NICEC
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

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Promoting research and reflective practice in career development

NICEC

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

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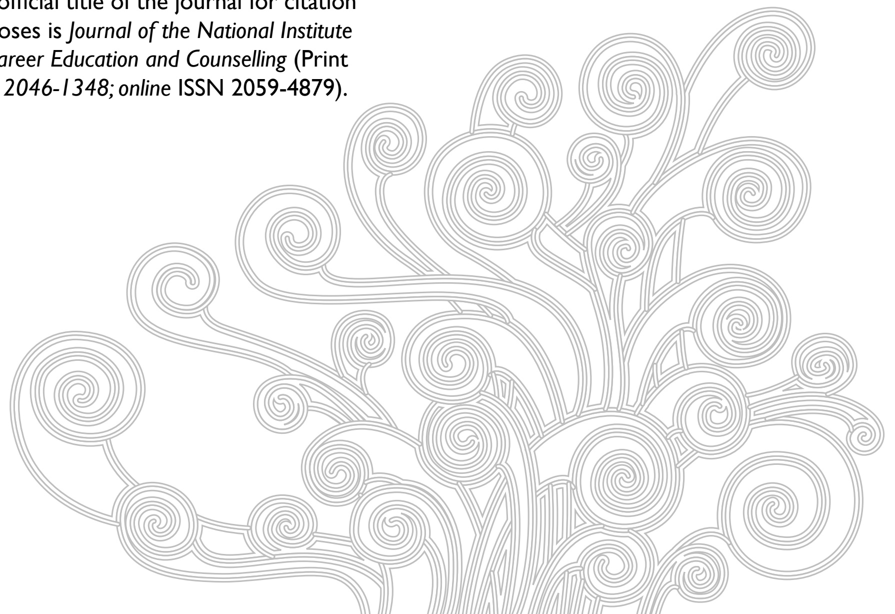

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Career guidance *for* social justice

Tristram Hooley and Ronald G. Sultana

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.

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

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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From mutualism to individual competitiveness: Implications and challenges for social justice within career guidance in neoliberal times

Peter Plant and Roger Kjærgård

The beginning of the twentieth century was a time of great societal and social change in the US. Many people struggled to find their way in a transformed and rapidly transforming society in which there was an increasing divide between the rich and the poor. Parsons and the social reformers of his time were advocates for the poor, youth, women and disadvantaged, and (Parsons, 1909) understood his vocational guidance work with individuals within a broad vision of social change. Over time, career guidance has been criticised for its lack of attention to this broad vision of social change, being more and more individualised in its practice. The changes of the 21st century have been described as neoliberal with focus on global competitiveness and increased individual autonomy. This article examines the roots of career guidance and the implications and challenges of social justice within career guidance in neoliberal times.

Contextual discourses

IHistorically career guidance has been related to education and employment and is now linked to policy agendas such as lifelong-learning. This has led to a marked need and desire for a clearer professionalisation or professional organisation of the career field (Gravås & Gaarder, 2011). Recommendations for formal qualifications and competency criteria for counsellors are suggested by professionals in the field (Schiersmann et al., 2012). State authorities aim at formalising and creating an evidence knowledge base concerning career guidance services, and introduce such curricular frameworks as 'Career management Skills frameworks' (Hooley, Watts, Sultana, & Neary, 2013). These are national initiatives, much inspired by the OECD (OECD, 2004) and the The Council of the European Commission (2008) and ELGPN (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network). In this context, political discourses include the idea that every citizen should pursue a career and that career guidance should serve the knowledge economy and seek to increase individual's human capital and capacity to compete. This article will focus on the roots of career guidance, and on the context in which the concept of careers was established and developed. In doing this, the article explores the challenges which career guidance faces in making a contribution to social justice.

Social justice is a slippery concept. Sultana (2014: 7) notes that:

> Career guidance… can claim its lineage within that historic arch of Enlightenment social dreaming that we now refer to as 'modernity', where individuals are encouraged to carve out dignified and fulfilling lives for themselves, irrespective of social origin, gender, ethnicity and other hitherto ascriptive factors. Within such a discourse, 'social justice' has particular connotations, relating to the meritocratic distribution of material resources and life chances in ways that reward ability, effort, and achievement.

And Irving (2015: 7) asserts that:

> A just society would be one in which the constraints of oppression and domination are eliminated, allowing people from all groups to develop and reach their full human potential… (with the) inclusion of processes and practices

> that: facilitate group recognition and participation; accommodate an equitable distribution of material goods; and actively respect multiple ways of living.

Thus, social justice is linked to ideas of just societies with no oppression or domination, with the aim to help everyone develop and reach their full human potential. This puts career guidance in a central and delicate position in terms of advocacy and social activism.

Career guidance and mutualism

> Frank Parsons was a consistent opponent of that individualism which pits men against each other in the struggle for existence, and an earnest advocate of that individuality that fits men for useful membership in the social body, and so draws them together in mutual fellowship and service. (Kent, 1908: 636)

Frank Parsons, regarded as the founder of modern career guidance, belonged to the US progressive movement. He saw career guidance as a social instrument, but also as an individual service that could create active citizenship, hope, solidarity and harmony. His community involvement led him to stand for election as mayor in Boston in 1895 for The People's Party. The progressive movement fought for a more just society by focusing on societal change and helping individuals. In 1906 Parsons gave a lecture titled 'The Ideal City', where he outlines the need to help young people in their choice of profession, and Parsons was subsequently asked to draw up a systematic plan for professional counselling. Thus, in January 1908 the Vocational Bureau was established (Zytowski, 2001). The Vocational Bureau exemplified the progressive spirit, aiming to help individuals and the city of Boston.

All over the USA such social justice oriented initiatives were flourishing, as a reaction to the abhorrent conditions, in particular in the booming cities. One critic was the well-known author of *How the Other Half Lives*. Jacob Riis gave an account of the living and working conditions in New York slums (Riis, 1890/2004). Parsons was another critic, among many. Career guidance was seen as a tool for social justice in a society with huge gaps between the rich and the poor (Davis, 1964). Parsons' vision was of the harmonious society, where everyone is a fellow-citizen in a working fellowship of solidarity. Everyone is a partner in a broad, extended family fellowship and all should be able to develop their optimal potential for the good of all. This society demands that each individual's potential is developed. As Parsons (1894: 2) noted 'each child [should] be fitted for life by an education carefully adapted to his partial genius and capacities, and will be given full opportunity to discover his true sphere of labour and occupy it'. Parsons actively opposed the fierce competition of his age and saw career guidance as a tool which about his vision of the harmonious society.

Psychometric techniques and social justice

The movements in Boston and elsewhere can be seen as a intertwined discourse between philanthropic movements and Protestantism, one in which morality and faith are central to the way one's life is led. Choice of work is seen in terms of a vocational call. Individuals should make their vocational choices for the glory of God and the good of mankind. It is in this way that harmony and success can be attained.

As Parsons' theories of vocational guidance became institutionalised and spread, however, they became more clearly associated with a positivistic rationality (Plant, 2009). Thus, psychometric techniques were applied, and the way to testing was paved. This particular approach has maintained its prominent position in career guidance and counselling since the publication of the book *Principles of Physiological Psychology* (Wundt (1874): psychometric institutes and testing were established in most industrialised countries. In this 'scientific' approach, and armed with aptitude, intelligence and interest tests, psychometrics were regarded as a new way of creating social justice, i.e. a meritocracy on a scientific basis, as opposed to earlier favouritism and nepotism, which were seen as signs of social injustice. Advocates of psychometrics maintained that they represented social justice for all, as their work was based on solid scientific evidence (Plant, 2009). Critics of testing, however, were never convinced that there was much of a correlation between the results of the testing, and the test of real

life experience (Gergen, 2001). On the contrary, they would see testing as another instrument of social injustice. Critics argue that many tests reproduce the existing social order, based on the social bias of the test constructor, his/her social background, and on the normative traits which are inherent in testing materials (Michell, 1999). In these terms, testing runs the risk of being transformed into a sophisticated instrument of social injustice (Plant, 2010).

The autonomous and skills-oriented citizen

Modern career guidance, test-based or not, started as a part of the progressive movement with a rationality based on social justice, citizenship, solidarity and harmony (Davis, 1964). In contemporary political discourses the notion of career comprises both the creation and management of one's career, and there is a suggestion of a change in career guidance policy (Bengtsson, 2011; Kjærgård, 2012). The OECD, for example, points out that 'A key challenge for policy-makers is to shift their career guidance systems to adopt a broader perspective, emphasising the promotion of people's capacity to manage their own careers. This is consistent with the view that the role of governments in democratic societies is to help citizens to manage their own lives, not to manage their lives for them' (OECD, 2004: 139). Here the OECD focus on a re-adjustment of career guidance policy by pointing to the manner in which the welfare state practically pacifies the population, advocating a neoliberal welfare regime that to a greater extent promotes the individual's own ability to take control of his/her own life and career (Kjærgård,2012).

From an emancipatory point of view, individuals could be viewed as autonomous in shaping their own lives: social class and societal structures are of little importance, and career guidance is part of this emancipating process. On the other hand, the autonomy discourse represents a withdrawal of the welfare state, backed by the notion that the welfare state creates dependant and passive clients: 'There is no such thing as society, there are only individuals and their families' (Thatcher, 1987). With this approach the responsibility for careers failure or success is placed on the individual, and less so on societal structures (Bengtsson, 2011; Kjærgård, 2012).

Likewise the Council of the European Union states: 'Career management skills play a decisive role in empowering people to become involved in shaping their learning, training and integration pathways and their careers. Such skills, which should be maintained throughout life, are based on key competences, in particular 'learning to learn', social and civic competences – including intercultural competences – and a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship' The Council of The European Union (2008: 8). In these terms, CMS is presented as an empowering instrument, aimed at active citizenship. These aims resonate with the progressive movement of more than 100 years ago, which focused on active citizenship, education, and work. The citizen of today is represented as an autonomous individual and a co-actor in the management of career development through the self-management of his/her own career (Bengtsson, 2011). The contribution that guidance makes is that (…) 'it can contribute to empowering individuals to manage their own career paths in a more secure way in the context of today's labour market, and to achieve a better balance between their personal and professional lives' (…) (The Council of the European Commission, 2008 p. 2). Guidance is here seen as enabling individuals to manage their career paths, and as helping to create a better life/work balance. So, what is the connection between career guidance and social justice in the 21st century, and how does this appear in practice?

Career guidance and social justice in the 21st century

When Frank Parsons and his colleagues started up various tutoring programmes related to community participation, education and work in the early 1900s, it was primarily among the poor and immigrants, and with the goal of creating a more just society (Davis, 1964). Even today career guidance is connected to concepts like social justice, advocacy and sustainability. In 2013, for example, the International Association of Educational and Vocational Guidance, IAEVG, issued a communiqué on 'Social Justice in Educational and Career Guidance and Counselling'. Likewise, the EU's Resolution of 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies points out that major challenges remain in terms of social integration and equal opportunities in education and work.

European policymakers, like Frank Parsons, emphasise that career guidance should help individuals to finds his/her place in society and in a vocation. The EU seeks to achieve this by fostering active citizenship and career management skills. Social, civic, or intercultural competences are pivotal in lifelong career guidance because they are a basic part of managing a lifelong career.

Inspired by the progressive movement in the US in the early twentieth century and its focus on social justice, a renewed discourse may emerge where career guidance is perceived as a tool for active and lifelong citizenship. To connect career guidance and social justice there is a need to focus on a holistic life-long approach and active citizenship. The Parsonian approach focused on matching, adaptation and mutualism; a neoliberal approach would focus more on competition, individualism, and autonomy.

Individual and society: a dual vision

According to Tony Watts (Watts, 2015) career guidance is a profoundly political process, and it operates at the interface between the individual and society. Watts has offered four alternative approaches to guidance from a socio-political perspective (figure 1), the dimensions of which are individual/society, and change/status quo. Thus, the dual functions of career guidance are addressed, and this provides an opportunity to problematise political goals and practices within career guidance, and its relation to social justice.

Figure 1: Watts' (1996) socio-political ideologies of guidance

	Core focus on society (macro and meso)	**Core focus on the individual** (micro)
Change	Radical (social change)	Progressive (individual change)
Status quo	Conservative (social control)	Liberal (non directive)

In Lovén (1995) survey among Swedish practitioners, the majority viewed guidance work as, in principle, non-directive and individually focused, whereas the main emphasis in practice was on the societal status quo aspects. Arthur, Collins, McMahon, and Marshall (2009) found similar views in their study on Canadian career practitioners' views of social justice and barriers for practice. By contrast, the political intentions with guidance activities focus on change, in terms of both society and the individual. The European Commission (2008) points out that career guidance should contribute to policy goals within education and employment, and a Norwegian law states that career guidance should help to reduce social inequality, prevent dropouts and integrate ethnic minorities (Educationlaw, 1998) .

These examples point to the fact that career guidance practice is challenged by policy-makers to become more proactive, especially in relation to vulnerable population groups. Career guidance should promote equal opportunities for all, where all people are given a lifelong opportunity to participate in education and employment. This political rhetoric views career guidance as a soft instrument for steering society. Such an instrument should encourage change at both the societal and individual level. The question is, of course: How far should this go? And how far will policy-makers allow this to go? From a social justice perspective, career guidance practices should focus on change with a view to ensuring that no one is excluded or exclude themselves from education, employment, or from their chosen path in life due to social background, gender, age, or ethnicity. Possible steps towards this vision may be found in emancipatory career guidance approaches to which we will now turn.

Career guidance as a tool for citizenship, emancipation and advocacy

Parsons, as we have seen above, was part of the progressive movement. He saw career guidance as one way to a more just society. In the present situation, with 'careerquakes' (Watts, 1996), rapid movements in societal tectonic plates, new technologies, and a more individualised society, expectations are focused on

entrepreneurship, flexibility, and autonomy. With this backdrop, inspiration can be found in Parsons' vision of mutualism and citizenship. Career guidance can be re-invented as an instrument of social justice. As in Boston, we also see a growing number of immigrants; a growing gap between the haves and have-nots; and an increase in the number of people without education or work. Our theoretical and practical approach in career guidance needs to be geared towards the present situation. Careerquakes are the order of the day, and career guidance can play an active role in this picture in terms of emancipatory approaches and advocacy.

Emancipatory career guidance

Emancipatory guidance implies, as the words says (free from bondage, oppression, or restraint; to liberate) that guidance has a role to play in terms of liberating the talents of each citizen, and thus societal forces. This can be seen narrowly as picking the best individuals for the competitive society. In these terms, the concept of emancipatory guidance on a humanistic base has been criticised for being naïve: people do not choose among options: they are chosen and selected by gender, class, etc. Grounded in opportunity structure theory, Colley (2003), Willis (1977), and Ken Roberts (1995) assert that 'choice' is constrained by social class and education limiting individuals to certain occupations: '…people's prospects still depend very much on their family background, their qualifications from their initial education, where they lie, their gender and their ethnicity' (Roberts, 1995: 82). With such overwhelming constraints, career education and career guidance are considered largely futile by Roberts. Career education and career guidance are much too weak instruments to counter such overwhelming powers as the dynamics of the labour market, and of the global economy. However, whereas such views may provide an insight into the powerful constraints that many clients experience, they may also provide the basis for empowerment and emancipation as important elements in careers work. This point links emancipation to awareness-rising, and to taking a stand. There is no impartial position: 'Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral,' as Paolo Freire (1985: 122) so famously declared. With this observation, the ideal of the neutral or even objective counsellor vanishes. There is no such position. Many scholars, from different standpoints, have dealt with emancipatory guidance in various ways. Most recently, Sultana (2014; 15-23), drawing on Habermas, distinguishes between:

> *Technocratic rationality*: instrumental control, efficiency, prediction and outcomes
>
> *Hermeneutic rationality:* communication, social interaction, and interpretation
>
> *Emancipatory rationality:* self-reflection and self-knowledge, biography as a result of internal and external factors, action that expands possibilities for self-expression and self-fulfilment

This latter part of the citation above leaves much room for personal and societal changes, based on self-reflection, group-reflection, and on similar well-known guidance activities. Other scholars have pointed to the emancipatory aspects of the communication between client and counsellor, based on conditions such as empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1951). Similarly, (Peavy, 2005) working within a constructivist mindset, bases his practice on compassion, cultural attunement, respect, authenticity, and disciplined mindfulness. Gottfredson (2002) pointed to the societal and psychological forces leading to circumscription and compromise, i.e. creating an awareness of processes of narrowing life options, thus limiting social justice, in particular for females. Barrie A Irving and Malik (2004) aimed at promoting social justice in the global economy: so called 'realistic' choices, made at the age of 16, may well limit the scope of choices, thus limiting social justice. With social justice as an underlying theme, Plant and Thomsen (2012) focus on the emerging social control aspects of guidance practices and policies, as do Plant and Valgreen (2014). And Irving (2015) sheds critical light on social in/justice within career education. All these scholars deal with social justice from different angles. Where do these insights lead us to? They point to both the limitations and the options in terms of the many roles of career guidance, which include information, assessment, advice, counselling, careers education, placement, referral, advocacy, feedback and follow-up (Bartlett et al, 2000: 21).

Advocacy and Feedback

From this list (above), *Advocacy* and *Feedback* are the most controversial ones in terms of the potential policy-making aspects of guidance. They are both linked directly to the focus on social justice, and they both imply a proactive model of guidance in which guidance practitioners may find themselves in opposition to the actual systems in which they work. This is where guidance as the Trojan Horse comes rolling in (Plant, 2005). *Advocacy*, for example, may imply that a guidance practitioner stands up for his/her client, and talks and writes on behalf of the client in trying to rectify the injustice that may affect the client (Barham, 1998). Such injustices may, in fact, be one of the by-products of the system itself. Schools, for instance, produce dropouts, i.e. pushouts (Plant & Oomen, 2014). Yet, school-based guidance practitioners may find themselves acting to counter, not only the act of the individual dropping out, but also the mechanisms that drive students to drop out: a potential conflict.

Similar situations may arise in relation to *feedback*. This guidance role entails that guidance practitioners actively give feedback about the (mal)functions of the systems of which they themselves are employees. This could include criticising the curriculum in schools, suggesting new routines or projects, via feedback based on evidence on the actual performance of the systems. Most educational and labour market systems do not take such feedback favourably: it upsets the functioning of the systems. However, it is an important guidance policy goal in this context to further social inclusion, i.e. to counter social exclusion and further social justice (see fig.1). Some guidance professionals have this obligation written into their ethical guidelines. The Swedes, for example, in their Ethical Declaration Sveriges Vägledarförening (2004) expressed a radical view on this: 'It is the moral obligation of the guidance counsellor to be on the side of the weak and vulnerable in society, and, if needed, speak on their behalf…in public'. In this case, the Trojan Horse concept is embedded in the ethically based societal inclusion and compensation role of the guidance practitioner. This obligation points to a bottom-up approach to policy making, in which the client and the guidance professional do not see themselves as victims of societal systems and of top-down policy making, but rather as active citizens working together to change the system from within, in order to combat social exclusion and to further social justice. Interestingly, the above-mentioned EU-Resolution on lifelong guidance (EU, 2004) repeats the goal of guidance to focus on those in particular need of such help, including the low-skilled, migrant workers, and people in the third age, but it does not specify how this goal may be obtained. Such policy leaves the guidance practitioner and regional/local managers to operationalise policies from a bottom-up perspective.

Conclusions

So, which contributions can career guidance offer today in terms of social justice: 'Frank, where are you, now that we need you' (Gummere, 1988)? Guidance has a long tradition of combating social injustice and of furthering social inclusion. Frank Parsons pointed to the emancipatory effects of career guidance, both in terms of the individual's liberation and in terms of creating a socially just and balanced society. Today, we need to re-vitalise career guidance along these two dimensions: emancipating individuals and focusing on structural and societal injustices. This implies a more proactive practice, which is a challenge for guidance – both in practical and in policy terms. If guidance is to play a more significant role in terms of formulating and implementing social justice and inclusion policies, and not just patching up social exclusion, guidance may need to play the role of the Trojan Horse in the very systems of which it is an integral part. It requires a strong professional foundation to fulfil this role; one which also includes the clients' perspectives, thus adding a bottom-up perspective to social justice aspects of policy and practice.

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Narrowing participation? Contesting the dominant discourse of employability in contemporary higher education

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This article considers the various roles the so-called 'employability agenda' plays in helping to narrow the terms of participation in higher education (HE) around definitions of educational value dominated by neoliberalist notions of 'human capital'. The article argues that as these definitions become naturalised in the behaviour of learners and their teachers it behoves us (academics, careers educators, learning developers *et al.*) to draw attention to the conditions of learning and to the broader scheme of values around work and identity, and models of success, which shape them in the 21st Century university.

Introduction

> One of the purposes of the university has been to hold a critical lens to society… and so one function of the university has also been to teach students to critique society, and their own role and the role of their chosen profession in that society.
>
> (Jones, 2007: 220)

'Employability', as Beck and Quinn (2011) point out, is 'a widely-used but poorly defined concept.' Social scientists, in their treatment of this concept, have tended to consider the complex interactions between both 'demand side' (macro-level social, economic and labour market conditions) and 'supply-side' (people's credentials, abilities, career-management skills etc.) factors (McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005). This more expansive, complexity-acknowledging, approach is also evident in Yorke's influential work (e.g. 2006) which focuses on supporting higher education (HE) students' employability. What follows here, then, is not a critique of employability *per se* – we write, after all, as educators engaged in supporting students' academic and career development. Still less is it a critique of careers guidance and education – a field that often attends explicitly to the socio-political contexts for, and implications of, its theory and practice (e.g. Hooley, 2015; Sultana, 2014; Watts, 2015). Rather, our focus is on a particular and pervasive 'discursive framing' of employability (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006: 310) – one 'dominated by employer concerns about the supply of graduates' (Brown and Hesketh, 2004: 7) and informed by highly contested theories of 'human capital'. Drawing on research and insights from existing critical scholarship, we will argue that this framing serves to narrow the terms of participation in HE by: i) limiting the forms of knowledge and learning that are valorised; ii) prescribing and privileging certain kinds of student identities; and iii) reducing complex questions of social justice to the simplifying and individualising ideology of 'meritocracy'. As many before us have observed, these inter-related phenomena serve to situate dominant conceptualisations of employability within the broader context of the ongoing neoliberalisation of higher education. The article will conclude by considering ways of nurturing more critical and expansive forms of engagement with questions of employment, work and career planning. Firstly, though, we will attempt to define what we mean by the phrase 'the ongoing neoliberalisation of higher education'.

Defining neoliberalism

It is beyond the scope of this article to offer a comprehensive or exhaustive definition of such a

complex and contested concept as neoliberalism.[1] Here we use term with the following meanings in mind: [2]

- as the legacy of a set of economic and political responses (e.g. 'Thatcherism' in the UK, 'Reaganism' in the US) to various crises in post-war democratic capitalism (Streeck, 2014) - responses which have entailed the extension of 'the market', and of market rationality, as the dominant bases for organising and regulating social, political and (increasingly) personal life (Davies, 2014b);
- as a 'technology of government' (Foucault, 2000: 76) – a technology which, as Lorey (2015) (drawing on Foucault) argues, functions largely via conditions of social insecurity and precarity, against which people are required to take *self-governing* responsibility for insuring themselves, not least by attending to their employability.

As numerous authors have commented, contrary to the anti-statist rhetoric that often surrounds various neoliberal 'reforms', neoliberal capitalism involves the state taking an active role in creating and sustaining its conditions of possibility (see, for example: Olssen and Peters, 2005; Harvey, 2007; Streeck, 2014; Davies, 2014b). Where UK HE is concerned, this has involved, among other things, the creation of a market of 'providers' - albeit a somewhat contrived and contorted market (McGettigan, 2013) – and a framing of HE's purpose and value around notions of 'human capital' development (Heaney, 2015).

Human capital theory, the instrumentalisation of learning, and the so-called 'knowledge-economy'

Contemporary human capital theory has its origins in the work of so-called 'Chicago School' economists (e.g. Becker, 1962) – work which has, as Davies (2014b) points out, been integral to the development of neoliberal thought and policy. Education, according to this theory, is viewed chiefly as an investment in our own production as more economically viable, competitive and productive subjects (Baptiste, 2001). From this, it follows that the knowledge, practices, dispositions etc. we develop through education are valuable inasmuch as they contribute to our individual development *as capital* (Rikowski, 2003). Given this somewhat stark and reductive view of both the human and of the value of learning it is perhaps, as Holborow (2012) suggests, unsurprising that the theory is still not referred to very widely outside of specialist contexts. As Holborow asks: 'Who, indeed, would spontaneously describe themselves as human capital?' (101). Nevertheless, the assumptions underpinning human capital theory are present in much state and institutional-level discourse regarding both the purpose of higher education and the kinds of students HE should aspire to 'produce' (Holborow, 2012; Heaney, 2015). Whilst we are mainly concerned, here, with the implications of this discourse for UK HE, it is worth noting that its reach is global - largely as the result of responses to the perceived challenges and opportunities of globalisation, with governments across the developed and developing world advocating for HE as a producer of a) the kinds of knowledge, and b) the kinds of graduates that will fuel economic growth and productivity (Naidoo, 2010).

Consider, for example, the following extract from the UK Government's *Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*:

> Higher education providers need to provide degrees with lasting value to their recipients. This will mean providers being open to involving employers and learned societies representing professions in curriculum design. It will also mean teaching students the transferrable work readiness skills that businesses need, including collaborative teamwork and the development of a positive work ethic, so that they can contribute more effectively to our efforts to boost the productivity of the UK economy.
>
> (Department of Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS), 2015: 11)

The ideological 'work' being carried out in this extract can be observed in the meanings it fixes (Laclau

1 For a superb and accessible introduction to the history and genealogy of neoliberalism as a concept, see Davies (2014a).
2 Given the context for this paper, we have focussed on the aspects of neoliberalism that pertain to advanced capitalist countries like the UK.

and Mouffe, 2001; Fairclough, 2003) around certain 'contested signifiers' (Rear and Jones, 2013). For example, whilst few would disagree with the notion that students should derive 'lasting value' from their education, we might well disagree strongly on what we mean by this term. Some of us, for instance, would argue that the true 'lasting value' of HE lies, in part at least, in how effectively it empowers students to critique and challenge the kinds of assumptions and ideologies encoded in the discourse produced by government departments such as BIS. This relates to our broader commitment to maintaining the university as a space for critical thought and as a 'democratic public sphere' (Giroux, 2010). For BIS, though, the meaning of 'lasting value' is fixed firmly around the exclusive aim of boosting 'productivity' by instilling in graduates the 'work readiness skills that businesses need' and the requisite 'positive work ethic'. Absent from this framing is any notion of the university as a space for critique – as a space for questioning, for example, how and why economic productivity is viewed as an axiomatic 'good' in the first place, or what alternative social, cultural or moral ends productive human activity might serve. The extract is illustrative, in other words, of the kind of narrow instrumentalisation of learning that dominates much contemporary discourse regarding HE (Giroux, 2014; Mavelli, 2014).

We should state, here, that we do not write from the misty-eyed perspective of some imagined 'pre-neoliberal' age of innocence and intellectual autonomy. As Collini (2012) has ably demonstrated, such an age has never existed. Nor are we rejecting the notion that universities should engage with the social and economic contexts in which they operate – far from it. Rather, and following McArthur (2011), we are simply asserting the value of engaging with these contexts *critically*, in ways that allow us and our students to ask more than simply: 'how do we comply with the demands of government and business?' Providing spaces to think beyond adaptation to the status quo – to ask critical questions about, and to consider alternatives to, this status quo - is central, after all, to any conception of HE as an agent of social justice.

However, the spectre of instrumentalisation is only one reason to find a human capital theory's framing of HE's mission problematic. Another is a particular view of the 'knowledge economy' that forms the backdrop for this framing – an economy replete, according to popular representations, with an abundance of exciting, creative, personally-rewarding and well-paid opportunities for any graduate with the 'talent' to seize them. As Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011:16) make clear, this vision of an opportunity-rich, brave new world of work 'would be more fitting in a fairy tale than in an actual account of reality.' It is a tale in which the extent of the demand and opportunities for creativity and professional autonomy are over-stated, and in which the realities for most 'knowledge workers' of 'routinization, surveillance and exploitation' (Naidoo, 2010: 69) remain largely concealed. Tomlinson (2012), meanwhile, reports on the ongoing phenomenon of graduate 'under-employment', citing research which reveals that 'a growing number of graduates are undertaking forms of employment that are not commensurate to their level of education and skills'. As for the much-vaunted 'graduate premium' (that promise of higher salaries for those who choose to 'invest' in their education) - this too is somewhat misleading. The true picture becomes far more complex, and far less rosy, when, rather than relying on averages, the actual distributions of graduate incomes are considered (Brown *et al.* 2011; Standing, 2011). In addition, as Lauder, Brown and Tholen (2012) argue, any apparent premium may well, in many cases, be more reflective of declining earnings among the 'non-graduate' labour force. Finally, and as many have observed, the widening of participation in HE has decidedly *not* coincided with a dissolution of entrenched social inequalities where career outcomes are concerned. Tomlinson again:

> Wider structural changes [in the economy] have potentially reinforced positional differences and differential outcomes between graduates, not least those from different class-cultural backgrounds. While mass HE has potentially opened up opportunities for non-traditional graduates, new forms of cultural reproduction and social closure continue to empower some graduates more readily than others. (2012: 427)

As many academics and careers professionals will already be aware, these are sobering realities, indeed, for anyone whose work is informed by a commitment to social justice. Against a backdrop of persistent inequalities, and a 'knowledge economy' whose realities

stand a long way from popular (mis)representations, we are faced with a dominant employability discourse which tends represent these inequalities as problems for individuals to overcome by adapting more successfully (i.e. more *competitively*) to the conditions they find themselves in (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Boden and Nedeva, 2010; Wilton, 2011; Chertkovskaya, Watt, Tramer and Spoelstra, 2013). From this it follows that HE's role is simply to 'equip' students with the necessary skills and dispositions (which themselves are characterised as neutral, asocial 'assets', whose perceived non-possession is ascribed to deficits in individual 'ability, determination and aspiration' (Burke, 2013: 111)) to enable them to compete and prosper. This 'meritocratic' framing of education's role ignores, of course, the complex social, cultural and economic *bases* for social injustice (Burke, 2013; Brennan and Naidoo, 2008; Hooley, 2015). 'Justice', according to this framing, becomes understood as the opportunity to exercise mobility within existing, intersecting structures of inequality, rather than as an outcome of challenging these structures and uncovering the 'ideological strategies' that sustain them (Fraser, 2012: 51). As already noted, however, universities should surely be spaces where precisely these latter kinds of critical practices flourish. Employability discourse, at least in the dominant form discussed here, may in other words help to militate against the very forms of criticality upon which a genuinely social justice-oriented higher education would depend.

As well as individualising responsibility for employment, this discourse also tends to emphasise the need for individuals to act as self-regulating sites of human capital - measuring the value of various forms of 'personal development' chiefly or exclusively in terms of the latter's contribution to this capital (Boden and Nedeva, 2010; Clegg, 2010). Definitions and explanations of employability in HE place a strong emphasis on the graduate's 'attributes and attitude' and on qualities such as: 'team-working', 'problem solving', 'communication', 'innovation', 'collaboration', and 'intellectual risk taking' (Cole and Tibby, 2013: 8). These are, once again, terms whose meaning is contested. Such qualities could, depending on the bearer, relate to all manner of beliefs and practices, some of which might be deemed antagonistic to the interests of certain employers (including, potentially, those BIS is so keen to see involved in 'curriculum design'). For example, collaborative, innovative, 'intellectual risk taking' students, imbued with excellent 'communication' skills might prove to be doughty campaigners against particular employers' business practices or, indeed, the system that gives rise to these practices in the first place. Employability discourse, however, works to define such contested and context-dependent attributes exclusively in terms of their transferrable exchange-value as 'soft' employability skills (Cremin, 2010). The emphasis on students' dispositions, attitudes, personal qualities etc. implies, also, a particular type of neoliberal subjectivity – one that views more and more aspects of personhood as functional forms of competitive advantage (Urciuoli, 2008; Moore, 2010; McArthur, 2011). As Lorey (2015) observes, one of the effects of the growing demand that we become – in conditions of systemic insecurity - self-entrepreneurial 'virtuoso workers', compelled to perform various personal, social and affective qualities in order to obtain and retain employment, is that: 'the entire person, with their knowledge and affects, becomes part of the capitalist production process.' (83-84).

This is not to suggest that support for students' career development need *inevitably* involve compelling students to submit their 'entire person' to the logic of human capital theory. As educationalists working in the neoliberal academy (whose own cognitive and affective labour is increasingly disciplined by regimes of market rationality) we recognise that whilst our work is inescapably implicated in the reproduction of neoliberal norms and values, it is in no way *reducible* to this role. As noted in the Introduction, employability is itself a contested concept. This contestation creates spaces for those of us working 'on the ground' to interpret it in a variety nuanced ways, including those which challenge, question and problematise interpretations dominant at state, or institutional, levels. Indeed, careers education already contains currents of thought which encourage us to look beyond simply facilitating individual adaptation *to* the existing order, and towards critique and transformation *of* this order (see, for example: Sultana, 2014; Hooley, 2015). The challenge lies in creating spaces where more critical, expansive and emancipatory forms of learning about work, employment and career development might flourish (McArthur, 2011).

Employability: Structure and Agency Reconsidered

If the foregoing is an adequate and necessary description of the contemporary university, in particular of the terms in which learning and future employment and employability are articulated, what would be an appropriate form of curricular and pedagogic counter-weight? Notwithstanding the possibility that *any* curricular or credential-bearing activity may be mobilized as evidence of learning for employability (though the everyday libidinal resistance of students to learning designs suggests that this is not likely to be the case), what learning activities would help students and teachers recognise the framing of their learning as employability, and to take responsibility for the meanings which attach to notions such as work (both in its connection with identity, and in its social dimensions), well-being, and success?

We will conclude, then, by reflecting on and critiquing our current plans to cultivate more critical approaches to employability - approaches which include explorations of the very social and structural perspectives often missing from the narrow, individualistic and meritocratic framing discussed above. These plans stem, in part, from insights arising from an earlier, so far rather informal, project on transitions to employment. Observations of corporate graduate selection centres, together with audits of the alignment of programmes of instruction and assessment with a transferable skills framework for higher education, led to reflection on the use and potential of the seminar as a vehicle for learning in the humanities. The structural passivity of the seminar student in the teacher/student couple mapped poorly onto claims about independent learners and their enterprising competencies (compare Bell, 2007). This was particularly the case with respect to team working and 'learning agility'. It was commonplace for the seminar to be nominated an instance of group work, but in practice the distribution of responsibility for the activity of the group often contradicts this assumption.

Ironically, the initial confirmation of a difference between educational and enterprising work – between the classroom and the corporation – opened the way to contemplating, under another description, the deeper continuities between these realms of activity. The practices of the classroom appeared to be significantly under-examined by its inhabitants in terms of the dynamics of the group, student and teacher identities, hidden curricula and the cross-cutting incentives which shaped different kinds of participation or 'engagement' in academic behaviour. So too were the values of work in the 'real world', together with the identities and incentives associated with institutional/professional labour, occluded by the vestigial imperatives of 'the work society' (Beck, 2000) and by the near universal veneration of work and wealth which Seabrook has analysed as a form of secular salvation in *Pauperland* (2013). How could the very texture of life be so invisible? We were aware of the extent to which the work of learners is discounted, not least by the processes of correction and other disciplines of assessment – Welch's (1945: 82) fictional description of an art teacher 'finishing' a schoolboy's drawing is emblematic: 'His work was being spoiled for him. Masters never understand this.' But could work, which everybody talks about, in the rarer intervals when they are not doing it, be as hard to see? Indeed, Siegfried Kracauer diagnosed the problem nearly a hundred years ago, exploring white-collar work in twenties Berlin:

> And how about the employees themselves? They are least conscious of their situation. But surely their existence is spent in full public view? It is precisely its public nature that protects it from discovery, just like the 'Letter to Her Majesty' in Edgar Allan Poe's tale: nobody notices the letter because it is out on display. Powerful forces are admittedly in play, anxious to prevent anyone noticing anything here.
>
> (1998: 29)

It follows from the condition of being hidden in plain sight that the relationships between work for examination, and work for salary, might repay further investigation, in particular at the site of their contemporary conjunction as an explicit discourse of employability in higher education. We doubt that students, and indeed their teachers, have sufficient opportunities to understand their behaviour as learners, and the values and identities which accrue to their work, especially given the compulsive repetition of the unexamined distinction between the supposed unreality of academic labour and the ontological gold-standard of work in the 'real world'.

An expanded employability education would provide an opportunity for students to identify and assess what is at stake - both the psychic and economic investments as well as the potential or imagined returns - in acquiring or performing the employability 'skills, understandings and attributes' which make 'graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations' (Knight and Yorke, 2003: 5). Such an approach would explore the very terms of transition from formal education to the workforce, in particular education itself, vocation, values of work and working identities. A module in development as a second-year undergraduate elective has the working title 'Work and Well-Being: Literary and Sociological Approaches to Labour, Health and Happiness'. This is being designed in such a way as to bring about the collaboration of students of literature and of sociology in thinking though the terms in which their future in the labour market is framed by the educational career that has brought them to university, but also learning how to contextualize and account for their own experiences of paid and unpaid work, including their academic work. Learning across disciplines, and the reflexive focus on the conditions of academic work itself, has a double significance. Firstly, this framing produces some of the material of the module. This includes the palpable differences students will encounter between the methodologies and working assumptions of social studies and literary studies, in particular their several orientations to the aggregate and to the individual. Additionally, immediate examples of aversive but (ultimately or immediately) rewarding effort, such as academic or term-time paid work, will provide practical contexts for testing theoretical and critical accounts of the values of work. Consideration of evidence such as the *Prospects and Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education* (DLHE) profiles of the 'destinations' of English and Sociology graduates will also help to generate reflection through difference. Secondly, the cross-disciplinary encounter provides the form of the module. The deliberate alternation of social and individualistic perspectives on theoretical and narrative texts is designed to open a dialogue amongst the contradictory values of work which themselves structure commonplace understandings of the relations of the personal and the public, for instance work as a source of satisfaction and as a source of status, work as gratification and as duty.

The teacherly conception of the module – by which we mean the goals of its designers, rather than the manifold and unpredictable uses to which it may be put by learners - is that, using literary representations of work and society, together with sociological descriptions and analyses of work as practice and as structure, students will learn to unpack the imperatives, values and fantasies which continue to shape their own, and their culture's, formal and informal preparation for individual and collective futures. In this sense the module is positioned as a co- or even anti-employability module, a demythologization of what Frayne (2015: 5) calls 'the dogmatic nature of work'. For instance, students would be invited to investigate the implications of the over-determination of higher education as a policy instrument for the design of an internationally competitive work force (Robbins, 1963), as a vector of individual positional advantage and as a humane or social good. In another example, the supposed independence of the learner in higher education might be juxtaposed with the structural 'necessity' of higher education as a meritocratic 'resolution' of the contradictions of scarcity and opportunity (Young, 1958). Module assessment is designed to recruit both the resources of the group, and to set up encounters with key issues from a variety of perspectives and in a variety of voices. Students would be expected to write an essay or report in which they unpacked a problem, developed an analysis or teased out a contradiction in the field of work and well-being using literary and/or sociological ideas and texts that they had studied. They would also create a reflective journal on their own work (paid, voluntary or academic), but the group would first have to generate a framework or checklist of criteria for the practice of that reflection on work. Finally, students would be required to perform their employability in a covering letter addressed to the contemporary labour market – again the group would first need to carry out research to generate a set of graduate 'roles' or 'opportunities' to be applied for (and negotiate the range of that set, whether for instance it could include volunteering, co-operative employment and so on).

But what would the learners actually be doing that would support their questioning values attributed to work which are ideological in the sense of going under the guise of facts or necessities? It is the perennial

concern of University careers services that students delay their preparation of a portfolio representing their employability – evidence that they have worked, know how to work, and wish to work - how much more difficult to instil a critical suspicion of the one true source of our purchasing-power, our status, our self-respect and our guilt! And one cannot assume that reading Zola's *The Ladies Paradise*, a late C19th novel of career and consumption - set as a primer for students of retailing in mid-century America - will inevitably provoke reflection on the interrelation of the opportunity costs represented by limitless calls on dutiful labour and the price of the limitless desire of the consumer. And what would be in it for the learners? (After all, we are working, as we write about the module one of us has designed and intends to teach). It is our hope that students taking the module would be in a position to make better decisions about what they were seeking in their work because they had negotiated some of the contradictions inherent in the competition for gratifying work in an increasingly precarious labour market, characterised by growing inequalities of security and remuneration. This broadening of the range of perspectives students are encouraged to consider in relation to work and to their own and their peers' employability would, we believe, provide an important and valuable challenge to the narrower conceptions of employability we have critiqued elsewhere in this article.

What relationship does this projected module bear to generic or embedded employability learning? Comparison with a design for a sequence of employability workshops launched recently in Eire points to two significant differences, the latter's explicit alignment with guidance, and its implicit affirmation of the 'mythology of work' (AHECS 2014, Fleming, 2015). The sequence of AHECS workshops was designed to support a range of educators with responsibility for employability in HE learning to inculcate an employability 'literacy' (in contemporary parlance), equipping undergraduates with concepts, examples and confidence in respect of their agency as a career-maker, as well as in their relations to the structure of the labour market. Students are supported in learning to make use of some concepts and values of career guidance in taking responsibility for their individual futures, ranging over career-choice theory, positive psychology, competencies, career development, 'future-proofing my career', 'building my brand', the recruitment and selection cycle and the theory of work adjustment. Alongside its contribution to the development of what testimonials refer to as 'market awareness' and 'self-awareness', the module is less explicitly about generating confidence in the concepts which rationalise and misrepresent work in our culture, notably the career itself, as well as competitive individualism, the values represented as facts which our module is designed to scrutinize (AHECS 2014: 7). By contrast, our approach is closer to some of the ideals outlined in the idea of 'career studies', an approach to careers education which aims at employability learning through a more holistic approach to work:

> Career Studies addresses aspects of how we live and what it is to be human. It is a transdisciplinary field of socio-cultural enquiry that focuses on life purposes and meanings and the more prosaic matters of achieving those ends (McCash, 2008: 6)

It could be argued that a career-studies module which persistently questioned the value, organisation and distribution of work (it would have to acknowledge the force, tenacity and moral significance of positive valuations of work as well) could not serve the interests of students making their way in the world: it would set up unresolvable contradictions between apparently inconsequential critique in the classroom and the more consequential competition for meaningful employment with an emolument exceeding the student loan repayment threshold. But how much better that students should have the responsibility for addressing those contradictions, not yet of their own (re) making, than that it should be camouflaged behind the projections of the employability boosters, which these days includes all of us.

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The practice portrait – a method for promoting social justice in practice

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The ability of the individual practitioner to grasp how her own practice is interwoven with different societal structures and interests can be seen as the first step on the way to social justice. This article investigates how the practice portrait can be used as an analytical and practical method to nurture this ability. The practice portrait was developed within the tradition of critical psychology to reduce the gap between research and practice by giving voice to practitioners in various social practices. In this article, I use the practice portrait alongside practitioners at a university career centre.

Introduction

There exist rival understandings of social justice, both in philosophy and in practice (Sultana, 2014). Few inquiries take into account the perspectives of career practitioners regarding social justice (Irving, 2011). One that does is the inquiry into the competencies career practitioners apply to address the barriers experienced by their clients, as well as competencies the practitioners would like to strengthen in this regard (Arthur, Collins, Marshall and McMahon, 2012). Arthur et al. find that many practitioners try to integrate their views on the struggles people are dealing with into ways of working in practice, but that career practitioners feel restricted in terms of their roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, Arthur and her colleagues find that it is important to translate the concept of social justice into practice roles and specific interventions; the practice portrait can be regarded as such an intervention. However, it is not an intervention into the lives of the beneficiaries of career guidance; it is an intervention into career guidance practice at the meso-level. Finally, Arthur et al. place considerable emphasis on negotiation when they conclude:

> According to the participants, the professional education of career development practitioners must be matched by negotiation with funders, policy-makers, and managers who oversee public and private agencies to consider where and how the value of social justice could be incorporated into service delivery (ibid. 2012: 151).

In 2013, the Board of Directors for the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance released the IAEVG Communiqué on Social Justice in Educational and Career Guidance and Counselling, acknowledging the everyday work of many practitioners, but also underlining that '…although each of us has roles and responsibilities towards social justice, we need to address the structural and societal barriers that continue to oppress people, requiring leadership and collective efforts' (IAEVG, 2013). As such, IAEVG also stresses the importance of structural and societal barriers, leadership and collective efforts.

This article introduces the idea of practitioners and researchers engaging together in portraying specific career guidance practices in order to identify possibilities for action and change and ways of assuming responsibility towards social justice collectively. The aim of this article is threefold: firstly to introduce the idea of the practice portrait to the wider international community of career guidance practice and research, since the majority of the published literature until now has been in German or Danish; secondly to develop a version of the practice portrait which can be applied with career guidance practices; and thirdly to contribute to the discussion

on how career practitioners are empowered to act as agentive practitioners, conscious of the way in which social justice is an inherent part of their daily practices.

The practice portrait

The practice portrait was developed within the tradition of Danish/German critical psychology and its practice research methodology which, according to Nissen (2000), is based on Marx's new materialism and has his Theses on Feuerbach (Marx, 1973) as its epistemological foundation. The methodological development was especially inspired by the 6th thesis: 'the essence of humanity is no abstraction inherent in each individual', but, in reality, 'the ensemble of social relations' (Marx and Engels, 1977 in Nissen, 2000: 146), and the 11th and probably most cited of the Feuerbach theses: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it' (ibid).

The Practice portrait was developed by a group of researchers in Berlin and Copenhagen researching psychological practices and working closely in tandem with practitioners whom they also encouraged to publish their own work. However, describing what was going on in practice was difficult without resorting to esoteric language or abstract generalisations. To support and enhance practitioners' voices in the development of psychological practice, a group of researchers and practitioners established the so-called Theory-Practice-Conferences (Markard and Holzkamp, 1989) which ran biannually over a ten year period led by, among others, the Danish psychologist Ole Dreier. At the Theory-Practice-Conferences, practitioners and researchers developed a way of describing practices based on the practitioners' standpoints. This was named The Practice Portrait, but the goal of the practice portrait was broader than merely portraying psychological practices in a descriptive manner; through systematic descriptions and interrogations of daily practices which preceded the descriptions, the goal was also to suggest changes to practice (Markard et al., 2004). More specifically, these changes should make psychological practices work for the oppressed and the vulnerable; an approach which is in line with critical psychology and practice research since

> The background of practice research is a critique of the inequality, distance, and hierarchical connections between research and practice that isolate research from social practice and regard the results of research as standards for improving practice. Similarly from this perspective, science has been criticized for producing abstract, irrelevant, and decontextualized knowledge (Højholt and Kousholt, 2014: 3).

Instead, practice research is viewed as a situated practice and ideally a joint venture that should not 'be reduced neither to a research methodology nor to a means of strategic development of a practice' (Nissen, 2000:170).

Therefore, an explicit goal of conducting a practice portrait is to identify potential collective actions and efforts in the endeavour to develop diverse social practices as a common good and work towards an inclusive society.

As such, the practice portrait is a comprehensive method that consists of a large set of questions which practitioners answer together in order to describe, analyse and discuss their own practice. The questions are organised in four themes: 1) the institution and the conditions for work, 2) the theoretical and practical cornerstones of daily practice; i.e., theories, methods, technologies and procedures, 3) specific situations at work, and 4) internal and external communication regarding practice. For this article, I decided to instigate a collaboration with career practitioners at a university career centre in order to learn how the questions in the practice portrait could be developed so as to be relevant to career guidance practices and to enable the collective of practitioners to grasp how their practice is interwoven with different societal structures and interests, and therefor has the potential to contribute to a more inclusive and socially just society. The next section presents the initial stages of a joint inquiry into university career guidance.

Collaboration on a practice portrait with a university career centre

I was invited to come to a university career centre to talk about career competences (Thomsen, 2014). I realised that this could also be a chance to engage in a practice portrait in order to share the practical experience with the readers of the NICEC journal in terms of laying the ground for discussions of potential interactions between research and practice meeting the idea of the 11th Feuerbach Theses. Therefore, I asked the career practitioners or career consultants as they call themselves, if they would be interested in doing a practice portrait together. And they were! Informed consent was sought in writing and the practice portrait was conducted using a semi-structured group approach, and then audio recorded. Two career consultants, a student and a trainee took part in the interview. They comprised the daily staff at the career centre. One additional career consultant called in sick that day. Prior to the interview, I chose to include a fifth theme on the beneficiaries and target groups in addition to the four themes mentioned in the previous section. Each of these themes was explored so as to allow for detailed description and discussion of practices at the university career centre. The themes each include a set of sub-questions adapted to the specific practice. For example, the first theme 'the institution and the conditions for work' had the sub-questions: Who works here? Which functions do you fulfil? How is the career centre placed within the university organisation? How is it managed? Describe formal/informal structures. After engaging in the practice portrait, I was able to reformulate the sub–questions, making them more relevant to career guidance practices, but also to the exploration of social justice in practice. Figure 1 illustrates the adapted version of the practice portrait developed on the basis of the collaboration activity and inspired by Markard et al. (2004), Bechmann Jensen (2005) and Petersen (2009). The adapted version has six themes because I found it important to describe specific procedures at work, including the question: 'Are considerations on gender, ethnicity or social class part of activities?'

The recording was summarised in order to describe the career guidance practice at the university career centre. I will now give a brief insight into the work with the practice portrait followed by a discussion of the results and, most importantly, a revised version of the practice portrait adapted to career guidance practices. In line with the critical psychological focus on first-person perspectives, the narrative is written from a first-person standpoint (Thomsen, 2012).

THE UNIVERSITY CAREER CENTRE

Our university career centre consists of three permanent members of staff, two student assistants and one manager. Organisation wise, we are under the Faculty of Arts with 10,000 students enrolled. There are formal structures which do not play a major role; more important are the informal structures that we establish and maintain through personal relations with, for instance, directors of study. We ourselves have different master's degrees, but all from the university where we are currently employed. Some of us have completed an internal course on career guidance. A centre similar to ours can be found at the other faculties, and this centre is particularly linked with the career centre at the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences from where we get a lot of inspiration since we used to be one centre and were only recently split up (2015). In the beginning, there was a lot of copy and paste from the practice at this previous centre, but now an 'artsification' of the activities is taking place. We do not have a written strategy or a vision for our work yet - there might be something in the documents produced around the time of the new centre's establishment. We offer a range of activities, many of which we refer to as events, which we develop to meet the needs of the students. Examples include 'Thesis to go', CV seminars and introductions to Linkedin. Other activities are career guidance interviews with the career practitioners from the public employment centre and the unions, and integrated career courses aimed at developing the students' career competences by integrating career learning activities into different study programmes. We also produce newsletters, maintain a Facebook group and homepage, and collect, systematise and analyse data on our activities. We try to stay on top of labour market information by subscribing to

Theme	Questions
1. the practice, the purpose and the organizing of the practice	Describe the career guidance service/practice/center. What is the purpose of the work in your opinion? Should/could the purpose be different? How has the purpose developed over time? What is the goal of the career guidance practice? If relevant How is the practice placed in the organization? What are the formal and informal structures? Give examples? Who work here, how many and where? How is the work organized? How is the work divided between you? Are there planned changes in the division of work? Give examples.
2. target group	Describe the target group for the career guidance practice, what problems, needs or challenges do they face? Has this changed over time? If yes how? How does your activities relate to the target group? (here the interviewer pick up on different target groups) Who can be supported? Give examples of successful activities. Who can't be supported? Give examples of unsuccessful activities. What are your suggestions for improving practice? And with a special focus on those citizens who faces the biggest challenges see from your perspective. How do you evaluate whether practice has achieved its goals? (or the purpose as you described it previously)
3. specific procedures in the work	How do you reach the target group? Who refer to you? How do you market the practice? What is the first contact? How do you introduce the practice and yourself? What is the role of social media/ICT? What happens next? What is the extend, the length and the frequency of the contact? How is the contact ended? What are the limitations to your involvement? What are the options of relevant referral? How are they used? Who gets referred where and why? Are considerations on gender, ethnicity or social class part of activities? If not why do you think that is, if yes give examples.
4. the theoretical and practical ground pillars of the daily practice i. e. theories, methods, technologies and procedures	Do you work with/in specific theories and methods? If yes how and please give examples. Do you have 'freedom of method' or one method that everybody should follow? How does this affect your work? Which rules or principles apply to your work? Give examples. Personal grounds for the work. Do you have rules, principles, guidelines or values that you (individually) value in your work? What are they and how are they expressed/present in the daily work? How do you develop the practice? (compulsory og voluntary) reading of literature, conferences, continued education and training. Do you discuss your individual work amongst you? How has work developed over time? What's the difference between individual and group interventions? When do you use the different forms of organizing?
5. specific situations a work	Periods of too much to do and periods of too little? What does working with career guidance mean to you? Does the work involve conflicts of any type? With users/citizens, students, teachers, researchers, management, collaborators, parents, yourself? Or internal conflict such as conflicting roles? Give examples of content of the conflicts and possible solutions to them. How do you handle difficulties? Can you turn to colleagues, management, and supervision?
6. collaboration and communication about the practice internally and externally	How does the communication among colleagues and among colleagues and management take place? Including communication with management elsewhere in the organization? How is knowledge and information shared between colleagues and among colleagues and management? How do you communicate with your target group/users? With media are used? How do you communicate labour market information? Information on different live styles and forms? How is knowledge about collaboration with different partners shared with users? And how is knowledge about users shared with different partners? Give examples.

Figure 1. Practice Portrait - Career Guidance Practices

newsletters and by speaking with the employers, stakeholders and unions when we participate in activities together. We are not inspired by specific theories and methods; maybe we integrate our different theoretical backgrounds into the work. We do a lot of project management.

Due to the limitations of an article, it is not possible to share the whole practice portrait, the above narrative draws mostly from the beginning of the interview and is intended to provide readers with little knowledge of university career guidance practices an insight into the organisation and the activities of the practice. As you can see the practice portrait is not about painting an ideal picture of a university career guidance centre but about describing this specific career guidance practices as close to the way they are described by the practitioners as possible, without making it into a mere transcript of the interview. The interview furthermore includes dialogues on the target group, how the activities offered fit the target group, what resources

are available and the participant's personal motivations towards the work. And a discussion involving all participants evolves around students identification with the many different academic fields comprising the Faculty of Arts and how this relates to the building of professional identity or not. Finally there is a short discussion on the absence of career guidance theory and methods ending with an evaluative question addressing the career practitioners' participation in the interview.

Of particular interest to this article on developing social justice in practice are two themes: namely the descriptions of the beneficiaries or target group and the personal meaning of the work in the career centre for the practitioners. Sultana has previously discussed the importance of the words we use to describe participants in career guidance practices (Sultana, 2011). Here, the word target group is used because the question that started this topic was 'please describe the target group of your work'.

TARGET GROUP

> In principle, all students are our target group and we interact with approximately 3,000 of the total 10,000 students. This can be interpreted as a few or as many depending on the perspective. We often discuss that some students 'want to play' and others do not. Should resources then be spent on those who do not seek to engage or maybe even oppose? We constantly look to develop new activities aligned with the needs of the students. We work by trial and error. In general we find that all students could benefit from career guidance and we have not met any students who find unemployment attractive. Among the 10,000 students, there might be groups we do not even know of yet. We see the integrated career courses as a way of reaching all students.

PERSONAL MOTIVATION

> I think it's awesome that we can support our students in getting the work life they dream of. Many students have dreams and visions and are super talented people. This is just something that is a little bit difficult for many. It is like opening a door to a dark room; you don't know how big it is or what you might bump into along the way. I think it's cool to equip them with a torch that enables them to navigate.

Lessons learned

Reflecting on the methodology, it is now clear to me that the practice portrait is one element in a collaborative research and development process, and that the practice portrait makes little sense as a standalone activity. The initial approach was to conduct the practice portrait as a group interview. Other researchers suggest that the questions should be answered in writing, submitted to the researcher who then constructs the practice portrait based on the written information (Petersen, 2009); others again propose a process consisting of both a group interview and written practice portraits followed by qualitative interviews (Bechmann Jensen, 2005). Further it takes time to engage in a practice portrait! We spent approximately one hour, but we could have spent more time. Interestingly enough, it led to the agreement that I would summarise the interview and we agreed to meet again to look at the practice portrait together and have a sort of meta-dialogue. Hence the practice portrait methodology fulfilled its first purpose: to support the establishment of a dialogical relationship between researchers (me) and practitioners (the four people at the career centre) and establish the foundation for a joint venture of research and development.

This brings me to further lessons learned: when the interview was transcribed it became clear that we did not speak much about social justice. So what would be the strength of this type of engagement in a social justice perspective?

Discussion

From the interview we learn that the university career centre and the practitioners at the centre perform

valuable work and organise activities that students appreciate. We also learn that few of them are trained within career guidance, and don't see themselves as part of a professional community of practice with an associated body of theory. So even though the career guidance community believe that social justice is to be promoted in all career guidance practices (see for instance IAEVG 2013) it would make little sense for me as a researcher to assume an expert position and point to all the things that this university career center is are currently not doing, not reflecting on or simply not aware of; one of which being the relationship between social justice and career guidance practices. Social justice is not a decontextualised theory, it is a stance (Sultana, 2014: 322), and stances are not merely stated and applied to practices. At best, they are developed as reflective practices, integrating knowledge about structural barriers as they are experienced by different student groups in their transition to the labour market. Those experiences are often shared in the public debate and sometimes reflected in research. Therefore, we have different sources of knowledge that can be discussed in a joint venture between researchers and practitioners.

The interview reflected an ideal among the practitioners at the career centre to assist *all* students in smoothing their transitions to the labour market. At the same time, practitioners were aware that some students seek out their assistance and some do not. The non-participants could be sources of inspiration for the development of practice in a social justice perspective (Thomsen, 2014). In terms of structural challenges in the Danish career guidance system and labour market, interesting research exists that could be discussed in the joint venture. Topics could be: patterns of segregation that continue to constitute a problem of inequality of educational opportunities, with children of privileged families maintaining a relatively higher level of access to more prestigious university programmes (Thomsen, 2015); gender inequalities that, by and large, can be attributed to the dynamic effects of childrearing in terms of earnings and labour market participation of women among other factors (Kleven, Landais and Sogaard, 2015); that universal access to career guidance in lower secondary school increases overall admission rates to upper secondary education with significant increases among immigrants (Hoest, Jensen and Nielsen 2013), and that career guidance in primary school it likely to be gender biased as nine out of ten career practitioners in Denmark believe that young people makes career choices based on gender and six out of ten acknowledge that gender plays a role when offering guidance on the choice of upper secondary programme (Zuleta and Krohn 2013). Also injustice in the graduate labour market is a relevant topic with Hooley (2015) arguing that university career guidance should provide students with the tools and knowledge to critically examine labour market structures.

When the university career practitioners speak during the interview of equipping students of higher education with a 'torch', it becomes increasingly interesting what this 'torch' will shed light on; that the light should not only help reveal the students' hopes and motivations, but be used to navigate the potentially restrictive structures and challenges which they will encounter, and hopefully overcome, upon entering the labour market. In conclusion, the potential of the practice portrait rests with the joint venture. For me, coming from a critical psychological perspective on research, this means that I will not just publish this as a finding in an article, but take an active responsibility to share my findings with the practitioners at the career centre and openly discuss our various understandings and, based on our shared investigations of practice as presented in the practice portrait, explore new possibilities for action.

Earlier on in this article I characterised the use of the practice portrait as an intervention at meso level highlighting that I wasn't referring to typical activities in career guidance practices intervening at micro level aiming at engaging individuals in reflections on education and work. To merely publish the findings would on the other hand be based in the idea of an intervention at macro level assuming that the discussion would find its own way to the relevant practices and make a difference there from professional and academic journals. By suggesting framing the engagement in the practice portrait as an intervention on meso level I am looking to explore methodologies that allow for me as a researcher to assume responsibility to open up discussions with practitioners about social justice. This first use of the practice portrait with career guidance practices in a university career center confirm that interventions

can and needs to be done in solidarity and respect in order to establish a common curiosity about the specific practice in question and possible relations to social justice issues.

Therefore, when it is suggested that there is a shared and collective responsibility in the career guidance community to translate optimisms of the will into grounded understandings of the possibilities of enacting social justice (Sultana 2014) I believe that engaging in practice portraits might be a fruitful first step that can be taken by researchers and practitioners together.

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Articles

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Social media, social justice? Consideration from a career development perspective

Tom Staunton

Inside the overall context of careers development, this article will explore how social media relates to social justice through exploring two contrasting perspectives. Firstly we will consider the potential of social media to enhance social justice by democratising social life and so address inequalities related to career development. We will secondly consider if social media develops new forms of inequalities in the forms of the network it creates which harm the progression of social justice. It will be argued that these two perspectives coexist, presenting social media as both disrupting and intensifying inequality in society. This will be particularly highlighted through attaching these positions to different schools of thought related to social capital.

Introduction

Is social media a friend or a foe to a version of career education and guidance that aims to address social injustice? This is the fundamental question this article will aim to engage with. Though I may not be able to provide a definitive statement I will introduce some of the key issues related to this question.

Watts (2005) stated that one of the main rationales for career guidance is to provide solutions to the fundamental structures that lead to inequality in society. Following on from the work of Watts, Hooley (2015) has recently discussed the potential of career education to provide a programme that is both radical and emancipatory in its outlook. This shows that engaging with social justice is an ongoing concern for careers development as a field.

My interest in social media in conjunction with this is the way that social media and the internet, in general, is changing the nature of the field of career development. As Hooley has elsewhere noted the internet has fundamentally changed career. Hooley (2013) has highlighted four main functions of the internet in relation to careers development: a resource library where individuals explore their career information needs, an opportunity market where individuals interact with employers, a space for the exchange of social capital where individuals maintain and build relationships and a democratic media channel where individuals can access the wider world. Hooley goes on to state that 'It is also important to recognise that all of these functions are underpinned by an individual's digital career literacy and their capacity to take advantage of the opportunities that the internet affords' (2012: 5). Hooley here describes digital networks as an instrument. Bimrose et al. (2015) and Bright (2015) similarly discuss ICT as an instrument for the delivery of career education and guidance, while Law (2012), Bender and Oryl (2013), Benson et al. (2014) and Longridge and Hooley (2012) discuss how social media can be used as an instrument by individuals engaged in career development.

This article will add to the body of literature on social media and career development by discussing how the changes that have been brought about to career development by the development of the internet and specifically social media helps or hinders the career sector's engagement with social justice. We will particularly look at social media as the focus of our study as a phenomenon due to its prevalence in discussions around how the internet is changing careers education and development (Longridge and Hooley, 2012, Longridge, Hooley et al., 2013).

This discussion must start by attempting to understand the nature of social justice. Ruff (2001) has described how career exists at the interface of the individual and society which makes wider social and political

concerns inherently related to career. Therefore, any careers professional must ask questions about the type of society the individual will inhabit. Sultana (2014), drawing on MacIntyre (1988), has identified four philosophical traditions of social justice which apply to the field of career development which we will refer to throughout our discussion:

1) Harmony as categorised by the thought of Socrates and Plato which sees justice as individuals putting their skills at the disposal of the community.
2) Equality, as represented by Kant among others, sees justice as a level playing field between individuals.
3) Equity, as represented by John Rawls, sees justice as equal results which often require some to be given more support than others.
4) Pluralism and difference as categorised by Derrida among other sees justice as ultimately tied to offering respect and value to an individual's humanity.

Beyond this, we will also be careful to bear enlightenment and postmodern views of society in mind when discussing social justice. Griffiths (1998) highlights the tension between the enlightenment view that progress is possible with the postmodern belief that progress may create new forms of injustice and oppression. An example of this in the career guidance field would be the Connexions services which, as Mignot (1999) points out focused on 'disaffected youth' which both brands the individual and runs the risk of excluding those not deemed as 'disaffected'.

This article will explore two differing perspectives on how social media could change the interrelation between career development and social justice. In the next section, we will explore connectivists such as Siemens (2005), Downes (2010) and Cormier (2008). We will consider the potential of social media and social learning to democratise learning and relationships. Secondly, focusing on the work of Mejias (2013), we will consider how social media may develop new forms of inequalities in the forms of the network it creates which harm the progression of social justice.

Connectivism

Connectivism is a learning theory which aims to provide an account of learning in light of the development of digital technologies and especially digital networks such as social media. Siemens (2005) argues that there is a disruptive effect from technology on knowledge, learning and the world of work. Siemens sees this as underpinned by the changing nature of information. While learning used to be institutionalised and long-lasting it is now held outside of institutions in informal online networks and is in a constant state of flux and change. Theorists such as Siemens (2005), Downes (2010) and Cormier (2008) argue that this move challenges the validity of a view of learning as a process that is internal to the individual. Instead, the network has become the dominant way to understand learning; what is important to focus on is not so much how learning happens but where it happens. Siemens (2005) claims that 'know-where' has replaced 'know-what' as the most important aspect of learning. This leads to Siemens claiming that 'the pipe is more important than the content of the pipe.' (Siemens, 2005: 6) and that 'the ability to plug into sources to meet the requirements becomes a vital skill' (2005: 7). This is where connectivism gets its name, from the belief that the ability to connect to the vast informal learning networks online is the vital skill. Cormier puts this as 'the community is the curriculum', (2010) meaning that the aim of education is to help people develop a personal learning network, not just to acquire content. Connectivism therefore claims that the task of education is to help people connect to these networks and to enable them to engage in meaningful lifelong learning rather than just achieving their learning during a limited period of their life cycle which is formal education.

When applied to careers guidance and careers education connectivism's implications are that the internet allows the individual to significantly build career-related social capital. While career-related programmes may traditionally focus on making and implementing decisions as the primary aims, a connectivist programme would enable students to use the internet to build and maintain useful connections. Building social capital has been discussed in the field of career development before by theorists such as Law (1981), Hodgkinson (1999) and Inkson (2004). What

connectivism particularly emphasises is the primacy of connections over other activities, such as information gathering or decision making, and the way the internet allows individuals to develop these connections.

Connectivism as an idea is echoed by many who do not directly use the name. Surowiecki (2005) discusses how crowds have the power to generate surprisingly accurate information when they work together. Not all crowds are inherently wise but under the right conditions can solve certain problems more effectively than individual experts. Surowiecki describes four necessary conditions for a wise crowd: having a diverse range of opinions, having independent opinions not affected by the majority view, being decentralised so individuals can draw on local knowledge and finally a mechanism to aggregate opinions and bring them together into collective view. Clay Shirky (2009) has discussed how the new tools afforded society by social media allow groups to create new ways of social functioning which may challenge existing power structures.

The above ideas point to the potential of the internet and social media to create new ways of organising social life and to enable new means of learning and social participation. Surowiecki and Shirky describe the potential for the internet to create new forms of social life but caution that this will not happen automatically. The implication of this is that if career education and guidance were to pursue social justice through digital networks it should aim to help people develop a particular type of network. This might involve making use of pre-existing groups on specific sites such as LinkedIn or Twitter but also building more widespread relationship networks across multiple platforms. It would be a particular type of these connections that would be encouraged to support individuals in building the capital to access information, relationships and the support to navigate between opportunities in the real world.

But what does this have to do with careers work and social justice? In many ways, network participation and exclusion are one of the chief ways that inequality is perpetuated in society. For example, when Marx (1867) described the class system in the mid-nineteenth century he was in effect observing how individuals lived in differing networks and these networks held differing degrees of capital often leaving those in inferior networks (subordinate classes) alienated from both capital and fulfilling work. Marx was describing how networks created social injustice. More recently Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) have described how students from a higher class background gain more from college and do better in the workplace afterwards. Importantly this is because those who have better networks (from family, friends etc.) before college are able to form more advantageous social ties in college. Both of these examples show the ability to form networks as a vital part of an individual's livelihood and their career progression.

Connectivism both makes observations about the changes digital networks are having on how networks are formed in society and on the pedagogical approach educators should take in light of this. While both Marx (1867) and Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) observe highly structured social systems, connectivism postulates that digital networks are making networks more dispersed or what Cormier (2010) would describe as rhizomatic. This creates, in McLuhan's words, a global village (1994) where anyone can connect and learn from anyone. Because knowledge is no longer locked away inside institutions anyone can now access the information and support they need to progress. Similarly, Castells argues that the internet creates the potential for a new form of 'networked society' which, based on the value of free sharing, is now 'geared towards collective action and shared ideals, such as…creating community' (Castells 2012: 230). Considering career development, through social media it is now possible to connect directly with individuals and learn from expert voices inside a sector, something that used to only be made possible to the privileged few. Secondly, as relationships are no longer locked away this creates the increased possibility that anyone can connect with the powerful nodes inside a network. While twenty years ago it was possible for someone from a working class background to move through life never meeting an accountant or a lawyer in a personal capacity now if they choose to join LinkedIn they have the potential to do just this. As social media enables connection with any information and anyone the chance for the individual to learn and build significant relationships related to their career becomes apparently only limited by their capacity to

connect. This may seem over optimistic, it is important to remember that social media does not necessarily enable high-quality connections. Boyd (2014) points out that most of the time social media replicates users existing social worlds and does not broaden the diversity of people they connect with. Similarly, Surowiecki (2005) points out that not all crowds are inherently wise, they only gain this property under certain conditions.

What is important to remember is that connectivism is not just an observation about the nature of the internet and social media but is also an educational approach to enable this. Connectivism asks the educator to consider what they can do to broaden their social capital and engage in high-quality communities online. Connectivism would aim therefore to re-focus the task of careers education to facilitate the connections an individual needs to progress and exist inside the various networks that map out their potential future careers. Traditional career activities such as decision making, opportunity awareness, transition skills and self-awareness (as in Law and Watts (1977) DOTS model) would be underpinned by building connections online to enable these activities. Similarly, when considering theories with more focus on uncertainty, such as chaos (Pryor and Bright 2011) or happenstance (Krumboltz and Levin 2004), connections would be seen as providing the underpinning resilience needed to navigate the changing world of work.

So how do the observations that connectivism make measure up to the ideas of justice we looked at before? From the perspective of equality, the key question for justice is whether the playing field is level or not, do people have the same chances or do some people have an unfair advantage. As we have seen, connectivists would argue that the internet creates a situation where institutions and elites no longer have a monopoly on the means an individual needs to develop their career. Under the right circumstances, the internet allows an individual to develop the capital they need to develop their career and would previously have struggled to access. The internet and social networks, in particular, create the potential to re-distribute resources, information and relationships making the playing field more level. Connectivism would point to social media making career development more equal. What is more difficult to understand though is does the promise bare relation to reality or not?

Off the network

This is where the work of Mejias (2013) comes into its own. Similarly to connectivist theory, Mejias focuses on the implications of social media as a form of network. In his book Off The Network Mejias argues that social networks inherently produce and maintain social inequality. Mejias describes this in two ways; inequality between the network and the participant and inequality between network participants themselves.

Firstly Mejias discusses the relationship between the social media participant and the organisation that runs the network. Mejias points out that participants are expected to give up their privacy to the networks they participate in while networks are increasingly opaque in how they deal with their users' data. This makes users powerless to a certain extent. Examining power structures in this way is in contrast to connectivism's focus on social networks being democratic. If the power structures between social media networks and users are so uneven then participants have little say in how their social interactions are structured and the nature of the networks they participate in. This demonstrates the continued existence of a powerful elite who most individuals have little ability to negotiate with.

Secondly, Mejias argues that inequality between participants is at the heart of a social media network. According to Mejias a network is a particular metaphor of the organisation of social relationships (family, team, body being other examples) but in social media, this metaphor becomes the very architecture of the set of relationships. Networks are based on connected nodes which aim to build and grow connections. Mejias argues that as a node grows connections it becomes able to grow at a faster rate in the future as it becomes more attractive to connect with and more apparent to other users. This means that 'rich' nodes continue to grow and become richer and gain more status, resources and social capital from a network. This makes social media a competition for status and resources between nodes. This is not to say that 'poor' nodes do not

gain any benefit from participating in social media or that they can never become 'rich'. Rather it means than inequality and competitiveness is hardwired into how social media platforms are set up and operate. Importantly this ability to grow and maintain status in a network, according to Mejias, is a product of how the network itself operates. While Mejias' first point about ownership may be countered by arguing that more informal connections should be formed online away from the control of corporations his second point highlights a fundamental flaw in the nature of social life on networks.

So what are the implications of this sort of analysis for social justice and careers work? While connectivism focuses on how social media disrupts existing power structures Mejias highlights how social media creates new ones. If we take, for example, LinkedIn's claim that more than 39 million university students and recent graduates are on LinkedIn Mejias would argue that they are set up to compete against each other for success on the network and that some will achieve radically different results than others. This is not to say that collaboration and generosity do not exist on social media but the structure of the network moves people towards competing for resources in a way that benefits some significantly more than others. As we pointed out above this is because a network creates a form of relationship that embeds competition. News feeds are a good example of this as people's ability to gain popularity on a network and their ability to put out eye-catching content appears to determine how they are interacted with. Similarly, most people experience being approached by people they feel dubious about on social media, not necessarily as part of a deliberate con but in order to grow their network and appear more popular. Both of these examples demonstrate how social media can develop what Mejias (2103) sees as game-like characteristics. The need to grow connections and status to survive on social media encourages behaviour that is based on competition which a minority are significantly more successful at than others because once you have gained status on a social media site, Mejias argues, you can continue to gain it at an exponential rate. This means by extension that the career-related resources that some people receive from social networks are significantly higher than others which would generally point to these 'richer' individuals are more likely to achieve career outcomes that those without them do not. This correlates with recent research conducted by Robinson et al. (2015), Boyd (2014) and Wessels (2013) who argue that social media replicates existing inequalities in society. Wessels has argued that factors such as class, status and power significantly affect an individual's ability to make use of digital networks due to the impact that educational background, living conditions and health can have on how well individuals can make use of digital resources. Boyd has described how discrimination is a frequent part of online life and often falls along racial and gender lines. This analysis points to the digital world creating discrimination through whether individuals have the ability to make use of the online world and how they are treated by others when inside it. This all points to phenomena such as gender, class, ethnicity etc. affecting how individuals perform well in the competitive environment Mejias describes.

It is possible to read Mejias as deterministic and bleak. The idea that social media forces people to compete and that competition and inequality are hard wired into social media does not always fit our experiences. But, Mejias does not argue that social media never contains generosity and collaboration nor that there is not benefit in some form for every participant. What Mejias argues for is that most social media users are caught between 'super rich' who dominate networks and the corporations who run social media platforms in a way that asks users to compromise themselves in a manner that users have little say in.

This is vital analysis for the field of career development. Practitioners and researchers need to ask if the general move to encourage individuals to engage in social media sites as part of the career research or job hunting may be exposing them to forms of injustice. The prominence of sites such as LinkedIn and Twitter may be benefiting the sites at the expense of the individuals that are trying to be supported.

So how does Mejias' analysis compare to the observations that connectivism make measure up to the ideas of justice we looked at before? Sultana points to John Rawls' (1999) description of justice as equity as one of the key traditions around what constitutes justice. If, as Mejias suggests, competition and inequality

are hard wired into social media then they do not offer justice under this definition, some people will win and others lose. Rather than increasingly basing career development around social media should we not be moving the future focus of career development from platforms that disproportionately benefit some members over others? Especially if those who gain substantial benefit are a significant minority. Mejias ultimately argues we need better forms of social organisation away from the competition and inequality of networks. This creates a potential new avenue for careers development, to take the enthusiasm for community-based career development that is informal and lifelong in its outlook and to see how this could be created and organised away from, or at least not entirely reliant on, social media.

Social Capital

As we noted above connectivists argue that social media can disrupt traditional power networks and equip people for new, more democratic, forms of network. Mejias highlights how social media networks have inequality built into them, and so we must find and develop alternatives to social media. This returns to the tension that Griffiths (1998) describes between the modern and the postmodern, we see the potential for progress while being aware that progress may create new forms of oppression. This tension could also be seen born out in a friction between two different approaches to social capital. Siisiäinen (2003) has drawn attention to different schools of thought about social capital contained in the works of Putnam and Bourdieu respectively. Siisiäinen highlights how Putnam sees social capital as building trust and unity among people. This very much echoes the connectivist approach to social media which focuses on the ability of social media to bring people together and create new communities. This is contrasted with Bourdieu who Siisiäinen sees as having very little to say about trust but is instead concerned with how power is distributed between different groups or 'fields' in society and the advantages this gives to some groups over others. This is similar to Mejias' analysis that social media has inequality hardwired into it due to the power that social media corporations and a minority of 'rich' social media nodes possess. As noted before the status of these rich nodes may be because of the social capital they gained outside of the network in the form of class, gender or racial advantage. Interestingly this contrast could also be formulated in terms of a harmony-based or an equity-based approach to justice as described by Sultana (2014).

The analysis above highlights a number of points of friction where the contrast between these two positions becomes most clear. Does social media disrupt the power structures which create inequality or simply create new ones? Do they increase democracy and move power from the few to the many or do they heighten competition between people? Do they create a new basis for career development based purely on merit or are they an elite few who have significant advantage over everyone else? Central to this is the question of if social media builds new ways for people to come together into a new form of unity with new potentials for organising and learning or if it preserves or amplifies inequalities in society where the few benefit at the expense of the many.

Conclusion

As we have seen careers professionals can ill afford to dismiss social media as an irrelevance when we consider how to engage with social justice. This engagement will involve recognising the potential that networks offer whilst being mindful of the risks they bring. The difficulty lies in seeing the potential while being cautious of the fact that it may be a dangerous mirage. If social media allows individuals to build social capital, access information, gain support and organise to genuinely support each other then much can be said of the way social media may equip people to overcome barriers and for careers guidance to engage with social inequality. That said we must ask if this can happen equitably across a network or if we are simply allowing some to benefit while the majority do not. This tension is not easily resolved and resists either the enthusiast or the sceptic declaring victory. We cannot simply dismiss social media as wrong because of its potential but we cannot wholly jump on board once we become aware of the potential for inequality.

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Career construction and reduction of psychosocial vulnerability: Intercultural career guidance based on Southern epistemologies

Fabiano Fonseca da Silva, Vera Paiva and Marcelo Afonso Ribeiro

Latin American theories of career guidance draw heavily on Northern epistemologies, though they articulate with such approaches by taking the context of the global South into consideration. Based on experiences and research conducted in Brazilian public high schools, this article highlights theoretical and practical underpinnings for an approach to intercultural career guidance that addresses psychosocial vulnerability and social unfairness. Inspired by Boaventura de Sousa Santos's intercultural ideas and by a social constructionist perspective informed by Southern epistemologies, the framework presented in this article expresses a Latin American critical perspective and aims to make a contribution to the social justice agenda, as an alternative to traditional goals of 'adjusting' and 'adapting' to careers, or 'educating' for them.

Introduction

Despite recent developments and greater stability in countries such as Brazil and Colombia, Latin America is still characterised by education of poor quality, and by a labour market with high rates of unemployment and underemployment, with many opportunities available only in the informal, unregulated sector (World Bank, 2013). The possibility for exercising career planning and for benefiting from career guidance are rare, relevant only to a minority élite while the majority of the population has to deal and cope with situations of psychosocial vulnerability (Castel, 2000; Rascován, Levy and Korinfeld, 2013; Antunes, 2015; Ribeiro, Uvaldo and Silva, 2015; Ribeiro, 2016).

Psychosocial vulnerability can be understood as 'a decrease in the possibility of making bonds and social networks, not a personal fragility, nor institutional, but relational' (Ribeiro, 2016: 82). It does not come from predetermined situations, but rather it is produced through specific 'intersubjectivity contexts' or spaces where relationships – whether social, cultural, labour, economic, and/or symbolic – are enacted in ways that generate vulnerability, as people face difficulties in establishing bonds in dimensions of their lives, such as their working lives.

How can one offer career guidance in contexts such as these? How can career guidance services be organised in the absence of any systematic support from public policy? Such a policy vacuum is the case with public elementary and secondary education in Brazil (Silva, 2010; 2011). In such a situation, career guidance projects are likely to remain limited to private education institutions that work with young people from the middle and upper classes. It is only in exceptional circumstances that lower middle class and poor people in the public school system can benefit from such services.

Career guidance for middle and upper class people in Brazil has been inspired by classical theories produced in the global North. Such approaches emphasise individualised forms of guidance that generally seek to support students in their choice of college for further education. Typically, such approaches draw on trait-factor and developmental theories (Brown et al, 2002).

An alternative approach to career guidance aims to support people in the choices they can make within contexts marked by psychosocial vulnerability, helping beneficiaries to think about future projects within

the broader working world. These guidance activities generally occur in group contexts and/or within an institution through projects and programmatic initiatives using Latin American theories and tools (Bohoslavsky, 1977; 1983; Bock and Bock, 2005; Rascován, 2005; González Bello, 2008).

This second mode challenges mainstream career guidance and counselling theories and practices, and quite frequently produces innovative approaches that articulate the epistemology of the global North with contextualised theories from the South (Silva, 2010; Ribeiro, 2013; 2016). Such a critical and dialectical dialogue between these contrasting approaches can also be productive when it comes to thinking through the relationship between career guidance and social justice (O'Brien, 2001; McMahon, Arthur and Collins, 2008; Sultana, 2010).

This article engages with this alternative approach to career guidance with a view to confronting psychosocial vulnerabilities and situations of social injustice. We here draw on examples taken from a school-based project in order to highlight a number of theoretical and methodological issues. Central to this approach is the notion of 'interculturality'. In the next sections, we first explore this core concept as articulated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Santos, 2001; 2002; 2014). We then present the theoretical and practical underpinnings of our proposal. This is inspired by a social constructionist perspective, such as that proposed by Blustein (2006; 2011), but re-viewed through the lens of Southern epistemologies, particularly those developed within the Latin American critical tradition (for a preliminary overview see Silva 2010; 2011 and Ribeiro 2013; 2016). The latter tradition, which focuses on human rights in the face of diverse forms of oppression, includes critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; 1975), psychology of liberation (Martin-Baró, 1986; 1994), critical psychoanalysis (Bohoslavsky, 1977; 1983; Rascován, 2005; Rascován, Levy and Korinfeld, 2013), and vulnerability and human rights framework (Ayres et al, 2006; Paiva, 2013), among others.

The intercultural approach

A major influence in the efforts to develop Southern, and specifically Latin American perspectives of career guidance, has been Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Santos (2009) has argued that our times require new epistemological, ethical and political positions, and some of his propositions have particular relevance to the field of career guidance.

A key argument is that we should challenge the dominant epistemologies and the universalising pretensions of many career guidance theories. Most of these have been produced in the global North and work in such a way as to homogenise the world through the obliteration of cultural differences. Instead, our position is that we should acknowledge, in a more serious manner, the implications of context.

A second point derived from Santos (2014) highlights the fact that we need to recognise the existence of small cracks in the dominant logic and, consequently, value epistemological pluralism. The world is epistemologically diverse and this diversity provides intelligibility and intentionality to social experiences – including to career guidance interventions and their outcomes.

Thirdly, it is important to recognise and acknowledge the production of epistemologies of the South because they have distinct criteria for the production and validation of knowledge. Santos (2014) named the contemporary production of theories as an 'ecology of knowledges'. It is based on the premise that *all knowledges* (and here it is important to stress the plural notion of knowledges) have limits and that their production should be accomplished by means of dialogue between different knowledges embodied in distinct social practices.

For Santos (2014), responses to contemporary social and cultural demands can only come from the possibility of relational and intercultural constructions of theories. The so-called 'intercultural dialogue' requires and assumes both mutual recognition of different cultures in a given cultural space and readiness for dialogue through processes of co-construction. Indeed, we understand culture as a symbolic system and organiser of social life through shared knowledge, values and practices.

'Co-construction' establishes mutuality and the possibility of constructions of distinct forms of understandings. An example from the field of career

guidance would be the process of decision-making. This should be the outcome of dialogue between those involved in the helping relationship, i.e. between the career guidance counsellor and the guided students. It should not only be based on the counsellor's professional knowledge, because everyday knowledge – what could be referred to as 'unscientific' understanding – is as important as scientific knowledge.

Co-construction and mutuality highlight the importance of conceptualising knowledge as relational, what Santos (2014) refers to as 'inter-knowledge'.

The rationale of an ecology of knowledge(s) and of intercultural dialogue is echoed in contemporary perspectives of social constructionism as articulated by a range of key Latin American authors. In the education field, for instance, the same principle of interculturality and relational ontology underpins Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed. In 'dialogic education', a 'process of awareness' results from the dialogue between teachers and students, all of whom are considered to have significant knowledge.

For authors from these perspectives, the central issue for professional interventions and for the production of theories is how to resolve the tension between regulation, on the one hand, and social emancipation on the other. In the case of career guidance, the main question is how to make it an emancipatory space without imposing hegemonic ways of being. Santos would refer to such imposition as 'top-down globalisations', in which the conception, the values and the dominant discourses are inflicted upon everyone (Santos, 2002).

In the field of career guidance, the traditional procedures aiming to adjust, adapt or educate as proposed by classical theories produced in the global North are examples of this logic of social regulation. Within this mind set, career guidance counsellors use their knowledge to help the other – often, however, without allowing the co-construction of knowledge by the students being guided.

The central task for an emancipatory action within an intercultural perspective would therefore be the transformation of the theory and the practice of an *imposed* hegemonic logic – what Santos (2002) refers to as 'globalised localism' – into a counter-hegemonic logic of 'co-construction' – akin to what Santos (2002) calls a 'cosmopolitan project'. Our view is that it is on the latter logic that career projects for social justice can be built by means of intercultural dialogue. Both the guided student (or group of guided students) and their career guidance counsellor should acknowledge a deep sense of incompleteness, with each one having the capacity to equally contribute to the guidance process.

Social relations are always both intercultural (produced 'in between') and political (representing unequal distributions of power). Valid knowledge is therefore contextualised knowledge; it is valid when it considers cultural differences and political differences (Santos, 2014).

Thus, the key point is that knowledge is produced in relation with, and from within, the context, without the supremacy of any form of knowledge over another. It should be oriented toward reality, which is taken both as a starting and an arrival point. According to Santos (2014: 31-32), 'global social injustice is, therefore, intimately linked to global cognitive injustice. The struggle for global justice must be therefore a struggle for global cognitive justice as well'.

How, then, should one think about an intercultural career guidance that contributes to the social justice agenda in the field? How should the intercultural principle be considered in the field of career guidance? In addressing these questions we will first consider some additional theoretical underpinnings before presenting what we have learnt from experiences carried out in Brazilian public schools.

Theoretical underpinnings

In general terms, the proposed model of intercultural career guidance emerged through an engagement with contexts marked by inequality and psychosocial vulnerability among disenfranchised Brazilians. Our action was guided by a desire to develop a productive relationship between Northern and Southern epistemologies, and specifically through an engagement with social constructionism and critical Latin American theories. In the process of trying to think through the notion of the co-construction of the self in the

world, four theoretical foundations helped organise our framework. As discussed in a preliminary way in Silva (2010; 2011) and Ribeiro (2013; 2016), these theoretical foundations consisted of (1) Relational ontology, (2) Narratability, (3) Intercultural dialogue, and (4) Conceptualisation of the guided student as the subject (rather than the object) of choices, discourses and rights – keeping in mind that in the Brazilian tradition, the notion of 'subject' integrates the idea of agency with the idea of citizenship, i.e., a subject is a person capable to regulate his/her own life (Paiva, 2005; Ayres et al, 2006).

Each of these four elements in our theoretical framework is briefly explored below.

Relational ontology

'Relational ontology' refers to the notion that most knowledge is produced in daily practices, rather than constituted as abstract knowledge. Freire (1970), for instance, pointed out that the production of knowledge takes place in human praxis, so that a pedagogy of the oppressed is 'not a pedagogy for him, but with him' (Freire, 1970: 9). Taking this on board in our field would mean that career guidance is done *with* others, not for others or by others.

Reality would thus not be objectively established but intersubjectively constructed by means of relational processes (Ribeiro, 2013). The focus here is neither the person nor the context, but rather on addressing what happens in the relationship when people are in contact, in a dynamic of people in context (Paiva, 2013). Consequently, relational ontology considers the reality of a relationship without neglecting a degree of independence between the personal and the social dimensions, as the social constructionist perspective points out (Mcnamee and Gergen, 1999).

Applying such a perspective to career guidance would mean that the focus of the process would be neither the guidance counsellor, nor the guided students, but the relationship established between them as well as its outcomes.

Narratability

In order to provide a relational and intermediate space so that each person is able to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct career narratives, as proposed by Rascován (2005) and Savickas et al (2009), career guidance should enable the co-construction of his/her 'narratability' (Savickas et al, 2009).

Narratability is not an individual skill, but a relational ability to narrate one's life story with meaning and significance shared with others. Each life story should be recognised and validated as a career in a context responsible for generating otherness … otherwise, the narrative is not recognised as socially valid. It is not a self-construction, but rather a co-construction of the self through one's relationship with others. Thus, the narratability is psychosocial, not individual.

Intercultural dialogue

Career guidance is a communitarian proposal organised by and with the guided students and others involved through conversations about projects and career plans. The assumption here is that career guidance can be offered by someone from a different cultural group than those who it is done with (Rascován, 2005).

As Silva suggests (2010; 2011), when discourses impose values or activities that are outside the acceptable interpretations, or impose meanings on a particular social group without listening to their experiences in daily life, such an attitude is likely to be oppressive rather than emancipatory for the person and/or group involved. Hence, it is important to understand the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and social class, produced in contexts of inequality and psychosocial vulnerabilities as key elements to intercultural dialogue. Paraphrasing Freire we can say that career guidance has to be forged *with* others, not *for* others (Freire, 1970: 32).

The guided student as a 'subject'

Students who are being guided are persons in relation. As such, they engage in intercultural dialogue in order to co-construct a position in which they are the subject of discourse. Their narratives in this process should be validated and recognised. This situation consequently makes the student-as-subject a 'rights holder' (Paiva, 2013), potentially transforming him/her into an agent of his/her own choices. This has important implications for the practice of career guidance. As Bohoslavsky (1977: 47) notes, if we

acknowledge a person as an 'agent of choices, we consider that the choice of the future is something that belongs to him/her which no professional, no matter how skilful s/he is, has the right to expropriate'. This should constitute the ethical norm underpinning career guidance.

In synthesis, the main objective of career guidance is to provide support for the co-construction of a place in the working world negotiated via intercultural dialogue. This stands in contrast to views that would define guidance in terms of supporting adjustment, adaptation or even education in relation to one's career.

Such an approach would generate awareness of the main attributes of equality and inequality, marked as these are by the intersectionality and consubstantiality of class, gender and race. In Silva's words: 'the awareness of social place, gender and skin colour attributes at work fosters the person's ability to place himself/herself as a subject of his/her educational and professional future' (Silva, 2010: 177).

This framework – which focuses on the four themes of relational ontology, narratability, intercultural dialogue, and 'student and subject' – provides us with some of the conceptual tools and lenses needed to develop ways to support each person's career projects within contexts marked by severe inequality. Within the framework of the Southern epistemologies referred to in this proposal, knowledge is not conceived in an abstract way, but as a practical knowledge arising from contexts marked by psychosocial vulnerability. It is to such practical considerations in the articulation of intercultural career guidance that we now turn.

Practical underpinnings

Ribeiro, Uvaldo and Silva (2015) have summarised the Latin American proposals for career guidance based on Southern epistemologies and have proposed that the diagnostic or development logic underpinning approaches to career guidance in the global North should be replaced by the identification of vulnerabilities, and that the focus of intervention should not be on the person but on social bonds.

Thus, the intervention is designed as a psychosocial intervention that transforms the career guidance practitioner into a communitarian worker rather than a traditional counsellor. Such a practitioner is particularly skilled in mediating psychosocial support processes rather than in providing individual guidance. He or she acts as an intermediary between the guided student and the career possibilities that are to be built in the working world, often by joint action with and through the community. As Ribeiro, Uvaldo and Silva (2015: 202) note, career guidance workers use such community-based action to 'help the persons in socio-occupational vulnerability to achieve educational and labour goals through sharing support and acting as intermediary for the relationships between them and the community actors and institutions'.

In other words, those providing career guidance act on the basis of relational knowledge production emanating from intercultural dialogue, helping students become the subjects of their choices. This can happen because such choices are co-constructed jointly between the career guidance counsellor, the guided students and the communities in which they are inserted or want to insert themselves in.

In such a situation, the career guidance counsellor no longer occupies the safe and secure place of 'the one who knows'. Rather the counsellor has to leave the position of 'guide' to assume that of the 'intermediary'. As such, counsellors facilitate the articulation of the mainstream culture with the local culture – what Santos (2002) refers to as 'cosmopolitanism logic'.

The practical approach proposed for career guidance from this Southern perspective thus has five assumptions based on the four theoretical foundations that have been presented above. Each of these assumptions is briefly explained below:

First, intercultural career guidance is based on personal narratives articulated with social discourses. It should assist the student to co-construct a personal narrative of his/her own life story, which connects the individual experience with the social forces that have shaped it.

Second, it focuses on the process, because understanding the personal process of constructing projects is more important than defining a specific project at a given life moment.

Third, it constructs contextualised concepts and practices with instituting function without imposing or applying a predefined strategy. It is not an existing strategy, which is simply applied in the current counselling situation. It is always built through a relationship between student and career guidance counsellor based on the knowledge of both.

Fourth, it works based on a 'diatopical hermeneutics' (Santos 2002). This is a key principle for intercultural career guidance, and refers to the process of interpretation (hermeneutics) carried out between persons or groups in different and unequal socio-cultural positions (*di* – two and *topoi* – positions or knowledge production places). In this relation, intercultural dialogue is generated between different and unequal knowledges (e.g., between the technical expertise of career guidance counsellors and the everyday knowledge of guided students). A good example of this is when a person whose working life is predominantly marked by informal jobs, seeks help to think about his or her career. Counsellors usually have little personal experience of work in this precarious sector of the labour market, and therefore require the everyday knowledge of the counselee to be able to help him or her in the process of building career projects.

Finally, intercultural career guidance proposes an intersubjective validation of knowledge with the guided student as the protagonist in the process. Career guidance is preferably carried out by means of group and communitarian strategies that potentially generate a 'web of meaningful exchanges…as a possible space of support to the differences, as a meeting place and respect for diversity' (Rascován, 2005: 124). As we have already noted, and following Santos (2014), the contemporary construction of knowledge should be the task of everyone, i.e., there should not be some that are more able than others to produce knowledge, even taking into account the fact that the different parties in a particular interaction have different levels of competence and responsibility. Instead, there needs to be a recognition that everyday knowledge is legitimate, and that co-constructors of knowledge are all in a situation of mutual incompleteness.

Strategies and approaches that include the use of 'intersubjective interaction scenes' (Paiva, 2005), of 'communitarian groups' (Rascován, 2005), and of 'psychodynamic groups' (Lehman et al, 2015) are examples of intercultural career guidance practices that take into account the above-mentioned theoretical and practical proposals.

The key principle underpinning intercultural career guidance is further illuminated if we take the liberation psychology developed by Martin-Baró (1994) into account. For the latter, the possibility of emancipation is neither action taken by someone on behalf or in the place of others, nor is it self-liberation. Rather, it is an enabling encounter of liberation, a shared action that is performed co-intentionally, in which both are engaged subjects in the act.

The exchange is not only between different knowledges but also between different cultures, i.e., the exchange is between universes of different meanings, based, for instance, on one's experiences of gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity and social class culture. Therefore, exchanges in intercultural career guidance informed by this perspective have a dialogical and psychosocial quality about them, because career projects are the outcome of mutual interaction between two partners: the career guidance counsellor and the guided students in a given community. Both are engaged in a process of 'co-construction', what Santos (2001) also refers to as 'mestizo knowledge'.

Conclusion

Our proposals regarding intercultural career guidance are based on a productive exchange with both Northern and Southern epistemologies, and especially between social constructionism and critical Latin American theories. We have outlined four basic theoretical foundations: relational ontology, narratability, intercultural dialogue, and the guided student as a rights holder and as an agent of choices.

We have argued that intercultural career guidance should identify psychosocial vulnerabilities, take into account the cultural differences between people, and focus its interventions in helping students construct and reconstruct their bonds and social networks by means of an intercultural dialogue. In addition, such forms of career guidance require collaboration with

the community, with the career guidance counsellor acting as a communitarian agent.

In conclusion, we highlight the importance of thinking of career guidance as intercultural, contextualised and plural. It recognises the intertwined and intersectional nature of race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, and social class – dimensions which cannot be separated from each other in any meaningful manner when considering social injustice. This means that intercultural career guidance cannot really divide and sort out people according to some of these dimensions; nor should it create specific strategies for each group, such as career guidance for Latinos or for lesbians. Rather than that, the whole point behind intercultural career guidance is to bring people together to deal with the differences from the perspective of diatopical hermeneutics, taking strength from a counter-hegemonic logic of cosmopolitanism in order to jointly face situations of psychosocial vulnerability and social injustice.

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A focus on educational choice has social justice consequences - an empirical study informed by Sen's capability approach

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This article demonstrates that in Denmark there is considerable focus on educational and career choices during the last year of lower-secondary school, and investigates the possibility of using Amartya Sen's capability approach as a lens to analyse this focus. It is argued that attention to the processes occurring before choices are made is of central importance, as these help to give students a genuine opportunity to choose from a broader range of options. This consideration is important from a social-justice perspective even if students end up choosing what they would have chosen without broader knowledge and reflection.

Introduction

A focus on social justice has strong roots in the history of career guidance thanks to Parsons' *Choosing a Vocation* (Parsons, 1909). In the literature, there are varying views as to how career guidance promotes social justice, if at all. Scholars wonder whether the career guidance field has drifted away from its roots in social justice, focusing instead on interventions primarily aimed at the individual without adequately considering contextual and environmental conditions (Arthur, Collins, McMahon & Marshall, 2009: 22). They also speculate as to whether career education practices 'rarely aim at enhancing equality of opportunity, of lessening social inequity or enhancing collective development actions' (Guichard, 2001: 166). Much of the literature on career development and social justice is primarily conceptual in nature and gives little attention to the challenges and successes experienced by career guidance practitioners. We need to focus on social justice in relation to, rather than detached from, practice (Arthur, Collins, Marshall & McMahon, 2013: 137; Irving, 2015), and to give due attention to what is actually to be done in practice (Hooley, 2015: 13), based on empirical observations (Berthet, 2010: 85).

One of the roles of youth guidance centres in Denmark involves supporting students in lower-secondary education (Danish grades 7 – 9/10, ages 14-16/17) in choosing upper-secondary education programmes. In the evaluations, surveys, research reports and articles produced on these youth guidance centres there is no focus on researching social justice issues (Skovhus & Thomsen, 2015). This article explores how career guidance unfolds in two Danish lower-secondary schools and how the students perceive the guidance activities which are offered to them. The empirical examples are discussed using Amartya Sen's capability approach as an analytic lens.

Initially the capability approach was not intended to be a theory about social justice. Sen's starting point was to find other ways to evaluate well-being, poverty and living standards than using an income approach or a utility approach. Sen argues that we should focus instead on what people are actually able to be and do, on the freedom they have to choose and live a kind of life they have reason to value. This is what Sen calls 'capabilities', a concept that will be explained in more detail later on in this article. Even though the basis of the theory was not social justice, it has become important in research and discussions of justice in relation to career guidance and education, see for example (Berthet, 2010; Bonal and Tarabini, 2016;

Galliott and Graham, 2014; Lanzi, 2004; Robertson, 2015; Saito, 2003; Sen, 2009; Unterhalter, Ladwig & Jeffrey, 2014; Unterhalter, Vaughan & Walker, 2007).

In the article, I argue that when considering career guidance in relation to social justice and capabilities, it is important to adopt a perspective which covers more than choices of education alone.

Methodology

The empirical studies which are the basis for this article formed part of my PhD research into career education and guidance in lower-secondary education in Denmark. In Denmark, compulsory education begins in pre-school grade (age 6) and ends after ninth grade (age 16). Tenth grade is optional. Students then choose between vocational and upper-secondary education. Guidance practitioners employed by youth guidance centres provide guidance in relation to this transition.

The empirical study was conducted in two ninth-grade classes for a total of 46 days spread over the whole school year. The classes were in two different schools connected to two different youth guidance centres. 47 students, two career guidance practitioners and six teachers were included in the research.

The methods used were interviews with students and career guidance practitioners as well as participant observation of guidance activities, lessons and students' breaks.

In this article I present one case about a student called Carl (not his real name) to demonstrate the focus on choice which pervades the empirical findings.

Sen, on whose theory this article is based, stresses the importance of operationalising the capability approach in a practical sense to assess justice (Berthet, Dechézelles, Gouin and Simon, 2009: 3), but without dictating which method should be used to conduct the work (Berthet et al., 2009: 20). The methods described above were chosen to gain insight into how career guidance in Danish schools unfolds, into how it makes sense for the persons involved, and into their subjective reasons for action.

Before I present the key findings, it is important to provide a brief account of the central aspects of Sen's capability approach.

The capability approach and social justice

Amartya Sen is a Nobel prize-winning Indian economist and philosopher who has worked in the United Kingdom and the United States for many years. In 1979 Sen presented a theory called the capability approach (Sen, 1979). He points out that most theories about social justice argue for the equality of something, but that this 'something' can vary. Traditionally, in relation to equality, there is a focus on utilities (concentrating on individual happiness or pleasure), or income, wealth or resources, which Sen calls 'goods' (Sen, 1992). Sen's starting point for the capability approach is that the critical question is not whether we need equality. The really critical question is 'equality of what?' (Sen, 1979, 2009: 293). Sen points out that the answer to this question is capability, where capability is 'a person's *actual* ability to do the different things that she values doing' (Sen, 2009: 253). The focus is on human lives and not just the goods they possess or have access to. Sen highlights that by changing the focus from the means of living to the actual opportunities people have, the capability approach represents a fairly radical change in the evaluative work on justice (Sen, 2009: 253).

Freedom is closely connected to human capabilities. In the capability approach, there is not just a focus on what people succeed in doing. There is also a focus on the freedom people actually have to choose between different kinds of lives (Sen, 2009: 18). Freedom to choose contributes to our well-being, but Sen points out that the importance of freedom goes beyond well-being. Freedom has an intrinsic value since 'being able to reason and choose is a significant aspect of human life' (Sen, 2009: 18). Freedom is valuable because more freedom gives a person more opportunity to pursue his or her objectives. Another central aspect concerns the process of choice, e.g. that 'we are not being forced into some state because of constraints imposed by others' (Sen, 2009: 228).

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If we understand freedom in a narrow sense, it is sufficient to be concerned with what a person ends up with. But if we join Sen in regarding the existence of options and freedom to choose as important, we also need to focus on the process and the way a person reaches a choice (Sen, 2009: 230).

It is important to mention that Sen does not represent the understanding that people's choices are detached. He points out that rather than choosing in a free and detached manner, people are profoundly influenced by their environment. In addition, what people value is influenced by their surroundings (Robeyns, 2005: 102; Unterhalter et al., 2007: 5). Among other things, that is why it becomes interesting to focus on career guidance as one aspect of the students' surroundings, as well as discussing the role of career guidance in a social justice perspective.

The capability approach is relevant for example for poverty analysis in developing countries (Robeyns, 2005: 101; Sen, 1987: 109), but the theory is not restricted to the analysis of poverty and deprivation. It can also serve as a framework for project evaluations or the measurement of inequality in affluent communities (Robeyns, 2005: 101).

Before I move on, it seems fair to mention that Sen's theory has been criticised in various ways. Wells (n.d.) has listed most of these critiques. In this context only some of the main ones are mentioned. Some, for instance, have argued the theory does not sufficiently explicate what is meant by and what constitutes a capability (Williams, 1987); others have claimed that it is necessary to discuss and make a list concerning which capabilities are important or trivial (Nussbaum, 2003), or that the capability approach in general is under-theorised. Additionally there has been critique of the lack of focus on the 'power relations that cause and reproduce underdevelopment through national and political institutions' (Navarro, 2000: 661). It has also been pointed out that there is a tendency for the capability approach to focus on individuals at the expense of structures that inhibit personal flourishing (Bonal & Tarabini, 2016). It is important to notice the structural conditions existing in school and career guidance. Graham and Harwood warn against using the capability approach naively, because it can raise the temptation 'to focus simply on building the individual capacity of students without recognising what structural and political barriers impede their participation' (Graham & Harwood, 2011: 137).

These critiques of the capability approach seem to be well founded. Even so, I found the theory useful when carrying out a qualitative analysis of selected empirical data from my PhD research on youth career guidance, largely because it provides perspectives on the focus on choice, which is conspicuous in the data material. The focus on choice is not new. In 2004 the OECD found that career services 'too often fail to develop people's career management skills, but focus upon immediate decisions' (OECD, 2004: 3). The analysis of my empirical findings outlined below shows that this may still be the case with youth career guidance and associated activities.

Focusing on choice

In Denmark, education is free. This includes not only compulsory education, but also upper-secondary education, vocational education and higher education. Every Dane over the age of 18 is entitled to a study allowance for his or her further education – regardless of income. In theory, this means that young people can choose which educational programme they like, as long they are assessed as being ready for it and as long as they meet the requirements of a certain level of marks if admission is restricted or regulated.

In lower-secondary school there are various mandatory career guidance activities, such as 'bridge-building activities' in which the students visit educational institutions (Ministry of Education, 2014), and some optional activities, such as short internships.

Now I will introduce a student named Carl from one of the classes involved in my research. At the age of 12 Carl decided that he would like to become a mechanic. For a couple of years he worked after school in a garage. In the eighth grade he went on a bridge-building visit to the mechanical engineering vocational school. He enjoyed this visit and afterwards said he was sure he wanted to be a mechanic. In his tenth-grade class, the plan is that all the students should visit various vocational programmes. Carl is not interested in these visits. His mother calls the school and tells

them that Carl will do an internship in a garage while the other students visit the various vocational programmes. Carl tells me he cannot see the point in visiting the other programmes because 'they're not for me, because I know I'm not going to be any of those things.'

The issues that arise in this case relate not to Carl alone, but to many of the students involved. Most of the students primarily value the career guidance activities in relation to whether the activity, in their opinion, is directly relevant for them in making a choice of educational programme. The students who were not yet clear about what to choose after lower-secondary school considered it very valuable for them to visit educational institutions in the range of educational pathways they were considering. But if the students had already chosen which vocational or upper-secondary educational programme they wished to attend after lower-secondary school, they rarely thought it was relevant or meaningful to participate in career guidance activities such as visiting an educational institution. This perspective is connected to self-understanding, which is an issue which I discuss in my PhD dissertation (Skovhus, n.d.). Using the capability approach, this focus on the end process of choice can be related to what Sen calls 'functionings'. As Robeyns (2011) notes, 'functionings are 'beings and doings', that is, various states of human beings and activities that a person can undertake […] Capabilities are a person's real freedoms or opportunities to achieve functionings. Thus, while travelling is a functioning, the real opportunity to travel is the corresponding capability. The distinction between functionings and capabilities is between the realized and the effectively possible, in other words, between achievements, on the one hand, and freedoms or valuable opportunities from which one can choose, on the other'.

The analysis shows that the focus on choice is connected, among other things, to the practice of the career guidance practitioner and teacher involved. When they introduce a guidance activity to the students, such as a visit to an educational institution, they mainly justify why the students should participate by saying that the students need to join so they can find out whether they would like to choose this specific educational programme after lower-secondary school. Many of these career guidance activities are isolated activities for which the students are not prepared, and no follow-up initiatives are implemented either.

Preparation and follow-up could help the students to consider more carefully what they might learn from the activity in a career learning perspective, even if they are initially certain that the activity in question (for example a specific programme of education which they are going to visit) is not relevant for them. The adoption of a wider perspective might broaden the student's perspective and help them to think more deeply about and understand the educational and vocational system, how things work and the kind of social system of which they are part. This might in turn help them to make good choices in a longer perspective as well – alone and together. I will relate aspects like these (the potential for career learning in an activity, reflection, broader perspectives, and the support that can be provided for deeper consideration of the alternatives) to capabilities.

Capability and a broader perspective than choice

It is not surprising that in the last year of compulsory school young people and their guidance practitioners focus on which education pathway to choose. The case of Carl shows that some students have actually already made their choice of education long before grade nine.

The capability approach is centred on freedom and opportunity. As noted above, Sen points out that being able to reason and to have the freedom to choose between different things that you value doing is central. There is a focus on people's actual opportunities to choose to live different lives, not exclusively on the end-process of a choice. In other words, the focus is placed not only on which course of education a young person ends up choosing, starting and finally completing. The process before the choice is central. With this in mind, and based on Sen, I argue that it is not sufficient to focus on choices of educational programmes by young people. It is also vital to support capabilities – which in this context means opening options, supporting reflection, and giving students a

genuine opportunity to make other choices. In other words, it is important to support the students to find out which programmes of education they can actually choose, to support them in reflecting on what they value and considering their actual options – not only to help them make the right choice, but also to contribute to social justice (with justice being understood by Sen as the freedom to choose between various ways to live, including education and vocation). This is a crucial aspect even if it turns out that young people make the same choices they would have made in the first place without any broader knowledge about (or experience of) education programmes and vocations.

It is important to remember that the choice of upper-secondary education programmes is only the first of myriads of career-related choices the person must take throughout life. In lower-secondary education, it is important to build a base that can be developed continuously. The young person will need this base when he or she chooses what to do after vocational or upper-secondary education – and again and again throughout life. As mentioned above, the empirical findings give reason to believe that students' opportunities for building capabilities are reduced when they (or the professionals who work with them) focus overwhelmingly on choice.

Discussion and conclusion

The capability approach offers an analytical toolbox (Berthet et al., 2009: 2), selected parts of which have been used in this article. The approach draws our attention to additional ways of understanding social justice – alternative paths instead of climbing the social ladder, for instance (Hansen, 2015).

The empirical data shows that a narrow focus on choice as young people in the last year of lower-secondary school choose between subsequent educational programmes can adversely affect their motivation to participate and engage in career-choice activities – activities which could contribute to capability development. Based on the capability approach, it is argued that it is important from a social-justice perspective to give young people real options to make different choices, for instance by providing them with knowledge of a broad range of educational opportunities and the chance to experience and reflect on them. This is the case even if students end up choosing what they would have chosen without broader knowledge and reflection.

In continuation of the analysis above, some questions can be raised about the capability approach. Questions such as how much capability (for instance connected to knowledge of and reflection on various educational options) is required before we can regard a choice as being genuinely free. And whether it is possible for the range of capabilities of a young person to be so broad that it becomes too difficult to make a choice and turns out to be a problem for him or her. Despite questions like these, I wish to stress that the capability approach contributes relevant perspectives when we want to understand career guidance practice in a social justice perspective.

Sultana points out that it is important not to overestimate the role career guidance can play. But it is also reasonable to argue that career guidance can make a positive difference in the lives of citizens, possibly contributing to equalising life-chances rather than just reproducing social class destinies (Sultana, 2014: 317). Based on Sen's framework, it seems fair to argue that career guidance has the potential in theory to contribute to social justice and increased capability, but that the analysis of career guidance activities in lower-secondary school reveals that whether and how career guidance actually succeeds in contributing is a matter for empirical examination.

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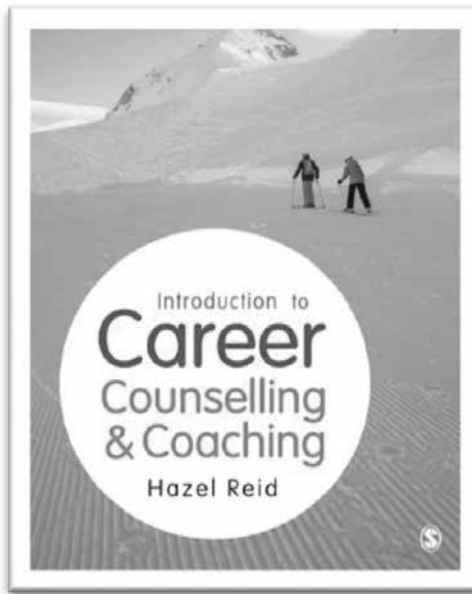

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Forthcoming events 2016

NICEC Events Calendar

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<tr><th>Event</th><th>Place</th><th>Date and Time</th></tr>
<tr><td>Seminar: New European Guidelines for Policies and Systems for Lifelong Guidance
John McCarthy, NICEC International Fellow and Director of The International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy</td><td>London</td><td>Thursday 17 March 2016 2pm-4pm</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">John will present the origins and development of the recently published European Guidelines and examine their structure, coverage and potential usage. The discussion will focus mainly around the following questions:
• Why is career guidance of policy interest at EU level? How has this interest manifested itself?
• What is a European Reference Policy Framework? Why is it important?
• Is there a need for a European Reference Framework for policies and systems for career guidance?
The Guidelines can be viewed on the following link:
http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/elgpn-tools-no-6-guidelines-for-policies-and-systems-development-for-lifelong-guidance/
Participants are strongly encouraged to download the Guidelines in advance of the seminar.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Seminar: Rehabilitation of Offenders,
Leigh Henderson, NICEC Fellow</td><td>London</td><td>Monday 9 May 2016
5pm-6.30pm</td></tr>
<tr><td>Seminar: [Topic to be agreed]
Claudia Harris, Chief Executive, The Careers & Enterprise Company</td><td>London</td><td>Wednesday 21 June 2016 5pm-6.30pm</td></tr>
<tr><td>Conference: Two-day residential
Rethinking Career Development for Global Contexts</td><td>University of Derby</td><td>Wednesday 21st & Thursday 22nd September</td></tr>
<tr><td>Seminar: Appropriate Attire for Careers
Tristram Hooley and Julia Yates, NICEC Fellows</td><td>London</td><td>Thursday 24 November 2016 5pm-6.30pm</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="3">Event Costs:</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Seminars and Network Meetings:
• included in membership fees for NICEC Fellows and members.
• £20 for seminars; £40 for network meetings for non-members.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">NICEC residential conference:
Fees have yet to be agreed, but we will need to recover the costs by charging a fee to Fellows, Members and non-members.</td></tr>
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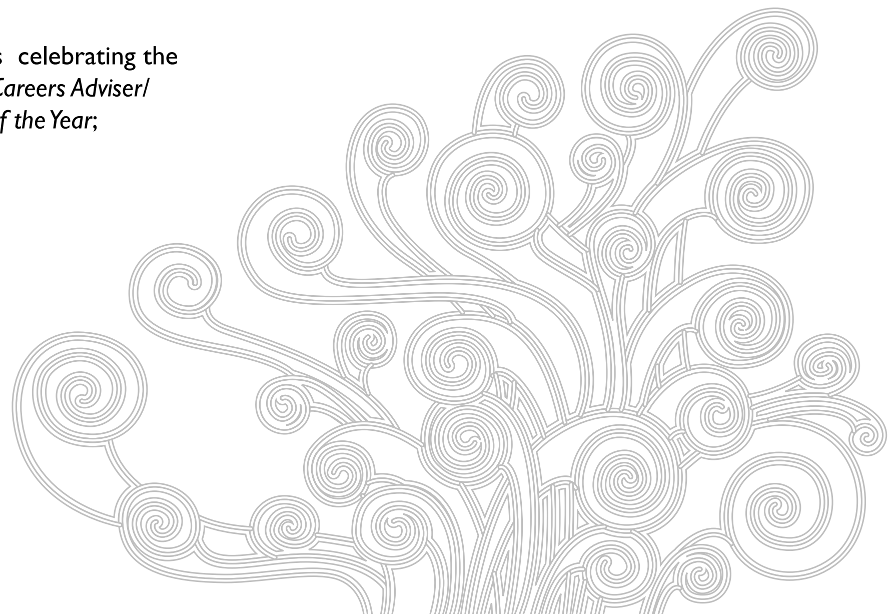

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