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Contents

EDITORIAL

ARTICLES

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Towards a new professional status?

Challenges and opportunities for the careers profession

This issue takes forward the debate held at the NICEC National Network Meeting in March 2011. The meeting discussed the issues addressed by the report *Towards a Strong Careers Profession* and situated these within a broader understanding of the nature of professions and the challenges faced. The journal extends that debate and reflects on the implications for the future of the career guidance profession in challenging times. Innovative thinking and practice is required at this turning point for the careers profession: you'll find that thinking in this issue.

Rachel Mulvey gives an account of the Careers Profession Task Force, from her perspective as its Vice Chair, considering its mission, methods, processes and challenges. All fourteen of the formal recommendations are presented. The article concludes that with the work of the taskforce now completed, the challenge for career professionals gathers apace.

Julia Evetts states that the sociological analysis of professional work has differentiated professionalism as a special means of organizing work and controlling workers. After clarifying the three concepts of profession, professionalization and professionalism, she continues with a section on professionalism, its history and current developments. The second section considers the main challenges to, and the third section the opportunities for, professionalism as an occupational value for the sector.

Bill Law considers that careers work professionalism is a personal commitment framed by an institutional policy. He argues that without the institutional, the commitment is unsupported; without the commitment, the policy is futile. The meanings attributed to careers-work professionalism are all contestable and Bill probes those dissonances, examining the issues they raise for our credibility, expertise, connectedness and independence. He concludes that their resolution has consequences for the public face of careers work in all its aspects.

John Gough reflects on what may now constitute the occupational and professional identity of career guidance practitioners after a decade of rapid change, and in the face of further significant policy developments. Building on recent research, he considers the effects of policy shifts, and their attendant managerialism, on the identity of careers practitioners in a wide variety of organisational settings. He uses a particular model to illuminate and critically examine the structural, political, motivational and symbolic aspects of change, including identity reformation.

Tony Watts reviews the international evidence in relation to four aspects of the emerging policy model for career guidance in England: an all-age service; revitalising the professionalism of career guidance; the partnership model between schools and an external service; and the introduction of school commissioning. Evidence is also reviewed in relation to six high-performing countries in terms of school performance. He concludes that there is no common pattern that characterises the career guidance provision in these countries, but that any devolution of responsibility to schools needs to be accompanied by strong policy levers.

Siobhan Neary's research examines how professional identity is defined within career guidance in England in the wake of ongoing change. She considers the components and the factors that contribute to the formation of professional identity, and the relationship with postgraduate continuing professional development (CPD). The study draws on the perceptions of a group of England-based practitioners broadly representing the sector, but bounded by one common factor; they have all undertaken a postgraduate qualification focusing on CPD within a guidance related discipline.

Samantha Cregeen-Cook reports on research that explores 360° feedback on the use of 'visual tools' for career guidance practice. Developed through data obtained during interviews with guidance practitioners, young people and their drawings – innovative thinking for practice is promoted at this 'crossroads' moment for the careers profession. The data produced demonstrates the interpretative nature of the research and the individual meanings constructed from it. Samantha argues that as we move towards a National Careers Service for England, resourceful and inventive practice is crucial for future development.

Laurie Simpson suggests that today's careers practitioners are tasked with offering assistance to a populace becoming increasingly culturally diverse, whilst facing ever growing professional insecurity. There is a need, she argues, to develop creative practice to meet the needs of individuals but also to motivate practitioners. Laurie considers creative written practices referring to case studies from her autoethnographic research: offering both a reflective and reflexive account. Her intention is to encourage career professionals to consider possible creative writing processes to facilitate clients to tell their unique stories, but also as a way to observe their own career journey; enhancing their understanding of the changing nature of career.

My thanks go to all the authors for their thought-provoking contributions.

Hazel Reid, Co-editor

The Careers Profession Task Force: Vice Chair's perspective

Rachel Mulvey

The article gives an account of the Careers Profession Task Force, from the perspective of its Vice Chair, and considers its mission, methods, processes and challenges. This independent group was asked firstly; to articulate the vision for high quality careers provision, and secondly; to advise the government on what actions would be needed to equip careers professionals to deliver high quality services. In particular the group was asked to consider whether careers professionals should be required to hold a specialist qualification in careers, and whether there is a need for a professional specialism in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). The Task Force was convened by the Labour administration, but reported to the coalition government, formed of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties. All fourteen of the formal recommendations are presented. The article concludes that with the work of the taskforce now completed, the challenge for career professionals gathers apace.

Introduction

This article presents an insider's view of the independent Task Force on the Careers Profession (TFCP). Although it is a personal perspective, the courtesy and discipline of collective responsibility are maintained; this is not an exposé of unseemly infighting, rather a partial account of one member's experience of taking part in an independent review.

The formal invitation to be vice-chair of the Task Force on the Careers Profession (TFCP) came from the Labour member of parliament (MP) Mr Iain Wright, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for 14-19 Reform and Apprenticeships. Several months later, the formal letter thanking me for my input into the task force and its report came from the Conservative MP Mr John Hayes, Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning in the coalition government (formed of the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrat party). If a week is a long time in politics, the half year in which the TFCP deliberated was an aeon. The political and economic landscape and its impact on public services (including the provision of career guidance) changed beyond recognition, and not, on closer consideration, for the better. This article confines itself to the workings of the TFCP and considers, in order, its mission, methods and processes. It presents all fourteen recommendations and touches on the challenges the task force worked through. It concludes with the author's retrospective of the process.

The Mission

Impetus

The impetus for the task force can be traced to the Skills Commission which published (The Skills Commission, 2009) a report on its inquiry into the provision of careers education and guidance. It expressed strong reservations about the training for career guidance professionals; training both on the job and in higher education institutions, career professionals delivering guidance and those working in schools with responsibility for careers education and career learning. It questioned whether training was fit for purpose in the current climate, suggesting that present provision would not equip the career workforce to help their clients deal with an increasingly complex world. In response, the then Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2009) set out a range of policy commitments. Key among these was the crucial role afforded to effective careers education and guidance to promote social mobility through raising aspirations and achievements

(The Cabinet Office, 2009). As part of its promise to enhance the quality of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CE/IAG), the DCSF pledged to create an independent task force on the careers profession.

Terms of reference

The detailed terms of reference were agreed by the membership within the earliest meetings, but the overall task entrusted to the group was to advise the government. It was asked to 'provide the vision for high-quality delivery of CE/IAG and make recommendations on the actions needed to ensure careers professionals in England have the knowledge and skills required to enable young people to make informed decisions…and…plan their own careers' (DfE, 2010:36). A number of specific objectives followed. These pivoted around high standards of professional training and subsequent practice, including the concern to 'attract entrants to the professional who are well-qualified, from a variety of backgrounds and who reflect the make-up of the working population' and the need to 'strengthen the integrated working of careers professionals with other members of the youth and adult workforce' (ibid). In addition, the task force had to answer two questions. Firstly, if they don't do so already, should all career professionals hold a specialist qualification? And secondly, whether professional careers advisers should be offered continuous professional development as a specialist for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM).

Methods and processes

Gathering evidence and becoming informed

Members of the task force were appointed to 'bring a range of relevant experience and interests' (DfE, 2010:2), but the wide reach of the careers professional workforce issue made for a sizeable group of seventeen. The task force met regularly for seven months; whole group meetings considered findings and evidence, considered arguments presented and, crucially, sought to arrive at an agreed position which everyone in the group could adhere to. Experts outside of the task force were invited to present their perspective and any relevant evidence. For example the chief executive of the science council briefed the group on the STEM agenda, sharing research undertaken on career thinking and career progression within STEM sectors. An open call for evidence reaped rich findings, which were formally received. Links were maintained with parallel groups whose work could inform the task force: these included the Education and Employers Task Force and the Children's Workforce Development Council/Lifelong Learning UK joint review of skills requirements for careers professionals. Task force members consulted with their own networks, formally so if they represented a member organisation e.g. the Institute of Career Guidance or the Association of Careers Education and Guidance. The expertise within the group was not lost, and several members were invited to submit working papers or to present in person to the whole task force. The secretariat, comprised of civil servants in the department, kept us informed of pertinent policy developments: no mean undertaking given the churn of a general election and the subsequent formation of a coalition government.

Organising the work plan: four theme groups

The task force tackled their work plan by pursuing four themes, namely: recruitment; workforce development; standards/inspection and linkages to the wider workforce. Each theme group was led by a task force member, with support provide by a member of the secretariat. The chair, Dame Ruth Silver, introduced the intriguing concept of a 'stalker' – someone who, during the course of the groups' deliberations, physically comes out of their designated group and goes into one of the others. The stalker role is akin to the critical friend in that she is permitted to ask questions and to challenge assumptions, thereby inhibiting the creep of group-think. However, the stalker's crucial brief was actively to seek out and bring back to their 'home' group any intelligence that would illuminate their own investigation. This approach afforded two benefits: it enhanced the work of each theme group, and forged connections between the parallel lines of inquiry. The four strand leaders had to ensure that work was done in between the whole group meetings; as these were fortnightly, the pace of work was not insignificant.

Refining the work plan: four sub-groups

In the best traditions of 'real world' research, no sooner was one summit conquered than another mountain was thus revealed. So, once the theme groups had started performing and reporting, there was a sifting of outstanding issues, and four new groupings were proposed. Not only did each group have a new brief, each group was re-constituted in a new formation of members. Although these were allocated, individuals were reassured that they could move to another group and some people did indeed do this, homing in on the issue they felt they could make the greatest contribution to. This was to ensure that the focus was firmly on what most needed doing. The issues tackled by the new sub groups were: what it means to be a professional; continuing professional development; what are the boundaries of the careers profession and excellent careers guidance. For these sub groups, the brief was to think the unthinkable, and not to let reality hamper vision. The sense was that the civil service would do that job for us; our task was to envisage, to dare to dream. But we were also reminded of our collective charge to advise the government; and the need to distill our thinking into concrete proposals, which transmuted into the fourteen recommendations.

Recommendations

The full set of recommendations is presented below (DfE, 2010: 3*ff*). It is striking that the task force entrusts the careers profession with much of the responsibility for change. This is entirely in keeping with core principles of professionalism, including autonomous action and the concomitant responsibility. It also challenges the professionals involved to shape their destiny: to forge a stronger profession rather than responding to government demands for more professional practice. Clearly, for these recommendations to secure greater recognition of professional work by careers practitioners and educators alike, key stakeholder must be onside. This would include schools and colleges, employers and providers of work based learning. Government too can help to strengthen the profession, to realize their ambition for an effective career workforce.

Recommendation 1: The Task Force is persuaded of the importance of the partnership model, and recommends that Government should seek to maintain and strengthen this model as it develops its future vision for careers education and guidance.

Recommendation 2: The Task Force welcomes the action recently taken by the main careers professional associations to establish an overarching group for the membership bodies, the Careers Profession Alliance, as a single authoritative voice, and recommends that Government should demonstrate its active support and encouragement for this process.

Recommendation 3: The Task Force recommends that the Careers Profession Alliance should develop common professional standards and a common code of ethics for careers professionals, and that all organisations represented in the Alliance should expect their members to adhere to these standards.

Recommendation 4: The Task Force recommends that members of the careers profession should be expected to achieve a minimum level 6 (QCF) qualification before starting to practise, that the Careers Profession Alliance, working principally with Careers England (and involving the broader base of employers of careers professionals), should support such transition arrangements as are necessary for those individuals currently practising below this level, and that consideration should be given to raising the minimum level to level 7 within five years.

Recommendation 5: In support of a more diverse workforce, the Task Force recognises the importance of the work-based route into the profession (leading to a level 6 qualification) and recommends the development of a single career progression framework which is capable of incorporating the concepts of 'Careers First' and 'Careers Last'.

Recommendation 6: The Task Force recommends that the organisations forming the Careers Profession Alliance should expect their members (whether individual members of the 4 careers profession or employers of careers professionals) to demonstrate a commitment to CPD [continuing professional development].

Recommendation 7: The Task Force recommends that initial training and CPD should include a focus on labour market information (LMI), information and communications technology (ICT), and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), all of which are crucial to all members of the careers profession in delivering high-quality career guidance; and that, through CPD, there should be opportunities for further development of 'specialisms', leading towards the concept of an Advanced Careers Practitioner.

Recommendation 8: The Task Force recommends that the organisations in the Careers Profession Alliance should consider requiring their members to self-declare the nature and amount of CPD they have undertaken each year, with a random sample being required to provide evidence to assure quality.

Recommendation 9: The Task Force recommends that both Careers Advisers and Careers Educators, where they consider themselves to be careers professionals, must uphold the professional standards and meet other expectations of the careers profession.

Recommendation 10: The Task Force recommends that an overarching national kite mark should be established to validate the different CEIAG quality awards for schools, colleges and work-based learning providers.

Recommendation 11: The Task Force recommends that any organisation that is making arrangements for the provision of career guidance to young people should ensure that the provider meets a relevant, nationally approved quality standard, and that Government should support the establishment of such a standard.

Recommendation 12: The Task Force recommends that the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services, the Training and Development Agency for Schools and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, working with Ofsted, the Careers Profession Alliance and Careers England (and involving the broader base of employers of careers professionals), should help schools, colleges and work-based learning providers to learn from and share examples of good practice.

Recommendation 13: The Task Force recommends that Ofsted should carry out a thematic review of CEIAG for young people, in a variety of contexts, to help identify excellent CEIAG provision and to establish a baseline for future development; and should carry out a further such review within three years to evaluate the progress that has been made.

Recommendation 14: The Task Force recommends that Government should assure itself that the careers profession is rising to the challenge of implementing the Task Force's recommendations by commissioning reports on progress in March 2011 and March 2012.

(DfE, 2010: 3ff)

Retrospective

Complexity and boundaries

At one of the earliest meetings, possibly the very first navigation meeting, the chair asked us to delineate the boundaries of the career guidance and education workforce. This proved absurdly taxing, and demanded return and review before a consensus could be reached. The landscape is really is very complex: it runs along a spectrum of provision from youth to any age, by way of targeted groups needing particular attention; it includes people in education (secondary, further, vocational, professional and higher) and training (off the job and on the job) and those not in education or training with provision ranging from formal publically funded services to informal grassroots activities either of which may experience management by target or by self-regulation.

More than once, our chair depicted the career domain as tentacular i.e. having the nature of tentacles. This workforce, our workforce does indeed have a sprawling footprint, with various degrees of occupational identity and commitment. Those within the community of practice have kept apace of changes in policy and, therefore, changes in service provision; those looking in from outside can be forgiven for seeking to discern a unifying logic in our evolution.

Through argument to consensus

A prurient reader, eager to glean graphic accounts of dissent from this insider perspective, would have been disappointed to note the opening promise of adherence to collective responsibility. But only a naïve reader would believe consensus sprang, fully formed, from a group of people with relevant experience, interests – and opinions. As outlined earlier, the methods and processes ensured that opinion and conviction within the group was triangulated against research evidence and external expertise. It was, at times, hard – both to make arguments and to hear arguments. But the formation and re-formation of theme and sub groups ensured group energies were consistently channelled into the challenge we signed up for: to advise on the career profession work force.

Conclusion

The independent Task Force on the Careers Profession delivered. It respected its terms of reference whilst keenly attending to the possibility of policy change in the future, particularly with regard to all age provision. Given the change of government within the lifespan of the task force, this was prescient. The task force has challenged individuals to continue their professional development throughout their professional life. It has also challenged all the member organisations to find new ways of working together in order to strengthen the profession. Since reporting in October 2010 two things have happened. Firstly, the minister has accepted all of its recommendations, and secondly, public spending cuts have severely affected the provision of career guidance in England. The publication of the task force report, far from being the end of the story, may well mark its beginning.

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Articles

Professionalism in turbulent times: challenges to and oportunities for professionalism as an occupational value

Julia Evetts

The sociological analysis of professional work has differentiated professionalism as a special means of organizing work and controlling workers. After clarifying the three concepts of profession, professionalization and professionalism, the paper continues with a section on professionalism, its history and current developments. The second section considers the main challenges to, and the third section the opportunities for, professionalism as an occupational value and for this category of professional practitioners and employees in the labour market.

Introduction

For a long time, the sociological analysis of professional work has differentiated professionalism as a special means of organizing work and controlling workers and in contrast to the hierarchical, bureaucratic and managerial controls of industrial and commercial organizations. But professional work is changing and being changed as increasingly professionals (such as doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers) now work in employing organizations; lawyers and accountants in large professional service firms (PSFs) and sometimes in international and commercial organizations; pharmacists in national (retailing) companies; and engineers, journalists, performing artists, the armed forces and police find occupational control of their work and discretionary decision-making increasingly difficult to maintain and sustain.

In sociological research on professional groups, three concepts have been used extensively in the development of explanations: profession, professionalization, professionalism. The concept of profession represents a distinct and generic category of occupational work. Definitions of 'profession' have been frequently attempted, but sociologists have been unsuccessful in clarifying the differences between professions and other occupations and identifying what makes professions distinctive. Definitions of professions as institutional remain unresolved, though particular generic occupational groups continue to form the case studies in which to examine and test sociological theories and explanations.

The concept of professionalization is regarded as the process to achieve the status of profession and has been interpreted as the process to pursue, develop and maintain the closure of the occupational group in order to maintain practitioners' own occupational self-interests in terms of their salary, status and power, as well as the monopoly protection of the occupational jurisdiction (Larson, 1977; Abbott, 1988). This interpretation was prominent in the field in the 1970s and 1980s and was associated with a critique of professions as ideological constructs (Johnson, 1972).

This interpretation has declined in popularity recently although sociologists interested in gender issues and differences continue to critique the idea of profession as a gendered (historical) construct (Davies, 1995; Witz, 1992). Also the concept of professionalization continues to be important in the analysis of newly emerging occupations (e.g. IT consultancy, human resources management, psychology and social care work) perhaps seeking status and recognition for the importance of the work often by standardization of the education, training and qualification for practice (Brint, 2001; Ruiz Ben, 2009).

A third concept is professionalism which has had a long history in the disciplinary sub-field. Professionalism was usually interpreted as an occupational or normative value, as something worth preserving and promoting in work and by and for workers. Then later developments interpreted professionalism as a discourse and to an extent this has combined the occupational value and the ideological interpretations. Certainly there are real advantages in the analysis of professionalism as the key analytical concept in explanations and interpretations about professional knowledge-based work, occupations and practitioners.

The paper begins with a section on the concept of professionalism, its history and current developments. The second section considers the main challenges to, and the third section the main opportunities for, professionalism as an occupational value and for this category of knowledge-based practitioners and employees in the labour market.

Professionalism as an occupational value: history and current developments

In early British sociological analysis, the key concept was 'professionalism' and the emphasis was on the importance of professionalism for the stability and civility of social systems (e.g. Tawney, 1921; Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933; Marshall, 1950). Tawney perceived professionalism as a force capable of controlling rampant individualism to work for the needs of the community. Carr-Saunders and Wilson saw professionalism as a force for stability and freedom against the threat of encroaching industrial and governmental bureaucracies. Marshall emphasized altruism or the 'service' orientation of professionalism and how professionalism might form a bulwark against threats to stable democratic processes. In these interpretations professionalism was regarded as an important and highly desirable occupational value and professional relations were characterized as collegial, co-operative and mutually supportive. Similarly, relations of trust characterized practitioner-client and practitioner-management interactions since competencies were assumed to be guaranteed by education, training and sometimes by licensing.

The early American sociological theorists of professions also developed similar interpretations and again the key concept was the occupational value of professionalism based on trust, competence, a strong occupational identity and co-operation. The best known, though perhaps most frequently mis-quoted, attempt to clarify the special characteristics of professionalism, its central values and its contribution to social order and stability, was that of Parsons (1939). Parsons recognized and was one of the first theorists to show how the capitalist economy, the rational-legal social order (of Weber), and the modern professions were all interrelated and mutually balancing in the maintenance and stability of a fragile normative social order. He demonstrated how the authority of the professions and of bureaucratic hierarchical organizations both rested on the same principles (for example of functional specificity, restriction of the power domain, application of universalistic, impersonal standards). The professions, however, by means of their collegial organization and shared identity, demonstrated an alternative approach (compared with the managerial hierarchy of bureaucratic organizations) towards the shared normative end.

The work of Parsons in general has subsequently been subject to heavy criticism mainly because of its links with functionalism (Dingwall and Lewis, 1983). The differences between professionalism and rational–legal, bureaucratic ways of organizing work have been returned to, however, in Freidson's (2001) final analysis. Freidson examined the logics of three different ways of organizing work in contemporary societies (the market, organization and profession) and illustrates the respective advantages and disadvantages of each for clients and practitioners. In this analysis he demonstrates the continuing importance of maintaining professionalism (with some changes) as the main organizing principle for service sector work. Freidson does not use the term 'occupational value' and instead focuses on the importance of knowledge and expertise; but he maintains that occupational control of the work (by the practitioners themselves) is of real importance for the maintenance of professionalism. It is important because the complexities of the work are such that only practitioners can understand the organizational needs of the work, its processes, procedures, testing and outcomes. It is by means of extensive (and expensive) systems of work place training and socialization that the new recruits develop the expertise to put theoretical knowledge into practice and to control the work systems and procedures.

This interpretation represents what might be termed the optimistic (or positive) view of what professionalism and the process of professionalization of work entails. It is based on the principle that the work is of importance either to the public or to the interests of the state or an elite (Freidson, 2001: 214). According to Freidson, 'the ideal typical position of professionalism is founded on the official belief that the knowledge and skill of a particular specialization requires a foundation in abstract concepts and formal learning' (2001: 34-35). Education, training and experience are fundamental requirements, but once achieved (and sometimes licensed) then the exercise of discretion (discretionary decision-making rather than autonomy, see Evetts, 2002) based on competences is central and deserving of special status. Practitioners have special knowledge and skill and because of complexity it is often necessary to trust professionals' intentions. One consequence is that externally imposed rules (from states or organizations) governing the work are minimized and the exercise of discretionary decision-making and good judgment, often in highly complex situations and circumstances, and based on recognized competences, is maximized.

It can also be argued that professionalism represents a distinctive form of decentralized occupational control and regulation which constitutes an important component of civil society. Professions create and maintain distinct professional values or moral obligations (e.g. codes of ethics) which restrain excessive competition by encouraging cooperation as well as practitioner pride and satisfaction in work performance – a form of individualized self-regulation. Indeed it could be argued that professional commitment (professionalism) has frequently covered for the various failures of statutory and organizational forms of work regulation. Where statutory and organizational forms have been seen to impoverish the quality of work and increase the bureaucracy, professionalism can be defended as a uniquely desirable method of regulating, monitoring and providing complex services to the public (Freidson, 2001).

There is a second more pessimistic (or negative) interpretation of professionalism, however, which grew out of the more critical literature on professions which was prominent in Anglo-American analyses in the 1970s and 1980s. During this period professionalism came to be dismissed as a successful ideology (Johnson, 1972) and professionalization as a process of market closure and monopoly control of work (Larson, 1977) and occupational dominance (Larkin, 1983). Professionalization was intended to promote professional practitioners' own occupational self interests in terms of their salary, status and power as well as the monopoly protection of an occupational jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). This was seen to be a process largely initiated and controlled by the practitioners themselves and mainly in their own interests; although it could also be argued to be in the public interest (Saks, 1995).

A third development involved the analysis of professionalism as a discourse of occupational change and control – this time in work organizations where the discourse is increasingly applied and utilized by managers. This third interpretation is a combination of the previous two and includes both occupational value and ideological elements. Fournier (1999) considers the appeal to 'professionalism' as a disciplinary mechanism in new occupational contexts. She suggests how the use of the discourse of professionalism, in a large privatized service company of managerial labour, works to inculcate 'appropriate' work identities, conducts and practices. She considers this as 'a disciplinary logic which inscribes "autonomous" professional practice within a network of accountability and governs professional conduct at a distance' (1999: 280).

It is also the case that the use of the discourse of professionalism varies between different occupational groups. It is possible to use McClelland's categorization (1990: 107) to differentiate between professionalization 'from within' (that is, successful manipulation of the market by the group, such as medicine and law) and 'from above' (that is, domination of forces external to the group, such as engineering and social work). In this interpretation, where the appeal to professionalism is made and used by the occupational group itself, 'from within', then the returns to the group (in terms of salary, status and authority) can be substantial. In these cases, historically the group has been able to use the discourse in constructing its occupational identity, promoting its image with clients and customers, and bargaining with states to secure and maintain its (sometimes self) regulatory responsibilities. In these instances the occupation is using the discourse partly in its own occupational and practitioner interests, but sometimes also as a way of promoting and protecting the public interest (e.g. medicine).

In the case of most contemporary public service occupations and professionals now practicing in organizations, however, professionalism is being constructed and imposed 'from above' and for the most part this means by the employers and managers of the public service organizations in which these 'professionals' work. Here the discourse (of dedicated service and autonomous decision making) is part of the appeal (or the ideology) of professionalism. This idea of service and autonomy is what makes professionalism attractive to aspiring occupational groups. When the discourse is constructed 'from above', then often it is imposed and it is a false or selective discourse because autonomy and occupational control of the work are not included. Rather, the discourse is used to promote and facilitate occupational change (rationalization) and as a disciplinary mechanism of autonomous subjects exercising appropriate conduct.

This discourse of professionalism is grasped and welcomed by the occupational group since it is perceived to be a way of improving the occupations' status and rewards collectively and individually (e.g. aspiring caring occupations). It is a powerful ideology and the idea of becoming and being a 'professional worker' has appealed to many new and existing occupational groups; particularly during the second half of the twentieth century (e.g. social work and social care occupations throughout Europe and North America).

However, the realities of professionalism 'from above' are very different. The effects are not the occupational control of the work by the worker-practitioners, but rather control by the organizational managers and supervisors (e.g. health and social care work). Organizational objectives (which are sometimes political) define practitioner-client relations, set achievement targets and performance indicators. In these ways organizational objectives regulate and replace occupational control of the practitioner-client work interactions, thereby limiting the exercise of discretionary decision-making and preventing the service ethic that has been so important in professional work. This type of 'organizational professionalism' is clearly of relevance to the forms of public management currently being developed in the UK, and more widely, in educational institutions (schools and universities) and in NHS hospitals and primary care practices.

The appeal to professionalism can and has been interpreted as a powerful motivating force of control 'at a distance' (Miller and Rose, 1990; Burchell et al, 1991). It is also effective at the micro level where essentially it is a form of inner-directed control or self-control where close managerial supervision is not required – professional workers don't need supervisors. Professionalism will be achieved through increased occupational training and the certification of the workers-employees, a process Collins labels 'credentialism' (1979; 1981). In these cases the appeal to professionalism is a powerful mechanism for promoting occupational change and social control.

But the appeal to the discourse by managers in work organizations is a myth or an ideology of professionalism (Evetts, 2003). The myth includes aspects such as exclusive ownership of an area of expertise, increased status and salary, autonomy and discretion in work practices and the occupational control of the work. The reality of professionalism is actually very different. The appeal to professionalism by managers most often includes the substitution of organizational for professional values; bureaucratic, hierarchical and managerial controls rather than collegial relations; managerial and organizational objectives rather than client trust and autonomy based on competencies and expertise; budgetary restrictions and financial rationalizations; the standardization of work practices rather than discretion; and performance targets, accountability and sometimes increased political controls.

Professionalism in organizations: challenges

The consequences of and challenges to professionalism as an occupational value, and some of the unintended consequences, are being documented by researchers interested in different occupational groups in Europe and North America (e.g. Schepers, 2006; Wrede, 2008; Champy, 2008; Dent et al, 2008; Boussard, 2006; Bolton, 2005; Bourgeault and Benoit, 2009) and research links with sociologists of organizations are developing (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008). There are also some early indications of what might be a retreat from or a substantial redefinition of certain aspects of managerialism in respect of some service work (e.g. target-setting for hospitals and doctors in the UK).

It is also the case that powerful professionals have often been resistant to managerial intervention and organizational controls. Many organizations in the public services (e.g. hospitals and universities) are complex professional bureaucracies (Mintzberg, 1983) characterized by the involvement of a number of different professional groups. These groups have a history of relative autonomy over their working practices and often have high status which gives them both power and authority. In addition, the 'outputs' of these organizations (and the professionals in them) are not easily standardized and measurable. When the ability to define and standardize the nature of the work process is limited and the definition of the outputs of the work (and what constitutes success) is problematic; then such service work would seem to be unsuitable for both market and organizational controls. Yet controls such as performance review and target-setting continue to be developed supposedly in the interests of value, transparency and accountability.

It can be stated, however, that organizational techniques for controlling employees have affected the work of practitioners in professional organizations. The imposition of targets in teaching and medical work – and indeed for the police (see Boussard, 2006) – have had 'unintended' consequences on the prioritization and ordering of work activities; and a focus on target achievement to the detriment or neglect of other less-measurable tasks and responsibilities. Increased regulation and form filling takes time which might arguably be devoted to clients and the professional task. Performance indicators, linked to future salary increases, are defined by the organization rather than the individual practitioner or professional association. The standardization of work procedures, perhaps using software programmes, is an important check on the underachieving practitioner, but can be a disincentive to the creative, innovative, and inspirational professional.

It is important to remember also that the way professionals regard their service work and their working relationships is also being changed. An emphasis on internal as well as external markets, on enterprise and economic contracting, are changing professionalism. In tendering, accounting and audit management, professionalism requires practitioners to codify their competence for contracts and evaluations (du Gay and Salaman, 1992; Lane, 2000; Freidson, 2001). 'Professional work is defined as service products to be marketed, price-tagged and individually evaluated and remunerated; it is, in that sense, commodified' (Svensson and Evetts, 2003: 11). Professional service work organizations are converting into enterprises in terms of identity, hierarchy and rationality. Possible solutions to client problems and difficulties are defined by the organization (rather than the ethical codes of the professional institution) and limited by financial constraints.

The commodification of professional service work entails changes in professional work relations. When practitioners become organizational employees then the traditional relationship of employer/professional trust is changed to one necessitating supervision, assessment and audit. In turn, this affects the relations between fellow practitioners in the organization. When individual performance (e.g. of pupils and teachers, GPs and consultants) is linked to the success or failure of the organization, then this amplifies the impact of any failure. The danger in this is that professional cohesion and mutual cooperation are undermined and competition can threaten both team working and collegial support.

Relationships between professionals and clients are also being converted into customer relations through the establishment of quasi-markets, customer satisfaction surveys and evaluations, quality measures and payment by results. The production, publication and diffusion of quality and target measurements are critical indicators for changing welfare services into a market (Considine, 2001). The service itself is focused, modelled on equivalents provided by other producers: shaped by the interests of the consumers and standardized. The marketing of a service organization's service product connects professionals more to their work organization than to their professional institutions and associations. Clients are converted into customers and professional work competencies become primarily related to, defined and assessed by, the work organization.

Professionalism in organizations: opportunities

The challenges to professionalism as an occupational value seem numerous, but are there any opportunities associated with these changes which might improve both the conduct and the practice of professional service work and be of benefit for professions as service institutions, practitioners and clients? Might there be some advantages in the combination of professional and organizational logics for controlling work and workers? Certainly there are opportunities for practitioners which might prove to be beneficial from the combination of the logics of professionalism and the organization. One of these is the incorporation of Human Resource Management (HRM) from the organization into professional employment practices, processes, procedures and conduct of the work. Job contracts, job descriptions, formal interview and selection procedures, employment rights and benefits, appeals procedures, sickness benefit and cover, maternity, caring and other absences, are all examples which have benefited the majority of professionals working in organizations and have for the most part replaced less formalized social networking and informal recommendation procedures.

Standardization and formalization of selection, retention and career development procedures have also increased the transparency of what were often hidden, even 'mysterious' arrangements in respect of promotion, career progress and departmental relationships and links within the organization. Less formalized procedures benefited only a select few, privileged practitioners and were perceived as unfair and inequitable by the majority. Increased transparency can then result in more emphasis on career choices, dependent on personal circumstances, rather than the sponsorship of the privileged few. Career inequalities clearly continue (including in respect of gender and ethnicity), as well as some reliance on networking, informal advice and recommendations, but, in general, the incorporation of HRM procedures and regulations from the organization into professional employment practices has been an opportunity and of benefit for practitioners and their work.

Other opportunities would seem to be explained by the increased recognition that organizational management and managerialism is not only complex, but is also multi-layered and multi-dimensional. Management is being used to control, and sometimes limit, the work of practitioners in organizations but, in addition, management is being used by practitioners and by professional associations themselves as a strategy; both in the career development of particular practitioners and in order to improve the status and respect of a professional occupation and its standing.

As a micro-level strategy there is some evidence, particularly from health professionals such as nursing and midwifery (Carvahlo, 2008; Bourgeault et al, 2004), but also now from medical doctors (Kuhlmann, 2008) and teachers (Gewirtz et al, 2009), of individual practitioners acquiring qualifications in management (e.g. the MBA) with the clear intention of developing careers. In the case of health professionals such as nurses and midwives, this can also be interpreted as a strategy in the competition with medical dominance: but increasingly hospital management at middle and senior levels is perceived as a career opening for those with appropriate management credentials, experience and motivation.

As a mezo level strategy, it is also interesting to note the work of Langer (2008) in respect of social work in Germany. Masters level programmes for social workers in Germany are incorporating management training as a way of increasing the status, standing, reputation and respect for social work as a professional occupation in the field of social services work. Following the Bologna process and standardization of higher education levels in Europe, in Germany there is a large development of Masters programmes which qualify (in this case) social workers to apply for leadership positions in non-profit organizations and social services departments. These developments can be interpreted, therefore, as both a micro and mezo level strategy in respect of social work.

In addition, as Muzio and Kirkpatrick (2011) have argued, organizations can constitute sites for (and objects of) professional control and domination.

Ackroyd (1996: 600) describes this as a form of 'dual closure' where access to labour markets (through registration and credentialism) is combined with informal control of access to particular work tasks and divisions of labour within the employing organization. Brint (1994: 73) explained how, in the corporate sector, 'high value-added applications within organizations can be more successful in enhancing status than closure in the labour market'. Similarly, Faulconbridge and Muzio (2008) have shown how managers and administrators benefit from their ability to control, devise and construct the bureaucratic machinery as well as to resolve central problems of their organizations. In addition it is important to recognize that organizations can constitute sites for the re-development of professional forms and methods of control (rules, values, norms and standards), to supplement or replace the organizational forms (hierarchy, management, efficiency and target objectives).

Other processes also explained by Muzio and Kirkpatrick (2011) refer to jurisdictional disputes and negotiations – originally described by Abbott (1988) but this time played out within organizations rather than in the wider arena of labour markets and education systems. Within organizations, occupations seek to process and control tasks and task divisions to suit their own occupational interests. The medical profession – particularly doctors employed by the state – continue to use their cultural authority and legitimacy to maintain dominance (Larkin, 1983; Freidson, 2001; Coburn, 2006). Armstrong (1985) describes competition between professionals in management (accountancy, engineering and personnel) in colonizing key positions, roles and decision-making with large organizations. In these ways organizations constitute arenas for inter-professional competitions as well as professional conquests. Or, as Muzio and Kirkpatrick (2011: 393) explain, organizations can 'provide a means through which traditional objectives of collective mobility, status advancement, financial reward and service quality can be better served'.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that the maintenance and development of professionalism in all kinds of work in organizations, and its links with management, present opportunities and benefits for professions, professional work and workers as well as important challenges. Perhaps achieving a balance between challenges and opportunities for professionalism in organizations is one of the most important tasks for states and for researchers in the sociology of professional groups over the next few years.

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The future of careers-work professionalism: fears and hopes

Bill Law

Careers work professionalism is a personal commitment framed by an institutional policy. Without the institutional, the commitment is unsupported; without the commitment, the policy is futile. But no professionalism is given once-and-for-all. It is an attribution: meaning what different people say it means – at different times, in different settings, and from different perspectives. The meanings attributed to careers-work professionalism are all contestable. The article probes those dissonances, examining the issues they raise for our credibility, expertise, connectedness and independence. Their resolution has consequences for the public face of careers work, the partnerships we make, stakeholders we consult, research we undertake, developments we create, funding we negotiate and colleagues we attract. We have had too many temporary postponements of fear, we need a sustainable basis for hope.

Introduction

At the heart of any defensible careers-work professionalism is a belief in the knowledge that best serves student-and client-interests. It enables professionals to rise above arbitrary pressure. The past has given us a well-trodden path to that position – training, qualification, membership, expertise, standards. They are necessary steps; the question here is 'are they any longer sufficient?'

Widespread calls for transparency put all professionals under scrutiny; it would be rash to assume that careers workers are exempt. Factors include economic globalisation and the digital technology which makes it possible. Both have changed the way people see things: our clients and students have new ways for finding out what is going on, and working out what to do about it.

In that changing situation we should ask whether they find us sufficiently...

- **credible?** widely recognised as necessary, accessible, relevant and trusted
- **expert?** sufficiently equipped in the disciplines offering useful accounts of what people actually do
- **connected?** in touch with the partners and stakeholders who authentically speak for these realities
- **independent?** as free of arbitrary influence as our claims to impartiality assert.

These are not questions just for an élite, but for all working people. Julia Evetts (in this journal issue) lays the ground, by making a distinction between profession and professionalism. While membership of a profession is assigned to the few, professionalism can be achieved by the many. Professionalism is a quality of the way people do their work. It is not validated by our claim, but by other people's attribution.

How credible?

The news is not good on the attribution of value to careers work. True, much of the evidence is scattered (Hibbert, 2010), and anecdotal (Redmond, 2010). But reports of disappointment are plentiful, persistent, and consistent. That scepticism may not be ill-founded. People can sense when what we do seems no more than what they are able to do for themselves. They need not be wrong about that: formal learning is a refinement of how people convivially help each other

(Illich, 1971) – and that is part of our shared humanity.

The internet offers more potentiality for that kind of accessibility than Illich could have dreamed of. A common contemporary manifestation is how people use the net to become their own travel agents. That is not to say that, in planning some journeys, they do not need expert help. But it does leave travel agents – and us – with questions: 'how much of what we offer do people recognise that they need from us?' and 'how convincing is the claim that trained expertise is always more useful than shared experience?'

It is not unreasonable to decline what you already have. Highly-trained professionals may shudder, but the evidence – plentiful, persistent and consistent – is part of a well-documented social trend. Bauman's (2000) characterisation of liquid modernity repositions people in celebration of recognisable experience, in rejection of unnecessary complexity, and in the protection of a comfort zone. Claims to exclusive authority do not go down well in that culture.

We are not alone in this: bankers, doctors, lawyers, journalists, and politicos are re-thinking relationships with clients, customers and constituents. In institutional terms the change is in the direction of 'co-production'. It calls for a 'working-with' rather than a 'doing-to' culture. Services are more effective when providers and users work in reciprocal and equal relationships (Boyle et al, 2010). Much personal careers-work professionalism sets out to do that. But we are not consistently trusted for having that kind of relevance to people's lives. We need to understand why.

Learning on the street and on the net is independent – it is people learning about their own world, not ours. Such evidence as there is suggests that it is the most-in-need of help who are least likely to trust us for help (MORI, undated).

Our credibility is established, not when we have more to say to such people, but when more of them have more to say to more of us.

How expert?

That people find other-than-expert credibility does not necessarily undermine expertise; but it does mean looking for what best links our expertise to their experience. One of the problems for that search is that we have no wholly-owned body-of-knowledge – we borrow from academic disciplines. The result is usefully called 'career studies' (McCash, 2008) – which is a subject, not a discipline. Our expertise is a selection from the behavioural sciences – largely psychology, sociology and economics. But our different text-books contain different selections, and many of them are contested.

expressions of career and causes of career: Some texts work well for business interests – citations include the words 'employability' and 'skills'. Some reflect policy priorities – 'markets' and 'quality' frequently crop up. Some express more broadly-based interests – 'needs' and 'community' assemble into explanatory sentences. None of these expressions necessarily excludes any other; but the centre-of-gravity for each is different. And so they are contested (Bates, 1990; Harris, 1999): differently-constituted groups favour differently-argued responses, to differently-conceived situations. There is always more than one way of characterising work-life.

At first sight the 'DOTS' analysis (Law and Watts, 1977) looks like a complete listing of what needs to be covered. DOTS and its derivatives work well for matching self to opportunities. And the matching model has proven durable – recently reaching its 100th birthday. It is a readily-recognisable expression of a free-standing self, entering an economically-defined environment. It is content-driven when it uses differential psychology and labour economics to link a diagnosed self to career opportunities. But 'careers studies' now includes accounts of social influences on career management, speaking of work-life as experienced with, for, and in response to other people. Roberts and Willis initiated an examination of the explanatory power of background, attachment and allegiance (Roberts, 1977; Willis, 1977; Williamson, 2004; Law, 2008; Atkinson, 2009). Such reports fit well to narrative rather than analytic forms. They are strong on both the expression of career and the causes of career.

This more rounded and dynamic account of career calls for an understanding of how people learn for that complexity. Careers studies therefore draws on accounts of learning as constructed from childhood, in social situations, with learning repertoires, recurring in cycles, informally, in affective layers, with multi-dimensional complexity, mapped by a stage-by-stage progression (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978; Gardner, 1983; Kolb et al, 1991; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Goleman, 1996; Illeris, 2002; Law, 2010a).

Attention to activity rather than coverage offers the helper more of an enquiring than a presiding role. The learning space becomes a place for finding and questioning – expertise shifts from content to process. And process can be re-engaged in any situation, at any stage in life. The content-driven matching model is in contention with this thinking.

commercial interests: The business world is impressed by the matching model. It has careers workers and human-resource people reading from the same pages in economics and psychology texts. They speak of skills-for-employability (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). Commercial support for matching has pervasive effects. Our performance indicators – standards, outcomes and targets – draw heavily on DOTS-like analyses.

But even labour economics raises doubts about how far such performance correlates with commercial competitiveness (Brown et al, 2011). And competitiveness incurs massive social and environmental costs (Donkin, 2010). Both the validity and desirability of business-world claims are in question. We need more of the imagery of career-management as exploratory 'journey', than of competitive 'race' (Law and Stanbury, 2009).

Nonetheless, education and selection remain yoked. Test and exam results are used to validate the effectiveness of learning and shortlist applicants for selection. This locates careers work as beginning a procedure which is completed by recruiters.

Some career-management costs are personal. Candidates risk their own investment in the recruitment process. But these realities do not feature in recruiter-candidate contracts, nor does the recruiter pay for them in any other way. Economically-driven institutions 'externalise' all avoidable costs.

Ethnographies may look wider; but recruitment and selection needs to be strong on the expression of career, not its causes. Its natural interest is in finding good candidates: the matching model looks no further. The commercial world has had little difficulty in gaining policy support for such interests. Whether they rate support from career-work professionalism is an issue.

policy interests: Prevailing policy interest is dominated by a neo-liberal belief in the ability of markets to harness consumer choice for improving products and increasing wealth. At first sight this seems to coincide with commercial interests. However, neo-liberalism is a rejection of the idea that 'big government' should protect commerce. While commercial interests seek policy intervention, neo-liberalism keeps intervention to a minimum – supply-and-demand deals with everything (Harvey, 2010). The rest is externalised.

But this, too, is contestable: even commerce understands the limitations of markets. There is a long history of business altruism (Cadbury, 2010). But neo-liberalism offers no defence of it: in market thinking the sole test of value is economic competitiveness.

In the career market-place a person is sometimes the purchaser, and sometimes the vendor: both career and candidate are commodities: the process is called 'commodification' (Dale, 2010). Markets can work well. But their loudest voices speak of success – we hear less about people who take on more risk than they can manage, or cause more damage than we should live with. It would not be good marketing to tell us. And so all markets are lop-sided. Only one side may know what is going on. This lack of symmetry can be corrected with market regulation and help. But neo-liberal thinking takes the market to be normal – so correction is artificial, and intervention minimal. They produce minimal performance indicators to guide vendors and inform consumers. Their minimalism is derided as 'tick-box'. It has long been understood to distort what professionals do (Marquand, 2004). The liberal in neo-liberalism is libertarian; but avoidance of interference is not the same as ready-for-anything flexibility. The careers-work professions are not unanimous on where they stand on this.

wider-interests: Many of the influences identified by fully-narrated ethnographies correspond with what recruitment and marketing externalise. That does not mean that career studies excludes economic factors: some people are more interested in how well work pays than in how closely it matches their profile. Career is for consuming as well as producing. And career studies has long been able to account for such links between life-roles (Super, 1981).

But expressions of career are linking to economy in new ways. People are as likely to speak of how they spend their income, as how they earn it. Klein (2007) is among the many who show how commercial-logo and consumer-branding feature in the iconography of self. Working-life is increasingly understood to impact family and neighbourhood, the developing world and the biosphere (Lexmond and Bradley, 2010). Work has a carbon-footprint. And we can now see how these trends develop differently in different social-and-cultural enclaves (Dorling, 2010). We can dig much deeper with this – new research usefully shows how wealth-and-culture interact with neurology (McGilchrist, 2009).

Career studies reaches far beyond selection and recruitment. Its underlying question is 'who gets to do what in society?' It probes access to opportunity in deeper and wider terms: 'what expands or contracts people's aspirations?' and 'what drives them on or shuts them down?' The Milburn Report (Cabinet Office, 2009) shows how aspiration is thwarted. But it neglects Willis and his successors showing how aspiration is squeezed out of narratives early in life. Career studies takes us to where we can see how career is differently managed in different terms, by different people, with different experiences, in different settings.

Ideas narrowly rooted in employable competitiveness are a problem for this thinking – and a danger to us. Our thinking can become habitual – beliefs and values can seem unassailable givens (Tavris and Aronson, 2008). And, when that happens, people stop listening to themselves expressing the taken-for-granted. No true professionalism is trapped into that kind of intellectual ghetto – where all career professionals are trained in the same disciplines, recycle the same citations, visit the same websites, belong to the same associations. We know better, and knowing is our hold on survival. Evolution in the direction of variety and complexity gives an organism a wider repertoire of responses. That is more useful and more engaging. And any worthwhile careers-work professionalism needs professions worth pursuing.

How connected?

Expertise is changing. But 'who do we need to share it with?…and listen to?' are questions for connectedness. We can answer both on a narrower or wider scale. Our conventional partnerships are narrow: they link guidance to curriculum in a bi-lateral agreement. A consequence is that some partners are consigned to ancillary or marginal roles.

On ancillary roles: guidance and curriculum each brings a distinctive contribution to careers work. Both are professions – with their own research and development. But bi-lateral partnerships too easily favour one area of expertise over the other. No such agreement will attract able people, in either guidance or curriculum. People, well rooted in their own profession, decline the ancillary role.

On marginalisation: bi-laterality is not lateral enough. More open and more inclusive agreements allow a range of partners to form widely inter-dependent teams. The range of potential participants is expanding: in any locality people can turn for help to social enterprises, freelance coaches and informal mentors. They can also find narrative-based and interactive social-networking websites – where students become partners with professionals (Law, 2010b). And easement of curriculum controls allows more teachers to adapt their schemes to learning-for-life.

Multi-laterality includes stakeholders as well as partners. While partners work on help, stakeholders work on how help takes account of their needs. Some interests – like families' – are personal-and-particular; others – like business people's – are professional-and-general. There are overlaps: families may be business people, some mentors are also teachers. But the most multifariously involved are students and clients. They are both partners and stakeholders. Indeed, a major role for careers work is to enable them to claim their stake in society.

Bi-lateral agreements do not connect with this multi-lateral reality. But individual professionals work with it – having personal networks as diverse as any.

And so, institutionally, we need to re-map the territories on which our agreements are negotiated. We seek people in command of useful knowledge, able to fire-up commitment, alive to the importance of the work, trusted to take on its challenge. Not all professionals qualify. Nor will enlisting people who happen to be available find them. They need institutionalised programme management, with a distinctive range of management abilities:

- **educational:** actively engaging able partners, in well-designed programmes and evaluation
- **leadership:** credibly positioning the work, so that actual and potential partners and stakeholders are attracted
- **organising:** efficiently coordinating material, logistics, budgeting and reporting.

This is not a job for one-or-two people. Indeed, few organisations are in a position to set this up just for careers work. It is best integrated in programmes of personal-and-social well-being. Multi-lateral agreements integrate learning for integrated lives – finding integers connecting one source to another, expertise to experience, and learning to life. Such multi-laterality is supported by network modelling, showing how diversified connectedness emancipates action by expanding repertoires (Dennett, 2003).

Our best hope of ensuring that we work with open and impressive people is to ensure that our professionalism is open and impressive. The future of careers work is multi-lateral.

How independent?

All of the interests in careers work have an ethical dimension. There is an underlying 'oughtness' in the celebration of competitive success and market efficiency. Career studies is also ethically-charged, suggesting values for work-life's impact on experience – from the personal to the planetary. All assign meaning and purpose to what careers workers do – by asking not just 'how can we change things?' but 'why should we try?' – calling for ethical as well as a theoretical justifications. As Helen Colley (2011) shows, our ethics needs a closer look.

Acting ethically is acting on principle. Its basis-for-action is what enlightenment figures uphold as human rights (Todorov, 2009). Rights are not implemented on behalf of sectional interests or personal preference, they resist arbitrary pressure, and – sooner or later – must mean taking a stand. That entails facing-up to inconvenient truths and being self-critical. Such independence means being aware of influences that we have been dependent on, and wondering what to do about it. This needs bigger ideas than can come from personal preferences and sectional interests.

The ideas must be big enough, but also address what working people recognise in their lives. The Milburn report is about high-end aspiration, ambition, and achievement. But this occupies a narrow segment in Maslow's (1970) oft-cited hierarchy. There is more to say about the involvement, responsiveness and commitment that people bring to their work. That greater motivational gamut includes the humanity of both the aspirationally competitive and the socially committed: not all impressive careers are pursued by careerists. Such thinking re-embeds work-life in society-as-a-whole, legitimising what all parts of society can recognise as valuable. Its grasp is life-wide – linking work-life to all life. Its reach is life-long – once found, ceaselessly relevant. That work-life is now characterised as occupational citizenship (Standing, 2009). Citizenship is the more inclusive concept – it locates work as one of many ways in which people lay claim to their membership of society.

Career studies is big enough to frame such thinking. But such thinking needs a strong institutional base, with policies and arrangements making room for independent integrity. Without institutional professionalism individuals are too-little supported and too-much exposed. Without personal professionalism, institutional policies are futile. But we find that our employer organisations cannot be relied on to support this kind of independence. Any organisation – whether in curriculum or guidance – has its ethos. And evidence (Foskett et al, 2004) shows that competitive institutions deal in terms which support survival. Prioritising the maintenance of funding streams side-lines professional priorities. A secure ethical professionalism therefore needs a location outside sectional interests, where thinking is authoritatively examined, and defensible principles are prioritised. As Julia Evetts shows, professionalism equips a person to say 'no' to an employer. An individual professional needs an institutional authority in order to take that stand. It calls for a brave, informed and multi-lateral alliance that can extend a collective professional memory into an on-going basis for action, and to which all partners and stakeholders can appeal.

There are policy proposals along these lines. Talk of the 'big society' signals that there are some areas of life where government cannot – or will not – go. This is not a new idea; a more useful accounts calls it 'civil society' (Edwards, 2004). It refers to action supported neither by government nor by commerce, but by a fabric of cultural-, faith-, social-, and work-related affiliations. And it needs more than the personal voluntarism driving the 'big society', it is a group-based institution working on how we live together (Simon, 1982).

Careers-work professionalism is a natural part of that social movement: big-thinking enough to negotiate what is contested, self-critical enough to work with changing conditions, independent enough to be credible, organised enough to support its people. The evidence (Law, 2005) is that a deep-enough training enables professionals to develop working orientations with an independence of the systems in which they are employed. Recently that work has been developed into an ethical framing of careers-work priorities (Law, 2011a).

Contemporary change is shaking the ground on which our credibility, expertise, connectedness and independence rests. It is a crisis, and needs a careful examination of what is going on. Trying to work our way back into the dependencies that have repeatedly failed us is not careful enough. We need reform for personal professionalism, but – most of all – for positioning an institutional framework which supports the breadth and depth of what we know to be our capabilities. It will change the public face of our professions, the partnerships we make, the stakeholders we consult, the research we undertake, the methods and materials we develop. It will also re-orient us to the resourcing we negotiate. But, most importantly, it will influence the people we attract and retain as members of our professions. We do not need another postponement of fear, we need a sustainable hope.

Note: This is an abridged version of Law, 2011b.

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Reframing and re-telling: the changing identity of the careers guidance profession

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The aim of the article is to critically reflect on what may now constitute the occupational and professional identity of career guidance practitioners after a decade of rapid change, and in the face of further significant policy developments. It seeks to build on recent research, e.g. Colley et al (2010), in order to consider the effects of policy shifts, and their attendant managerialism, on the identity of careers practitioners in a wide variety of organisational settings. The article proposes that Bolman and Deal's Four Frames model (2003), with its holistic and constructivist basis, can be used to illuminate and critically examine the structural, political, motivational and symbolic aspects of change, including identity reformation. It concludes by suggesting that the various professional bodies that represent career guidance have an opportunity to re-appraise and redefine professional value and identity.

Introduction

The career guidance profession has been subject to rapid and substantial policy changes since the mid-90s. This article aims to build on recent research, e.g. Colley et al (2010) to consider the effects of such upheavals on the wider profession in England in order to examine what may now constitute the identity of the profession and its practitioners. It proposes that the use of metaphors and models that often illuminate organisational change may also be used to provide a holistic picture of the current state of the profession. The Bolman and Deal Four Frames Model (2003) has been used to examine organisational transitions in the public as well as well as private sectors, e.g. Lueddekke (1999); and will be applied here to consider the structural, political, human resource and symbolic aspects of change. Part of the model's strength is its use of metaphors in ways that are consistent with a perennial impulse in human story telling: to explore and communicate the meaning of common experiences through the use of shared motifs, images, and archetypes (Booker, 2004). The article will also explore the ways in which ethical codes may provide the means by which the careers profession reasserts its claim to identity and expertise; and tackle the issue of 'indeterminancy' that can undermine the status of those in the 'caring' professions (MacDonald, 1995).

Pace of change

Firstly, I need to consider the sheer velocity of change in the policy environment as it has affected the career guidance profession. It is arguable that the profession has always needed (or been expected to have) a Janus-like face to look either in the direction of nation's economic needs by helping 'square pegs fit square holes'; or towards the welfare, even moral, needs of apparently large numbers of disaffected members of society (Peck, 2004). As the profession's face has turned from one focus to the other, some of the key turning points for the statutory sector have included the shift towards privatised careers companies in the early to mid-90s; and the 'Bridging the Gap' report by the Social Exclusion Unit in 1999, the consequences of which led to the formation of the Connexions Service in 2001. Further shifts, prompted by policies such as Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003) and Youth Matters (DfES, 2005), returned the statutory duty for the provision of careers services to local authorities, leading to an often bewildering variety of service models in England (Watts and McGowan, 2007). This has stood in contrast to the 'one nation' approaches seen in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. At the same time, services in FE and HE have also been subject to change. The impact of the Leitch Review (2006) and the Skills Agenda, aligned services with institutions' concerns with recruitment, retention and employability. With the advent of the Browne Report (2010), the latter is now a major corporate concern, particularly for HE. Services for adults in England have also been reconfigured, with the fusing of Learn Direct and Next Step into the Adult Guidance Service in 2010. And perhaps most far-reaching of all, the profession is still trying to accommodate the unwinding of the proposal to establish a new all-age service for England by April 2012 (DBIS, 2010), with arrangements to link the provision for schools and adults still being formulated.

'Framing' the changes: structural, political, motivational and symbolic

As these changes unfold, careers practitioners in whichever context find themselves in a landscape that is rather shaky, even molten in quality. To critically examine the implications of these changes for the profession and its identity, the article will consider each of Bolman and Deal's Four Frames (2003) in turn. Firstly, I will consider the Structural Frame, where organisations are viewed as 'machines', and resources are aligned and deployed to achieve corporate objectives. In this way, organisations, at their most straightforward, are entities by which inputs are turned into outputs that are required by policy makers, shareholders or stakeholders (Mullins, 2010). For career guidance providers, this has meant 'producing' low rates of unemployment and/or the active engagement of citizens in society. Perhaps the biggest structural realignment in statutory guidance was the advent of the Connexions Service, where careers advisers became Personal Advisers with new, holistically-based roles that were concerned with the health and welfare of young people, and not just their career choices. From this, involved, bureaucratic processes and structures were engineered to monitor services' and practitioners' progress against their NEET targets. This new performativity (Dent and Whithead, 2002) has also been felt acutely in Next Step Adult Guidance Services, where the completion of action plans produces funding in line with targets identified in tightly-defined contracts. And as the face of the profession is turned back to career guidance, some services, e.g. those run by Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnerships Ltd. (CSWP Ltd.) have already implemented interim realignments, where careers advisers (no longer Personal Advisers) are now working on both adult guidance contracts and in schools.

Whilst realignments in FE and HE have not been as dramatic, more recent developments suggest more fundamental reconfigurations, particularly in HE. The importance of employability to universities' corporate strategy, and their market offer to prospective *customers*, has meant that some universities are reorganising careers services to produce the required employability output – ie, graduates into graduate level jobs. Roles such as 'Student Employability Coaches' have begun to mushroom as the added value the careers services bring to corporate strategy has come under greater scrutiny. When considering the historical basis of HE careers services (Watts, 1996), it could be argued that some services are being returned in part to the appointments-style model that predominated in HEIs up until the mid-1990s, where the 'expert power' (Reed, 1996) of the service rested on its ability to match final year students to graduate recruiters via the Milkround.

To develop the picture offered by looking through the Structural Frame, we may now consider the profession's change as viewed through the Political Frame. This is concerned with organisations as political entities, where their various agents or departments compete for resources, status and power. This is instructive, since in the early to mid-1990s, career guidance was subject to marketisation and 'New Right' thinking that was central to public policy at that time (Gothard et al, 2001). Career guidance providers and practitioners in England needed to engage with this power play in order to offer services and maintain their profile and viability as organisations. Some companies embraced this entrepreneurialism, and established wider regional or even national infrastructures to bid for contracts and to operate as part of local and regional networks and partnerships concerned with education, training and employment. Careers companies thus became hybridised organisations (Mouwen, 2000) with duties to provide public services and the relative freedom to diversify their income sources. With the advent of Children's Trusts, this identity and power base was significantly changed. Some of the larger careers service providers, e.g. Birmingham and Solihull Connexions, were broken up and redistributed back into local authorities according to city or district boundaries. The net effect was a significant reduction in their political status, where many services became part of a large division within a local authority, where they had to compete for reduced resources or make cuts by stripping out staffing layers that were no longer needed.

Most recent governmental announcements (DBIS, 2010) concerning funding and arrangements for the new national careers service show the dramatic, even catastrophic reduction in the power of career guidance providers. The removal of legislative levers, e.g. the statutory duty of schools to provide career guidance and education, and of ring-fenced budget streams, will have very serious consequences for providers which had once embraced the opportunities afforded by marketisation. And the consequences for statutory provision as a profession may be as serious, since if schools are being expected to fund services from their existing budgets, then careers information, advice and guidance may default once again to teachers or other individuals on the premise of 'indeterminancy' (MacDonald, 1995) – that providing advice is an everyday skill that most sensible and reasonably informed people can offer. There is a very bitter irony here, too. The 'symbolic violence' visited on the profession by Connexions (Artaraz, 2006) has actually been continued with the removal of this now-discredited service. Instead of re-instating the primacy of career guidance with adequate funding streams, recent policy developments seem to have reduced the political power of 'statutory' career guidance still further.

The operation of Next Step services is a stark example of the ways in which IAG services operate within challenging structural and political contexts. Although DBIS has identified funding streams, contracts with guidance providers are such that where targets are missed, then penalties will reduce resources – especially money – for organisations where cash flow has now become more critical. The need to secure action plans, and reduce the cost base, has meant that Next Step advisers increasingly operate from libraries, low or peppercorn rent retail units, or job centres.

The political challenges for services and practitioners in FE and HE may not be as dramatic, but are indicative of the kind of power play still required for IAG services operating within evolving structures. For services in FE and HE that have been embedded in wider Student Services departments, the political implications can be mixed. Career guidance practitioners may feel that their status and profile is affected by working alongside services that deal with students with 'problems', and by the fact that access to resources, and influential forums, is mitigated by the need to go through further management layers. However, the political advantage here may be the 'management by exception' (Mullins, 2010) rule, where the service and its practitioners may be given relative autonomy as long as they do not attract adverse publicity, e.g. complaints. As mentioned earlier, this relative buffer zone is now being increasingly disrupted by HEIs in particular where, in some cases, employability resources are being increased in return for direct impact on graduate employment rates.

A further dimension of the political challenge for services in FE and HE is one of physical location. One model is where careers services are part of a high profile, newly-built or refurbished campus hub. Here, practitioners' organisational role and identity is most certainly aligned with student support and the quality of student experience. A different model, which is also being increasingly adopted by universities, is to locate careers advisers in Faculties as an organisational signifier of the ways in which careers services are aligned with the particular concerns of a Faculty. In this way, the Faculty may be less concerned with the adviser operating in a central service which may afford a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998), and keener to see that the practitioner is helping students get jobs. These models again emphasise the dilemma between an orientation towards managerialist, organisationally-contingent objectives, or an approach which is client-centred and impartial (Banks, 2004).

The Human Resource Frame provides a lens through which the effects of the structural and political issues discussed above on morale, motivation and esteem can be viewed. Colley et al (2010) have illustrated in some detail the perceived negative effects of the introduction of the Connexions' model on professional identity and esteem. These include role confusion; greater scrutiny; a sense that practitioners feel deskilled and devalued; and a lack of resources to perform these new roles. A particularly strong theme, too, was the ways in which practitioners also experienced ethical tensions and dilemmas between 'hitting targets' and providing client-centred services. Artaraz (2006) identified three types of adviser behaviour in response to these organisational demands: open resistance; subterfuge; or those who embraced the change. These resistance strategies to the ways in which professional identity was being defined and managed (Alvesson and Wilmott, cited in Hatch and Schultz, 2004) now seem particularly contingent on organisational settings in the light of recent and extensive cuts to former Connexions Services. It is more difficult to resist redundancies (and the sense of 'the lights being turned off' in some English regions) using similar subterfuge.

For adult guidance, such effects have not yet been researched as extensively as for those working in statutory services. However, the effect of the need to reach weekly action plan targets, constant performance reviews, and even capability processes on practitioners is not difficult to imagine. The other aspect is the experience of precarious practice, e.g. for those working on short-term contracts with no guarantees of continuing employment. The need for business managers to model their cash flow forecasts, drive staff towards targets and to either renew employment contracts or issue redundancy notices, is perhaps most indicative of the full force of marketisation in IAG services. Here, it seems that practitioner identity (such as it is) is very much tied to the organisation and the need to achieve targets.

Even in the light of the increased importance of employability to FEIs and HEIs, it is tempting to view careers practitioners there as having been sheltered from the kinds of effects noted above. However, there will be changes in morale, motivation and identity with the advent of greater scrutiny, accountability and new employability roles. Once again, the face of career guidance in FE and HE is being turned firmly towards corporate pre-occupation with 'getting jobs for graduates'. In this way, the purpose and identity of careers service and its practitioners is being explicitly defined by the organisation. This is in contrast to the previous approach of 'management by exception', which afforded careers practitioners greater scope to work beyond organisational boundaries, e.g. for professional bodies and in local and national networks.

Next steps for career guidance?

It is tempting, and perhaps inevitable, to take a pessimistic view of career guidance, and its current importance, power, esteem and identity. This is despite re-assurances offered by ministers when announcing policy and new services; and indeed the adoption of the recommendations from the Dame Ruth Silver review of the profession (DBIS 2010; DofE, 2010). Viewing these changes through the final frame, the Symbolic frame, which focuses on the symbols, beliefs and cultures of organisations, may offer some conclusions as to the state of the profession's identity. One rather bleak conclusion is that career practitioners' identities have become structurally, politically and organisationally contingent. The performativity discussed earlier has produced, and may continue to produce, a number of organisationally-situated and reified symbols. For example, Connexions area managers within the same locality may have once competed to achieve the lowest NEET rate. In the same way, Next Step advisers are associated with the number of action plans they produce in a week. Advisers in FE or HE may also become the sum total of their targets, particularly as they may be compared to competitor institutions. The experience of ethical drifts, problems and dilemmas as noted by Mulvey (2002), where professional and organisational values clash, is likely to become the norm for practitioners. The shield of impartiality (or more accurately, services that are untainted by organisational convenience) may become too heavy to carry in an environment where, for example, new Academies are increasingly run as businesses, with apparently greater freedoms to deploy resources. Kantian notions of 'Respect for Persons' (cited in La Follette, 2007) that underpin client-centredness and impartiality may seem much less tenable than utilitarian pragmatism, or to express this in another way, a triumph for neo-liberalism (Singh and Cowden, 2009).

Given the current uncertainty concerning the precise arrangements for the new all-age service in England, and the scale of redundancies predicted for the statutory sector, it is difficult to identify more positive signifiers for the profession and its identity. However, if we maintain our view through the Symbolic Frame, the very debate about professionalism, and professional identity, may offer some interesting clues as to where new service arrangements may take us. It is arguable that the symbols that signify the status of career guidance as a profession are of a different magnitude when compared to medicine or law, e.g. 'dining at Inns of Court', and the power of regulation and exclusivity wielded by the Law Society and the BMA. Moreover, there is a much stronger sense that doctors and lawyers may work in organisations but their final accountability and orientation, despite the growth of managerialism in the NHS (Alcock et al, 2008), is to their profession. By contrast, and as was evident particularly in the statutory sector (and increasingly in FE and HE), careers services became far more managerial from the mid-90s onwards, embracing more business-like structures and entrepreneurialism. Any 'opposition' to this was difficult for a number of reasons. 'The profession' has been represented by at least four professional bodies. Practitioners at the statutory level have undergone differing training routes and occupational socialisation, e.g. those with the DipCG, as compared to these who had been recruited as Personal Advisers and who had undertaken work-based qualifications. Further, services in HE have never had a common entry route, and the amount of advisers holding a DipCG, QCG or similar has been a phenomenon of the last decade. These aspects could therefore symbolise a profession that is rather fragmented and lacking political power.

From this, it could be argued that one future direction for careers practitioners is to confirm their status as skilled, semi-professional workers who can adapt to a wide variety of organisational needs. The extent to which this will play out is difficult to tell, but one option is for practitioners to work as consultants for schools to help them achieve their progression and achievement targets. In this scenario, impartiality may be less important than the practitioner being aligned explicity with the *organisation*. Perhaps a signifier of this option is the level of interest in ICG workshops concerned with 'transitioning to the private sector'. In FE and HE, this may be expressed as practitioners acting as internal consultants and experts to academic departments: the expertise resting on their labour market knowledge which may yield substantial employer interest. It seems unlikely that the state will provide the level of funding which our professional bodies have called for; and so this may be a model which practitioners need to consider.

Another possibility, and one which may appear to contradict the above, is that the careers profession seeks to define itself as such: that is, more regulated and exclusive. Ministerial communications (DBIS 2010) and the Silver Review (DofE, 2010) seem to suggest that career guidance needs to be reprofessionalised and consider a register of practitioners. This in part seems to symbolise the need to refocus on career guidance as a reaction to apparent role confusions associated with the Connexions service. The identification of a minimum level 6 qualification level is also encouraging (although the extent to which DBIS will insist on this when issuing tenders for service contracts has yet to be clarified). Should the latter be the case, then large numbers of existing Next Step (and former Connexions Services staff) who hold NVQ 3 or 4 qualifications will need to step up to the new level; the mapping exercise for which has been completed by the OCR in conjunction with the ICG. What is interesting is that employer dissatisfaction with the previous work-based frameworks was partly due to lack of *guidance* skills shown by advisers, and the relative inability to probe beyond the immediate presenting issues.

This may allow the profession, and its representative bodies, to re-promote career guidance, and the training, experience and skills that underpin it. Put more simply, career guidance is not just something 'anyone can do'. Savickas (2003) issued a similar call by suggesting that the development of the career profession shouldn't simply be dictated by external forces. The ways in which other professional bodies symbolise this claim is by rigorous entry requirements; registers of professionals; and penalties for poor practice, e.g. 'being struck off.' The aim here is that a school, college or university should feel that its reputation is enhanced by having kite-marked, professionally accredited careers guidance services as part of its mission and strategy.

Conclusion

This article began by proposing that the use of models and metaphors may help to frame the rapid changes that career guidance has experienced over the last decade in particular. The Bolman and Deal Four Frames model (2003) has been used to consider the structural, political, human resource and symbolic aspects of the changes that the profession, and its practitioners, have experienced, particularly in relation to notions of identity. The article has also proposed that the perceived value and identity of the profession and its practitioners has suffered from being structurally, politically and organisationally defined and conditional. A potent symbol of this has been the ways in which the Connexions service was imposed and operationalised (and now apparently in the process of being dismantled.) Finally, the article has suggested that the profession may remain 'semi-professional', and embrace its contingent value to organisations; or seek to become *more* professional by acquiring the symbols of other professional bodies that identify, promote and reify the particular skills and value of practitioners' work.

The introduction also mentioned that metaphors enable human kind to tell stories. A final thought in this article is to ask: what narrative or story are 'we' telling about career guidance currently? What symbols and images do we want those looking through the Symbolic Frame to see? Do we want to present the view of a rather 'Balkanised' profession, with four separate associations? Or that despite cuts to services, our professional value as symbolised by *guidance* still burns with passion and importance to society's prosperity and well-being?

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Articles

The emerging policy model for career guidance in England: some lessons from international examples

A. G. Watts

The existing international evidence is reviewed in relation to four aspects of the emerging policy model for career guidance in England: an all-age service; revitalising the professionalism of career guidance; the partnership model between schools and an external service; and introducing school commissioning. It is concluded that the first three are supported by the international evidence; but that on the fourth, the evidence is more negative. Evidence is also reviewed in relation to six high-performing countries in terms of school performance. It is concluded that there is no common pattern that characterises the career guidance provision in these countries, but that any devolution of responsibility to schools needs to be accompanied by strong policy levers. These might include measures to assure professional standards, support for school planning and self-evaluation, and in-service training for school heads.

Introduction

The aims of this article are two-fold:

- To review evidence related to the model of career guidance which the current Government is proposing to implement in England
- To identify relevant evidence on career guidance provision from high-performing countries in terms of school performance, as identified in the evidence paper (Department for Education, 2010a) that accompanied the White Paper on *The Importance of Teaching* (Department for Education, 2010b).

These two issues will be covered in turn, and followed by a brief conclusions section.

The article is based on a paper prepared for the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. It draws heavily on the linked policy reviews carried out within the last decade by OECD, the World Bank, the European Commission and its agencies, and other organisations, which have covered a total of 55 countries (for a methodological overview, see Watts, 2008). It also draws on other published papers and up-to-date information from expert informants.

Evidence related to the proposed model

The core features of the model of career guidance which the Government has been proposing (for a detailed analysis, see Watts, 2011) are:

- An all-age careers service
- Revitalising the professionalism of career guidance, based on responding positively to the recommendations of the Careers Profession Task Force (2010)
- For school pupils, placing the partnership model – whereby schools work together with external independent advisers – at the heart of the new arrangements
- Introducing school commissioning: making schools responsible for securing career guidance for their pupils from the all-age careers service or another quality-assured external provider.

The notion of an all-age careers service is supported by the existing international evidence. The

OECD Career Guidance Policy Review pointed out that all-age services have a number of organisational and resource-used advantages. By allowing a diverse range of services to be provided throughout the lifespan within one organisational framework, they are potentially more cost-effective, avoiding unnecessary duplication of resources (OECD, 2004: 144). More recent reviews, benchmarked against the OECD review, of the three major existing examples of all-age services – in New Zealand, Scotland and Wales – have all been very positive (Watts, 2005; 2007; 2009). Together, they indicate that an all-age service has an opportunity to think more broadly and more systematically about the nature and applicability of its professionalism, the allocation of its resources across the whole population, and the links between career guidance and public policy, than is the case with age-segmented services, especially those that are embedded into particular service sectors (e.g. schools). In effect, such a service provides a strong professional spine for a lifelong career guidance system. So long as it recognises that it cannot provide all the career guidance that is needed, and must pay significant attention to supporting embedded career support in educational institutions, in workplaces and in the community, the evidence indicates that it provides a particularly robust base for such a system (Watts, 2010a).

The move towards stronger **professionalism**, too, is supported by the international evidence. The OECD review recommended that 'the priority for policy-makers in most OECD countries should be to create separate, and appropriate, occupational and organisational structures to deliver career guidance'. It pointed out that:

> When it cannot readily be identified as a service that is available in its own right, people will continue to have difficulty in accessing it. And if it is not a separate occupational category, the problems of creating separate and appropriate training arrangements for it will persist. This has implications for the nature and quality of the career guidance services that policy-makers are able to deliver to citizens (OECD, 2004: 102).

More recent international studies have indicated that a number of European countries are now making significant moves towards more specialised training (Cedefop, 2009: 24), and that 'the career guidance sector in many countries is changing as career guidance becomes a separate practice and a distinct occupation, pushing the sector towards professionalisation' (Reid, 2007: 7).

The third feature of the current policy, the **partnership model,** is again supported by the international evidence. The OECD review indicated the limitations of an exclusively school/college-based model of career guidance delivery, in three respects:

- Its weak links with the labour market, and its tendency to view educational choices as ends in themselves without attention to their longer-term career implications
- Its lack of impartiality, and the tendency for schools to promote their own provision rather than college- or work-based routes
- Its lack of consistency: the policy levers on schools and colleges to deliver services in this area tended to be weak, and services to be patchy both in extent and in quality.

Accordingly, the OECD review strongly favoured a delivery model based on a partnership between schools and colleges on the one hand, and on the other an external service that is closer to the labour market and is able to provide impartial guidance at a consistent standard (OECD, 2004).

On the fourth feature, **school commissioning**, the evidence is more negative. As noted in an earlier article in this journal (Watts, 2010b), two countries have in recent years implemented reforms in which this was a feature: New Zealand and the Netherlands.

In New Zealand, prior to the mid-1990s, the precursors of what is now Career Services commonly visited schools to interview most if not all school-leavers. In 1996, this was replaced by a structure in which secondary schools received extra funding to enable them to purchase career services from an external provider if they wished to do so. These funds were part of their bulk funds and were not tagged. Schools could use them to purchase external services, to cover internal guidance costs, or for other purposes altogether. A more recent review concluded that most schools used the monies to cover internal career-related costs or for other unrelated purposes: unpublished Education Review Office data indicated that around two-thirds of secondary schools allocated all of the relevant funding to career education and guidance; of the remainder, half allocated 50-85% to it; the other half allocated 25-50% to it (Watts, 2007). Schools which chose to buy in interviews with all leavers or all students in a particular year were now very much the exception rather than the rule (though some carried out such interview programmes by using their own staff). A report by the Education Review Office (2006) concluded that only 12% of secondary schools provided high-quality career education and guidance to their students. A further 85% were effective in some areas and needed to improve in others.

In the Netherlands, the funding previously allocated to the Advice Offices for Education and Occupation (AOBs in Dutch) was progressively reallocated to schools between 1995 and 2000, as part of a broader policy of marketisation. As a result of this policy, some schools continued to buy services from the AOBs; some switched to other private-sector organisations; some aimed to provide all services internally. The result was that the number of AOBs was reduced from 16 to 4, with considerable loss of expertise, and no evidence of any improvement in services within schools (Meijers, 2001; also OECD, 2002a).

An OECD report on the Netherlands (OECD, 2002a) pointed out that the effect of the reforms had been 'to place purchasing power in relation to guidance services in the hands not of the demand side but of the supply side: not of individuals but of institutions with their own agendas and priorities'. The issue was 'whether such agendas and priorities are necessarily and invariably congruent with the interests of individuals and with the wider public good'. There were two problems in particular with devolving decisions on career information and guidance provision to institutions:

The first is that it leaves such provision at the mercy of management priorities. Some managers may see guidance as being very important for the institution and its students; some may not. The latter is particularly likely to be the case where, as in the Netherlands, external pressures on institutional priorities focus heavily on output measures based on examination performance, rather than on process measures or longer-term outcome measures. In this situation, the system tends to be viewed in management terms as a closed box, and guidance linked to individual progression outside this box as being of peripheral importance.

The second potential problem is closely related: it is the issue of impartiality. The funding of educational institutions is linked to enrolments and/or course completions, and this may incline them to restrict the guidance they offer. Thus an employers' representative suggested to us that educational institutions were more interested in filling their courses than with giving good advice to students on the realities of labour-market demand. Again, an external agency reported that a couple of schools had cancelled their contracts because it had advised some students that it might be in their best interests to leave the school and move elsewhere (OECD, 2002a: 11).

Both of these two points seem likely to apply in England. There is strong evidence that within schools which extend beyond the age of 16, guidance tends to favour their own provision post-16 at the expense of other options (see e.g. Foskett, Dyke and Maringe, 2004). The proposal in the Education Bill 2011 (clause 27) to introduce a new statutory duty for schools to 'secure that all registered pupils at the school are provided with independent careers guidance' between the ages of 14 and 16 – with 'independent' being defined as being provided by persons other than those employed at the school – appears to protect against this by effectively preventing schools from providing professional career guidance internally. Subsequent 'clarifications', however, suggest that this may not be the case (Watts, 2011). Even if it were, the Dutch evidence suggests that strong quality assurance would be needed if the possibility of informal pressures on the impartiality of external agencies was to be avoided. More broadly, the international evidence suggests that strong policy levers will be needed if schools in general are to 'invest' significantly in independent career guidance for their pupils.

These points are all the more important in the light of recent developments which suggest that the DfE contribution to the allegedly all-age National

Careers Service is likely to be confined wholly to web-based and telephone-based services, without any discernible transfer of career guidance funding to schools (Watts, 2011). If this proves to be the case, the reality will be that the existing notional funding for face-to-face career guidance services for young people under Connexions has not just been pruned in line with general cuts in public expenditure, but has been allowed to disappear altogether – without any public announcement to this effect. It should be noted that in the two countries which have previously adopted school commissioning (Netherlands and New Zealand), discernible funding was provided for the schools to buy in such services if they wished (OECD, 2002a, p.5; Watts, 2007, p.42): if this is not to be the case now in England, this suggests that the significant reductions in the extent and quality of career guidance provision that subsequently took place in both of these countries are likely to be much greater here. It also means that the partnership model which the Government has affirmed will have been effectively abandoned and dismantled, and that the claim that the National Careers Service is genuinely all-age becomes highly questionable.

Since the core rationale for these policies is based on the Government's adherence to the principle of school autonomy, and since the justification for this is based heavily on the international evidence in relation to pupil attainment cited in *The Case for Change* (Department for Education, 2010a), this attaches even greater importance to the question of whether or not the evidence from high-performing countries supports equally the application of these policies in relation to the support provided for pupil career choices and transitions. This will be discussed next.

Evidence from high-performing countries (in terms of school performance)

On the basis of the discussion in *The Case for Change* (Department for Education, 2010a), six high-performing countries in terms of school performance were selected: Canada, Finland, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore and Sweden. In view of the focus here, the career guidance provision reviewed in these countries was confined to that for school pupils.

In **Canada**, guidance programmes have traditionally been based on the role of the guidance counsellor. In most provinces, guidance counsellors are licensed teachers who usually also have a graduate qualification in guidance and counselling: this may, however, include little or no specific attention to career development and career counselling, focusing instead on psychological issues; they tend also to devote much of their time to responding to students' personal problems. Attention to career education and work experience varies across the provinces (OECD, 2002b; for more recent evidence, see Malatest and Associates, 2009). Strengths include the development of creative career education resources (notably The Real Game, which has been successfully used in the UK (Edwards, Barnes, Killeen and Watts, 1999)) and of strategic instruments (notably the Blueprint for Life/Work Designs, a framework for developing career management skills both in and beyond schools, which is currently being adapted for use in both England (LSIS, 2009) and Scotland (Hooley, Watts, Sultana and Neary, 2011)). In Ontario, at the time of the OECD survey, school principals were required not only to produce a comprehensive guidance and career education plan, but also every three years to conduct surveys of students, parents, teachers and other partners to evaluate the delivery and effectiveness of all components of the programme (OECD, 2002b). In Alberta, a Connecting Learning and Work programme launched in 2009 includes partnership working to support career development from kindergarten to grade 12.[1]

In **Finland**, the career guidance system is strongly professionalised by international standards. All comprehensive schools have at least one full-time-equivalent counsellor, who has normally had a five-year training as a teacher, plus teaching experience, followed by a one-year specialist training; alternatively, guidance can be selected as an option within the five-year initial teacher training. Their role includes individual career counselling, and running guidance classes focusing on careers education and study skills. In addition, most pupils have at least two one-week work-experience placements. Alongside this, pupils have access to career guidance provided by vocational psychologists

[1] www.employment.alberta.ca/documents/CES/CES-CLW_strategy.pdf

within the Ministry of Labour: they have had six years' training as psychologists, plus a 55-day specialist vocational training (OECD, 1996). Some powers have been devolved to municipalities and to schools, in relation to resource allocation and curriculum content. Nonetheless, there have been clear guidelines for comprehensive and upper secondary schools, specifying the minimum level of guidance services permissible, together with a web-based service to support institutional self-evaluation of guidance services. Steps have also been taken to embed guidance policy issues in national in-service training programmes for school principals (Vuorinen, Kasurinen and Merimaa, 2003). Guidance is a compulsory subject within the curriculum, and each school must produce a plan indicating how the relevant goals are to be reached both by all teachers and by the school counsellors (Vuorinen, 2011).

In Hong Kong, the educational system was modelled after the British system though is now undergoing substantial changes. The career guidance services are located within schools, and based on teams of five to six teachers led by a senior teacher who holds the title of careers master/mistress and spends around five hours per week on guidance work; the others carry a full teaching load in other subjects. Their training is limited, confined to access to an introductory course in career development and counselling. Their programmes have tended to rely on careers talks and visits, though a career education curriculum on which schools can draw if they wish has been developed by the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters. Some use is made of external careers services provided by the Labour Department and by non-governmental organisations (Leung, 2002; Ho, 2008).

In Korea, the main guidance specialist in schools is the guidance counsellor, who is a qualified teacher with (usually) additional specialist training. Their role covers not only educational and career guidance but also counselling on personal and behavioural issues. Most guidance delivery is provided by the homeroom teachers (tutors). In practice, most of it is focused around college entrance, and particularly which colleges and fields of study to apply for. Such guidance is informed largely by school marks and aptitude/interest test results, and in the past has appeared in general to pay little or no attention to clarifying longer-term career aspirations (though this may be beginning to change in the light of data on college drop-outs and course changes). Vocational counsellors from the public employment services commonly visit schools to administer psychometric tests and run group sessions to help pupils interpret the results. Some career education programmes have been introduced, but on a voluntary basis, and with little training support for the teachers involved; opportunities for pupils to experience the world of work are limited (OECD, 2002c). More recently, a Career Education Division has been established in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology; efforts are being made to integrate career education elements into mainstream schools subjects; 'career and school entrance teachers' are being appointed in each of the middle-high schools; and awareness of career education and guidance is being included in national in-service programmes for school principals (Lee, 2011).

In Singapore, a system of pastoral care and career guidance was introduced into schools between 1987 and 1995, which drew strongly from UK school-based models (Watts, 1988), viewed as part of efforts to make the education system more 'efficient'. The model was based more on career education than on career counselling. It included a programme of 'affective and career education' (ACE) delivered in curriculum periods at least once a week, usually by form teachers. In addition, subject teachers were expected to incorporate career education in their teaching; and a fair number of schools appointed careers teachers to provide planned group guidance sessions and some face-to-face career counselling. Subsequently, the careers teacher became viewed more as a co-ordinator of a more broadly based careers programme. There was also a stronger emphasis on individualised guidance, as part of a policy of implementing an 'ability-driven' education that sought to develop the full spectrum of talents and abilities in every child in school. This included more advanced training programmes for careers teachers (Tan, 2002). More recently, a developmental programme of Education and Career Guidance (ECG) has been introduced, with primary schools focusing on career awareness, secondary schools on career exploration, and upper secondary schools on career planning. This is delivered through a variety of means, including career education lessons, counselling, talks, clinics, visits, work experience/shadowing, projects, e-resources and career portfolios.[2] In addition, each school now has a school counsellor plus teacher-counsellors, who may provide some career counselling to pupils.[3]

In Sweden, the system of career guidance has since the 1970s been based on school-based 'study and vocational orientation counsellors'. They were not teachers, but had specialist training comprising a three-year undergraduate course (those with a number of years' work experience could qualify through a 1.5-year course); after 1989 they were employed by, and ultimately accountable to, their municipality. Their role included individual career counselling, group guidance, organising work experience, acting as a resource to teachers, following up former pupils, and liaising with the employment service (which provides some limited support) (Watts, 1981). Following the decentralisation that took place in the 1990s, many municipalities have devolved decisions on the nature of provision to schools. The training requirement has been weakened, with many schools assigning teachers without specialist training to carry out career guidance tasks (especially in the publicly-funded 'free schools'). Moreover, counsellors are increasingly assigned marketing tasks, to promote their schools in the emerging school market (Lundahl and Nilsson, 2009). New legislation has recently been introduced to ensure that all pupils have access to guidance provided by a trained and qualified career guidance practitioner. Several municipalities are also setting up guidance centres where counsellors are based and from which they visit schools (Mjörnheden, 2011).

It is evident that there is no common pattern that characterises the career guidance provision for school pupils in these countries:

- In some cases, they are exclusively school-based (Canada, Singapore); in others, there is access to external services (Finland, Hong Kong, Korea, Sweden)
- In some cases, they are highly professionalised in terms of career guidance expertise (notably in Finland and Sweden); in others, less so
- In some cases, the key specialist guidance roles are generic, covering personal and social as well as educational and vocational guidance (Canada, Korea); in others, they focus more specifically on career guidance (Finland, Hong Kong, Singapore, Sweden)
- In most of these cases, the specialists have been trained initially as teachers; but in Sweden, they usually have not
- In some cases, there is a systematic developmental careers education programme (Canada [Alberta], Finland, Singapore); in others, any such provision is less systematic (Hong Kong, Korea, Sweden)
- In some cases, such programmes systematically include work experience/shadowing (Finland, Singapore, Sweden); in others, they sometimes do so (Canada); in yet others (Hong Kong, Korea), they rarely do so (though this may be beginning to change).

There are no data which enable firm conclusions to be drawn on the impact of these different models on pupil attainment, progression and employment prospects, or on other quantifiable success measures. There is evidence elsewhere to demonstrate a relationship between clarity of career goals and educational attainment (Inter-Ed, 2004). There is also a strong theoretical basis for the effect of careers education and guidance on attainment and associated behaviour (Killeen, Sammons and Watts, 1999). This is supported by some US studies on the impact of more broadly-based guidance programmes on pupil performance (see e.g. Lapan, Gysbers and Sun, 1997).

A number of other features in these international examples would seem relevant to current policy developments in England. These include:

- The need to avoid the risk that devolution of responsibility for career guidance to schools will result in erosion of specialist professional guidance roles (Sweden)
- The desirability of requiring schools to produce a plan for careers education and guidance delivery, together with provision

[2] http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/programmes/social-emotional-learning/education-career-guidance/
[3] http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/programmes/social-emotional-learning/education-career-guidance/

for school self-evaluation (Canada [Ontario], Finland)

- The desirability of including career guidance policy issues in national in-service training programmes for school principals (Finland, Korea)
- The notion that a developmental careers education programme should start in primary schools (Canada [Alberta], Singapore) (for recent English evidence to support this, see Wade et al, 2011).

Conclusions

This brief international review has indicated strong support for three main features of current Government policy for career guidance in England: an all-age careers service; enhancing the professionalism of career guidance practitioners; and the partnership model between schools and an external service.

On devolution of responsibility for career guidance to schools, the evidence is more negative. It suggests that for such a policy to be successful, strong policy levers will be needed. These should include – but not necessarily be confined to – measures to assure professional standards, support for school planning and self-evaluation, and in-service training for school heads. Since the policy for school autonomy as outlined in *The Case for Change* (Department for Education, 2010a) is based heavily on international evidence, it is important that the contrasting international evidence presented in this paper be given similar prominence in formulating policy in relation to career guidance provision.

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A Careers Adviser? So what do you do exactly?

Siobhan Neary

This paper aims to explore and examine how professional identity is defined within career guidance in England in the wake of ongoing change. It considers the components and the factors that contribute to the formation of professional identity, and the relationship with postgraduate continuing professional development (CPD). The study draws on the perceptions of a group of England-based practitioners broadly representing the sector, but bounded by one common factor; they have all undertaken a postgraduate qualification focusing on CPD within a guidance related discipline.

Introduction: careers work in transition

The extent to which career guidance is recognised as a profession is debatable (Watts, 1999; McMahon, 2004; Furbish, 2004). It has been defined within the UK as 'weakly professionalised' (Watts, 1999), most recently the terminology has transformed into 'a profession that is not yet strong'; as per the recent report presented by the Careers Profession Taskforce (2010); although it refers repeatedly throughout the report to the 'Careers Profession'.

A number of research reports (Hibbert, 2010; McCrone et al, 2010; Future First, 2011) express a lack of confidence in current information advice and guidance (IAG) delivery and, specifically, cited individuals' preference for seeking support from a range of 'non-career professionals', including family, teachers, mentors, alumni and individuals working in their areas of interest. Hibbert (2010) argues many young people prefer to talk to people nearer their own age with some experience of the world of work, or a trusted adult rather than an expert. Practitioners face many challenges to their status as career professionals. The Careers Profession Taskforce (2010) identifies lack of resources, appropriateness and currency of qualifications as contributing to this. John Hayes (2011) in his recent speech on the Education Bill proposed that turning high quality careers advisers in to 'jack of all trades' with an expectation of excelling was unrealistic.

The broadening remit of the workforce, together with the differentiation between specialist and generic roles, must have impacted on users' understanding of service provision and may explain some of the comments on young people's services presented earlier. It is easy to understand users' likely confusion when faced with over 40 different job titles used by practitioners (TBR, 2009) instead of the single, traditional 'careers adviser' title. Although the TBR report refers specifically to the adult sector, practitioners working with young people have had the experience of being re-designated as Personal Adviser without the acknowledgement of their professional histories as practitioners (Colley et al, 2009).

So where does professional identity come in to it?

The literature on professional identity (Brown 2002, Beijaard et al, 2004) contends that professional identity is an important facet in times of change and transition. It is safe to say that the careers profession has been in a state of flux for the best part of the last two decades. With so many challenges how do careers professionals view themselves within all of this? Have they retained a professional identity, or have the changes been too many that they no longer feel they have one, or did they even have one to begin with? The following research study explores the extent to which practitioners have retained a professional identity throughout the changes impacting on them over recent years.

There has been limited research focusing on the concept of professional identity within careers work, until recently. Dubrow and Higgins (2005) contend that the challenging context of career demands a better understanding of professional identity and what contributes to its development. It is therefore appropriate that career professionals invest in research that addresses this. Most recently Colley et al, (2009, 2010), Douglas (2009, 2010) and Cedfop (2009) have addressed this by exploring the impact of change on roles and identities. It would appear both timely and imperative therefore, to explore professional identity when much of the career guidance sector is experiencing a radical realignment in conjunction with systemic cuts in public services.

Defining professional identity

Attempting to define professional identity is complex. Beijaard et al (2004) consider that professional identity can be defined in different ways but they regard it as having three component parts; self concept and image of self; the occupational role; and expectations of others and accepted images within society as to what the occupation should know and do. There are, however, a number of definitions. Ibarra considers professional identity as the combination of 'attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which individuals define themselves within their professional role' (1999:765). Alternatively Smitina considers professional identity within the context of the professional role, i.e.; 'who I am as a professional, what would I like to be and how did I become the professional I am?'(2010:1141). Souhami (2007) and Mellin et al (2011) suggest that a primary difficulty for practitioners, particularly within helping roles, is the ability to differentiate between their role and that of others: what is it that they do, specifically, that others do not and how can this be articulated effectively?

Methodology

The policy driven nature of careers work often leaves the practitioner voice absent from research (Reid, 2007) and dominated by other discourses, usually that of managers and policy makers. This study hoped to offer a space for the practitioner's voice to be heard and to present discourse drawing on how they perceive their professional identity. To support a constructivist methodology, a case study approach was adopted, which was bounded specifically on a group of practitioners in England undertaking a postgraduate award; focusing on professional development within a guidance related discipline. The study was limited to students working in England, to retain consistency and explore broadly common experiences.

The students included in this study reflect most areas of the career guidance sector see fig 1. (NB: some respondents listed more than one sector). Although all work within the guidance sector, some students' roles focused more on educational guidance activities.

Figure 1: Research Participants

Sector	Survey	Interview	Narrative
HE	2	2	
FE	6	2	3
School	1		
Connexions/ LA	5	1	
Adult Guidance	4	2	1
Voluntary Comm	1		
Other	1		1

All students past and present who have been on the programme between 2006-2010 were invited to contribute at different stages; both communication and survey responses were through the web. Those who were invited to contribute to the in-depth telephone interviews were selected as a result of their participation in the survey stage.

A key benefit of adopting a case study approach is the opportunity to utilize multiple sources of evidence (Robson, 1993), ensuring that data can be triangulated and explored from many angles. In addition, for this project, data were collected at different times throughout students' academic career, this allowed an exploration of policy change and potential relationships between this and student self-perceptions. The tools used included; documentary evidence in the form of programme applications and supporting statements (n=66); survey questionnaire (n=18); in-depth interviews (n=7) and personal narratives (n=5). Within this article, elements of the survey questionnaire, in-depth interviews and the personal narratives are considered.

Much of the debate concerning case study as a method focuses on what constitutes the case (Burton 2000, Denscombe 2007). This case is bounded within a group of students undertaking the same course within a defined time frame. When adopting a case study approach the purpose is not to provide generalisations per se but to offer 'principles that may be more general' (Reid, 2007: 64). The length of this article prohibits an extensive discussion of findings. Thus three areas will be addressed reflecting Beijaard et al's (2004) trio of concepts relating to professional identity: self concept and image of self; the occupational role and expectations of others and accepted images in society.

The occupational role of the careers practitioner

Many practitioners when asked to define their role found this a challenging activity; often responding with 'that's a difficult one'. Why is it difficult for careers practitioners to define what they do? The responses tended to fall into three categories:

i. emphatic – I am a Careers Adviser/ Education Adviser
ii. that would depend on who I am talking to
iii. difficult to describe because I have lots of roles.

The first group felt strongly that they knew who they were and what they did. This description was often aligned with a qualifier; 'I work with young people/ adults'. For some respondents they made a point of distancing themselves from other areas of the sector such as Connexions; 'I don't work for Connexions': it appeared important to define what they were not and to express their specialism almost as a sub-identity. Beijaard et al, (2004) state that individuals often locate their identity in relation to the status of their discipline, so if they perceive low status they locate their professional identity within their generic role.

The second group often struggled to define themselves as they felt clients or peers did not understand what they did and how they did it. 'You say to people I am a Personal Adviser and they say what is that? What do you do?' (PA, Connexions). This lack of clarity puts pressure on practitioners to try and describe their roles in a way that might be meaningful to others. Colley et al, (2010) present in their research a lack of clarity as to the role of the PA, specifically, around delivery or brokering services to young people. Souhami (2007) and Mellin et al (2011) all suggest an inability to articulate roles, especially with professional peers. Practitioners within the study, reported in this article, often felt defined by clients' previous experiences of using careers services: this was often perceived to be poor. 'They understand the term careers advice don't they, which is user friendly, but then that is what they will have been told they have had at school by the maths teacher' (College Careers Adviser).

The third group, which was composed predominantly of practitioners who worked in educational institutions, identified themselves as having multiple roles. Their primary role was as a career adviser, but they often had additional responsibilities around safeguarding, staff development or special educational needs. They presented careers work in institutions as not a 'pure' role. It is one which can often have many additional activities and responsibilities added. Thus, the converse of the more familiar embedded role, where careers activities are integrated within existing job roles (Harrison et al, 2001; Neary and Jackson, 2010). It could be argued that the nature of the individuals' identity is strongly influenced by their area of specialism i.e. adult, young person, graduates (Mellin, et al, 2011) and this not only defines who they are, but also their role and how confident they feel articulating this to others.

Practitioner self-image

The various large scale policy realignments, from education and employment to social inclusion and progression, have changed the self-concept of the careers workforce and how they view themselves (Artaraz, 2006; Colley et al, 2009, 2010). Many practitioners feel there is a perception that anyone can do guidance (Douglas 2009); this was also articulated a number of times here. Hence the impact of policy drivers over this timeframe has also been equally significant; policy has sought to replace the careers profession with a more generic role: the Personal Adviser in the Connexions service for young people. This has had a significant impact on how practitioners view themselves and their profession (Artaraz, 2006, Colley et al, 2009). According to Beijaard et al (2004), the concept of self has an impact on how individuals develop and the nature of their practice. This element, within their definition, focuses on the personal and individual internalization of the professional role and how it relates to self.

The practitioners in this study reflect the broad range of training and experience including those with no formal training and qualifications in careers work, with the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) 4 and finally the Diploma in Career Guidance /Qualification in Career Guidance. Practitioners with the NVQ 4 can be divided into two groups, those whose qualification was supported with theoretical input, usually through a university, and those who had limited or no theory. All see themselves as providing a professional service, but not necessarily seeing themselves in the sense of the traditional professional. When asked how they define 'professional' they invariably refer to traditional examples of doctors and lawyers. This view very much reflected how they suspect others perceive them and is considered in more depth in the next section.

Often those studying at masters' level feel their interest in developing themselves and their practice is not understood by their colleagues, and they are often concerned by the lack of commitment and value demonstrated by colleagues in relation to their own CPD, 'and they almost look at me as if to say why? You are quite sad you have nothing else to do' (Personal Adviser, Connexions).

For many practitioners, regardless of their initial training route, the lack of consistent training and qualifications for the sector has created ambiguity: challenging the professional status of those who had invested in postgraduate qualifications and professional development. This personal, financial and resource investment contributes to their sense of ownership of their professionalism. When asked why they chose to start a masters' level course, 50% of the questionnaire respondents and the majority of the interviewees said they wanted to enhance their theoretical knowledge. Those who had undertaken the NVQ with little theoretical content felt that there was a gap in their knowledge and that theory allowed them to exercise agency over their professional practice. Some of the NVQ trained practitioners felt they had the skills, but lacked the theoretical knowledge that allowed them to fully apply them.

> Knowledge is not necessarily a body of knowledge that we draw on and pull facts out of. But it is the knowledge that enables us to understand what to do at any given moment, what to think and how to put into practice (Adult Careers Adviser).

Those with a good grounding in theory had a genuine interest in pursuing this further. For many the engagement with the theoretical aspects represented an opportunity to intellectualize their work, from what has for many become a mechanistic approach to practice.

> I am engaging in some of that critical thinking and self reflection now which adds value to what you do and gives you that confidence as a professional to your delivery (Adult Careers Adviser).

Questionnaire responses centered on practitioners' views of client focus. 67% of respondents identified it as their personal driver for professional development, reinforcing Reid's (2007) findings describing the meeting of client need as the focus of the careers practitioners' working life. A commitment to client focus was implicit at all levels of the data, for many it was synonymous with their rationale for professional development (Neary and Hutchinson, 2009). Client focus was inextricable from their practice and how they perceived themselves. When considering if a common set of values, attributes, beliefs, motives and experiences (Ibarra, 1999) could be defined for career practitioners, the answers aligned overwhelmingly with the ethical framework adhered to by practitioners:

focusing on CPD, client focus, impartiality, being values driven and so on. The importance of ethics was fundamental and defined practitioners' professionalism and sense of self.

> I think you also need to demonstrate the ethics around working with individuals and the importance of being impartial, recognizing your own prejudices and potential for that (HE Careers Adviser).

Perception of others

The third element identified by Beijaard et al (2004) focuses on perceptions of others and the accepted images in society of what the professional role involves. For many practitioners there was the fundamental belief that the public at large has little understanding of the careers adviser role. In addition, with the diversification of the workforce, practitioners often felt that there was a general belief that it was a role anyone can do, as noted by Douglas (2009) previously. 'I have quite a few clients at that level who say I can do your job, this is easy, it's just sitting here talking to people' (Adult Careers Adviser).

For some this was compounded by a belief that not only the general public and some clients lacked an understanding of the role, but that many peers within peripheral roles did as well. For many practitioners this enhances a sense of isolation and a lack of value in what they feel is a very important job.

Formation of professional identity

As identified previously the concept of professional identity for many practitioners is both challenging and opaque. So what contributes to the formulation of professional identity? Felstead et al (2010) focus on employers promoting and creating a defined professional identity for their staff, this can be evidenced in the construction of the Personal Adviser role within Connexions. Professional identify is influenced by a range of variables including training, expertise, qualifications and being seen and seeing oneself as qualified (McCarthy 2004; Beijaards et al, 2004; Mellin et al, 2011). Cedefop (2009) identify the following as contributing to professional identity: recognition in national systems of occupations, media coverage raising awareness of the occupational area, establishment of professional associations, academic training and specialist training.

For the group of practitioners within this study, their professional identity has developed over a period of time and for some it was well-established and always had been; for others it was in transition. Factors identified as contributing to this included networks, in particular, opportunities to interact and communicate with like-minded people. The commitment to CPD was paramount and, particularly, the desire to engage with practitioners from a wide professional milieu. Another contributing factor in professional identity was the engagement in postgraduate level study and the kudos of advanced level qualifications (particularly having a higher level qualification than their manager). Also considered important were ethical frameworks, recognition, being valued, professional associations that promote and protect the profession and defined minimum level qualifications.

Conclusion

Professional identity is dynamic (Brown 1997; Beijaards et al, 2004) and therefore it is a fragile entity and one that needs nurture and investment. Felstead et al (2010) consider it as a social entity and involving a sense of belonging. The suggestions by practitioners of the importance of contacts with like-minded practitioners and informal professional association activities reinforce the individual ownership and definition of professional identity as a concept. Do careers practitioners have a professional identity? Professional identity exists on a continuum from those who claim not to, to those who emphatically claim they do. There are however, a number of constants that contribute and influence professional identity that all subscribe to. All practitioners have an ethical framework as the core to their practice; this does not deviate or change dependent on their work environment. Engagement with postgraduate professional development contributes to professional identity for the majority within the study: it reinforces their commitment to their professional identity; it reawakens their interest in theory and provides an intellectual engagement with practice. Those who felt it did not already have a strong professional identity and professional self worth. For all it provides the opportunity for structured reflection, allowing an in-depth engagement with how they perceive themselves as a professional.

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Beyond words: an exploration of the use of 'visual tools' within career guidance practice

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By means of shared best practice, this article explores 360° feedback on the use of 'visual tools' for career guidance practice. Developed through data obtained during interviews with guidance practitioners, young people and their drawings, innovative thinking for practice is promoted at this 'crossroads' in time for the careers profession. The study observes practitioners' commitment to continuing professional development (CPD) and research despite the current issues they face, along with the need for more inspiring engagement with young people. Evident in the data produced, is the variety of responses from individual participants to the same questions and to the visual tools themselves, demonstrating the interpretative nature of the research and the individual meanings constructed from it. This study argues that as we move towards a National Career Service for England, resourceful and inventive practice is crucial for future development.

Introduction

Traditional approaches to the guidance interview, presuppose that a verbal exchange takes place between the guidance practitioner and client. However, it is generally accepted that some people are better able to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions through the use of visual images, and the use of such an approach is already accepted in many therapeutic settings (Sutherland, 2009). It seems reasonable to suggest therefore that the use of visual 'starting points' and creative techniques, may have a potential role to play in a career guidance setting and in doing so enhance the design of career services. Visual tools are researched here to decipher their value for the field of career guidance.

The work of Margot Sutherland (Sutherland 2009) and her use of storytelling as a therapeutic tool within art therapy, provided me with a set of ready-made resources which could be explored. 'Visual tools' selected for investigation, were initially chosen from Sutherland's manual of resources designed to help young people and adults express, communicate and deal more effectively with their emotions through drawing. Sutherland's materials are designed to promote clarity of thought, as a first step towards positive action and to put seemingly unmanageable and unsolvable problems in a new perspective. The exercises her work provides, may be adopted for any age or ability, can be freely photocopied and provide a resource to those who work directly with the emotions of others; e.g. therapists, teachers and social workers.

Sutherland's tools represent 'visual metaphors' to be used to evoke thoughts, feelings and experiences beyond the specific objects that they depicted. They were considered useful for enabling clients to express that which might otherwise be difficult to articulate verbally. According to Kerr Inkson, 'The new interest in metaphor is part of a 'post-modern' view of careers – one in which flexibility, creativity and personal narrative play a part, enabling the development of wider and more imaginative views of career behaviour and practice' (Inkson, 2010:2).

In talking about her work, Sutherland explains that the exercises use 'a visual image which the participant can elaborate on, either with words or by extending the visual metaphor' and she goes on to say that, 'images can help people to 'see' what they cannot verbalise' (Sutherland, 2009:4). The above reasons provided the rationale for selection and, it was hoped, promote preliminary discussion on the topic.

Literature reviewed for the study established that the use of visual resources for careers work was a comparatively under researched area. Whilst some innovative techniques using visual means were being developed, e.g. Storyboarding for Career Management (Law, 2010), existing resources may lie outside the subject of careers. What was required for this exploration was a 're-purposing' of that which already existed (Haseman and Mafe, 2010).

Donald Winnicott's work allowed for recognition that the space between career counsellor and client (where projection and transference may be played out) was the place where trust and reliability through therapeutic empathy, could be replicated.

For Winnicott,

> The potential space between baby and mother, between child and family, between individual and society or the world depends on experience which leads to trust. It can be looked upon as sacred to the individual in that it is here that the individual experiences creative living.
> (Winnicott, 1967 48:368-372)

Reflecting on both Winnicott and Sutherland's writing implied that visual tools could be used as potential spaces within potential space, as a vehicle for increasing a client's autonomy, and it was this value for careers work which motivated the research.

Multisource Methodology

Authorised as part of the MA in Career Guidance at Canterbury Christ Church University, the research used a multisource methodology (Lepsinger and Lucia 2009). This combined desktop research, semi-structured interview, focus group, observation and drawings evidence. In 360° feedback on the use of 'visual tools' within current practice, the study revealed practitioners' commitment to research and continuing professional development, as well as enthusiastic engagement by young people through their drawings evidence. These qualitative methods supplied a rich range of data gathering instruments which then offered wide opportunities for interpretation and analysis.

The data were analysed through the identification of themes (e.g. the most common visual tools currently in use within career guidance). This used participant validated interview data (from the six semi-structured interviews with guidance practitioners) and data accumulated from a focus group with young people; who used the tools and provided feedback on their use. All practitioners appeared to be open to what could work and the idea of utilising the visual tools drawn from Sutherland's art therapy work. Whether participants modified their behaviour and showed enthusiasm in response to the fact that they were participants of research (Gillespie, 1991), or whether their responses were genuinely motivated by a need within their practice – is not conclusive. However, with no prior knowledge of the interview questions, practitioners overall were observed to demonstrate reflective practice, attempting to integrate theory and practice, thought and action (Schon, 1983).

Drawings Evidence

The views of young people were captured through engagement with the tools, producing drawings' evidence during a focus group following the practitioner interviews. Young people were observed to engage with the tools in a way that was meaningful to them, and the visual tools revealed the personal quality of their experience, through their unique and varying results. It was observed that engagement in 'drawing' activity was indicative of the focus group's level of participation to go beyond words and to reveal what was significant to them. Young people were observed to write words, draw symbols and use colours of their choosing.

From the feedback that young people gave, it would appear that they found the activity fun, a good way of thinking things through and useful for decision making. This was supported by comments made by an observer (Learning Support Tutor), who made notes and then wrote these up at the end of the focus group. Figure 1 indicates the degree of engagement by one young person who took part in the focus group, demonstrating their creative activity, as well as the thinking processes which took place.

Figure1: Options for GCSE subjects

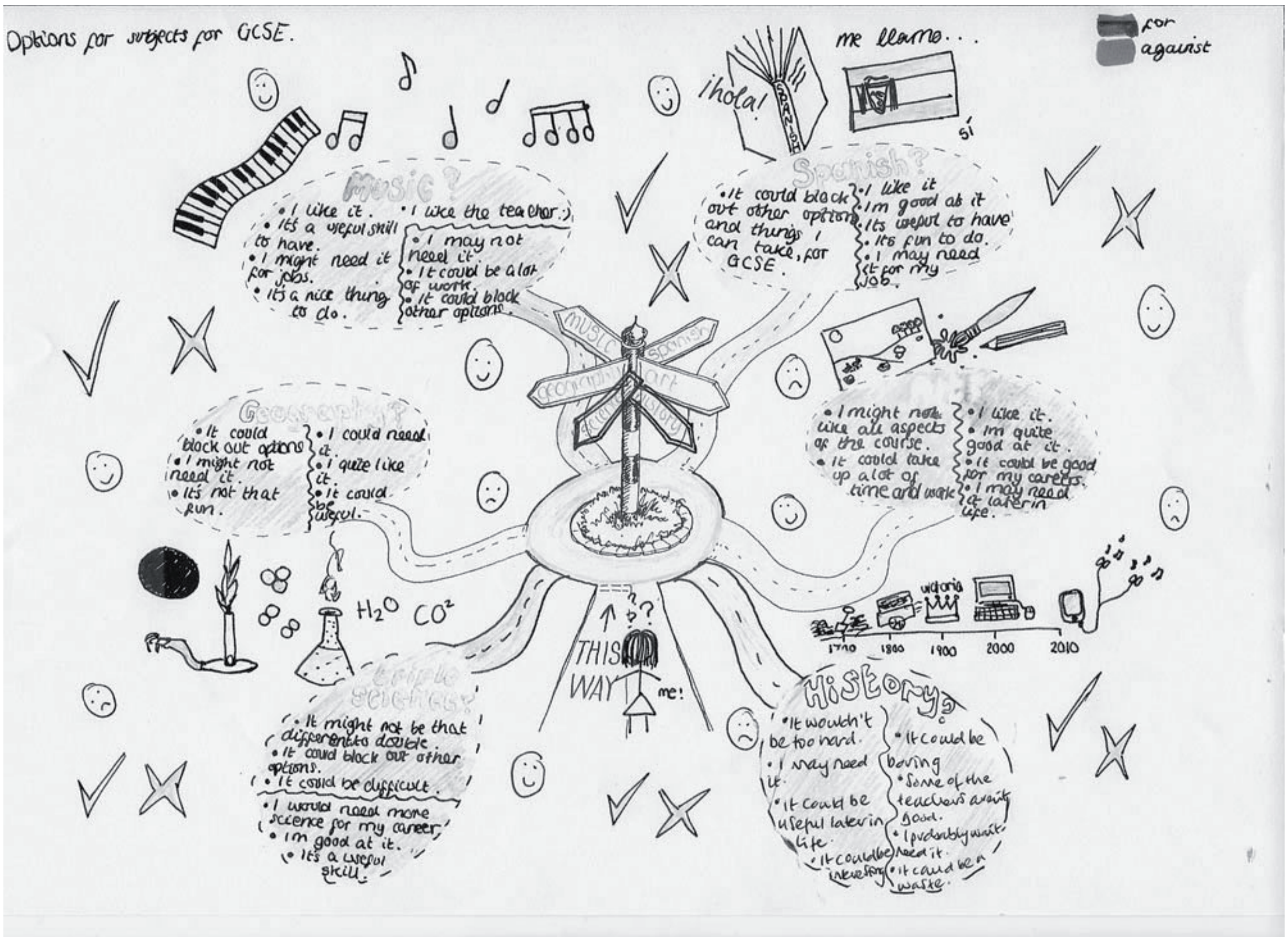
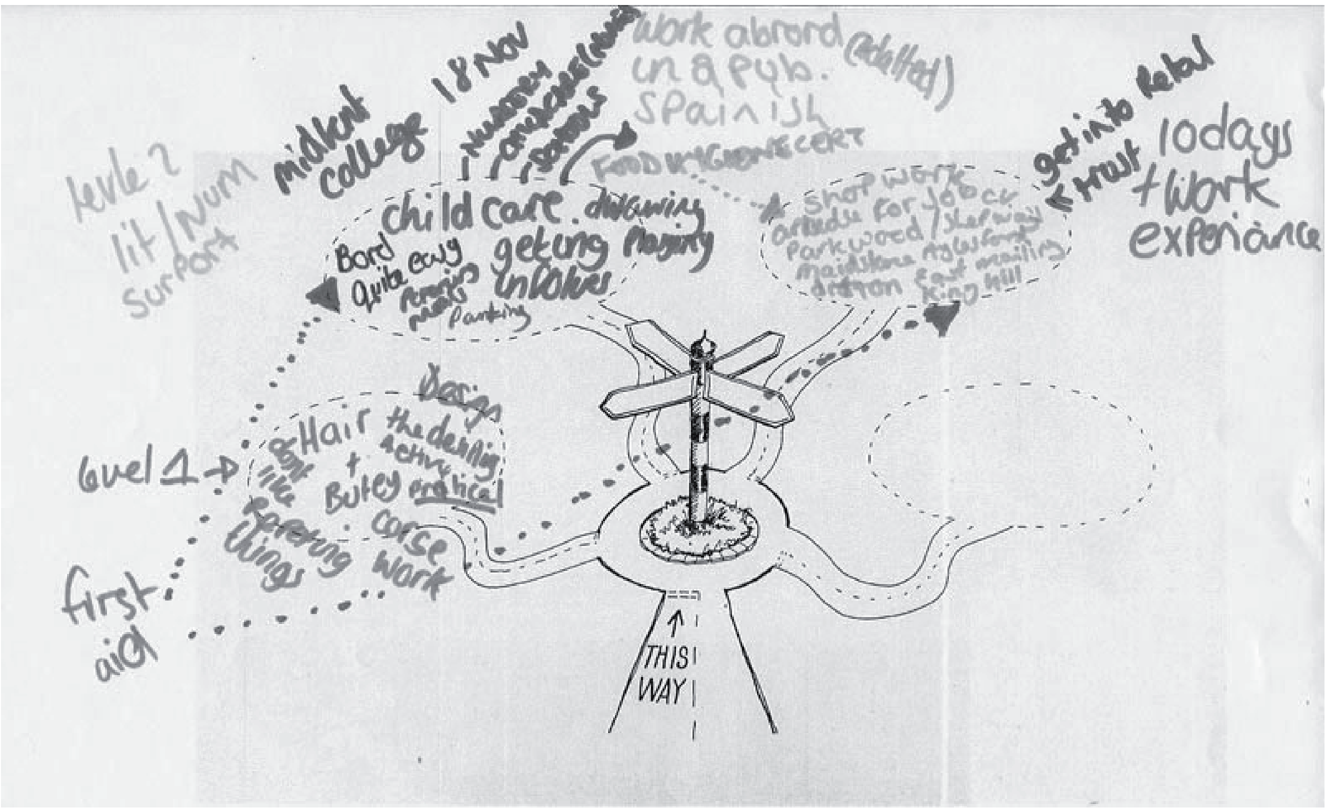


Figure 2: Options for education, employment or training



Utilised in this way, this 'Crossroads' tool, was interpreted as being 'helpful' for decision making and could potentially be used within group work (e.g. GCSE or A Level options), or within one to one guidance (e.g. as a progress review tool).

What follows is another example, this time an illustration of a young person's engagement during a one to one action research interview, following the initial study. Figure 2 illustrates the young person's priorities of a different kind, revealing some of their 'story' as well as their thoughts, ideas and feelings about the possibilities for education, employment and training.

Analysis and findings

According to the practitioners interviewed, the introduction of visual tools was a welcome resource for use with clients 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET), for visual learners and with those with identified learning difficulties and disabilities. For clients that were NEET, practitioners considered that the tools could be used as a vehicle to express and think through their choices to enable careers work to take place. In thinking about practitioners' identification of 'visual learners', Fleming's Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic (VAK) model (Fleming, 2001) was used to interpret the learning styles. Fleming claimed that visual learners have a preference for seeing (think in pictures; diagrams, using handouts, etc.). Auditory learners best learn through listening (lectures, discussions, tapes, etc.), whilst Kinaesthetic learners prefer to learn via their own experiences or learning through doing. Fleming's model is however, one among many others on learning styles (Revell, 2005) .

The largest group who may potentially benefit from engaging with the visual tools, according to practitioners' identifications, were young people with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities. This identification was interpreted as evidence of equality and social justice legislation in action (Equality Act, 2010), through the socially inclusive contracts delivered by Connexions services at the time of the research. Despite this legislation to provide legal rights to disabled people in the areas of education, employment and training, many of these contracts have subsequently been terminated, leaving countless young people without support, impartial advice or career guidance.

Both practitioners and young people agreed that the 'Crossroads' visual tool could be successfully utilised within career guidance group work for decision making and option selection. In developing ways that enable 'externalising conversations' (Winslade and Monk, 1999) with young people, alternative stories constructed through more 'playful' means, may hold relevance for some in 're-authoring their stories' (Reid, 2006:11). For guidance practitioners working within narrative models, 'visual tools' may enable this guidance process.

The six practitioners who took part in the study welcomed the prospect to try out the tools that were introduced via the research, which was interpreted as an indication of willingness to evolve practice and try new ways of engaging with clients. Following recommendations from the Careers Profession Alliance to raise the minimum level qualification for careers work to Level 7 within the next five years (Silver, 2010), practitioners' professional practice may be enhanced through research activities.

Reflecting on the groups of young people identified by practitioners, as those who may benefit from 'visual tools', allowed me to consider whether guidance services could provide tools which catered for difference or develop tools which encompassed it. These reflections were evident in the focus group with young people who brought their individual capacity to the 'visual tool'; the visual tool did not single out a person, type or disability, each worked with what they could meaningfully bring. The drawings are unique responses, illustrating young people's stories, their thought processes, interests and what is meaningful to them.

The guidance practitioners interviewed, considered that the 'visual tools' should fit within the 3 stage model (Egan, 2007), as this was the model they were all using: which is not to assume they used a variety of models to meet different client needs. For clients within the NEET group, other models may be required depending on their needs. Motivational Interviewing (Miller and Rollnick, 2002), Solution-Focused Therapy

(O'Connell, 2005) or Narrative approaches (Reid and West, 2011) offer alternative methods, and it could be that 'visual tools' best fit as 'therapeutic documents' within one of these models. Alternatively, culturally specific interventions may enable more intuitive and collaborative practice which better accommodates 'visual tools' (Arulmani, 2011).

The future use of 'visual tools'

Under the previous administration, careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) could be seen primarily as a vehicle to address social exclusion through partnership working between IAG providers and schools. Under the Coalition government however, a greater emphasis is being placed on school autonomy, with the Education Bill now placing a new duty on schools to secure 'independent careers guidance' (Higginbotham, 2011). This provides a challenge to schools to provide careers advice (with the potential cost of employing a careers adviser), purchasing external web-based and telephone services and/or buying-in professional impartial guidance, with less money available due to cuts in school grants. Thus schools are now being asked to purchase these services from their limited resources. Where there was once an effective partnership model , a contractor-supplier relationship now exists (Watts, 2011).

In taking the learning from this research forward however, converting 'visual tools' to online files, which form part of electronic interactivities, could provide an animated experience, mimicking that which is drawn. As 90% of young people go on-line to support their studies (Livingstone and Bober, 2005) this might provide more stimulating engagement than job-matching software. In thinking about the importance of helping clients 'actualise an ideal narrative' (Cochran, 1997, cited in Kidd, 2006:67), more creative uses of media – through art and technology – might engage young people in the production of artefacts which employ technology to help gain self-awareness.

As we move towards a National Career Service (Hayes, 2010), resourceful and inventive reflective practice is crucial for future development (Bolton, 2010). In recognition that some experiences are 'Beyond Words', client centred artefacts and 'visual tools' assist to convey the meaning of events by actively construing without language. Drawings for example, like many other 'making' processes, can be used in a multitude of effective ways to illustrate parts of an interview, to chart change (real or potential) and go beyond words in revealing more of the underlying meaning. Technical drawing skills are not necessary and people can choose to represent themselves in all sorts of ways, where dialogue and self discovery may be promoted through more playful interventions (Cregeen-Cook, 2011). Few careers guidance practitioners are trained artists or art therapists and neither are their clients experts in these fields. The visual tools suggested here are simple, basic and easy to use, enhancing guidance interactions, not replacing them. In harnessing the creative process of drawing as a potent form of communication, participants in this study experienced the way imagery can be used to solve problems, think about decision making and describe learning. The potential of art making within the context of career, for both practitioner and client, may hold the key to making sense of what is painful, generate personal meaning and enhance well-being in order to become whole (Brownell, 2010). The future of the career guidance profession may depend upon how resourceful we are in finding new ways to serve others.

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Creative writing practices in career guidance: an autoethnographical approach

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Today's careers practitioners are tasked with offering assistance to a populace becoming increasingly culturally diverse, whilst facing ever growing professional insecurity. Uncertainty besets not just the seeker but also the helper. There is a need to develop creative practice to meet the needs of individuals but also to motivate practitioners to, tentatively, venture forward. This article will consider creative written practices referring to case studies and my own MA autoethnographical experience, offering both a reflective and reflexive account. Some feel unable to voice their thoughts and feelings. Writing their narrative could heighten self awareness and become a catalyst for career development.

My intention is to encourage career professionals to consider possible creative writing processes to facilitate clients to tell their unique stories, but also as a way to observe their own career journey, thereby better assisting others to understand the changing nature of career.

Introduction

Today's cosmopolitan society offers a cultural diversity, which whilst presenting the potential for enriched career guidance practice, could also increase individual uncertainty. Perhaps, if practitioners had a better understanding of their own career stories they could gain an enhanced perspective of their clients' lives. This suggestion formed a part of my MA journey and was to become a catalyst sparking a desire to explore creative writing practices, not just for my own research and writing, but also as a possible tool for creative guidance practice. Fervently I hope that what I have to say will motivate others to try creative writing practices with clients of all ages. If we do not take risks how can we possibly ask our clients to take risks? My fear of submitting work which would be subject to peer review, abated when I thought of writing as a conversation; a sharing of ideas with other people (Smart, 2010). Inspired by authors such as Etherington (2004), Meekums (2008), Ellis and Bochner (2000) and Richardson (2000), to write a 'different way', I would like to share an account of the writing process involved in my recent autoethnographical MA dissertation; following with an exploration of case studies where creative writing practices were used: thereby offering a reflective and reflexive account.

My MA Story

> There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.
>
> (Maya Angelou, undated)

When I decided to studying the MA Career Guidance I knew I wanted to tell my story. I believe that in order to make sense of someone's story we first need to understand the importance of our own as it can provide an 'advantage point from which we understand others' (Reid, 2003:67). The lack of self belief that I have felt is echoed through the individual stories I am privileged to hear in my job as a career guidance adviser in a further education college. The cultural diversity of those who seek assistance instigated a need to acknowledge my own cultural background and the formation of my career identity. Let me explain.

I was born in Sri Lanka of a Eurasian Burgher heritage. Seen as middle class, urban, Europeanised English speakers (Ryan, 1960) at the time of my birth, this group shared a common culture rather than ethnicity. My family arrived in England in the early sixties and brought with them their own ingrained cultural values, beliefs and assumptions (Arulmani and Nag-Arulmani, 2004), embodying generational cultural traits, eclectically intermingling European and Asian ideologies which were unique to mine, but not necessarily other Burgher families. Such distinctive cultural inclination caused confusion in childhood as I struggled to find my self identity. In the dissertation I questioned if the values indoctrinated in childhood still influenced the adult, as it is noted that 'families tend to shape the cultural roots of adult ways of thinking' (Dominice, 2000:102).

The research considered aspects of my life: the familial influences on career identity, the societal influences affecting the female career roles of 'wife' and 'mother', the personal values gained from lifelong learning and the influence of chance on career decision making (Neary-Booth and Hambly, 2007). The dissertation was a personal, individualised study where I hoped by adopting a reflexive approach to my research (Etherington, 2004), and by using my own experiences and background to inform possible conclusions, I would gain an in-depth understanding of both the societal and cultural influences that have affected my career identity. In doing so I hoped to find meaning (Bruner, 1990) born of subjective immersion in my past, to better understand my present and future actions. My aim was not to offer generalisations for career guidance but rather indicators from my career thinking which could offer practitioners insights into their own and their client's thinking when they tell their stories. I chose the research instrument of an autoethnographical free flowing journal which documented my career story from childhood to present day, forming the basis for critical analysis. It also provided the opportunity to 're-author my story' (Meekums, 2008:298), offering a representation of the events from my viewpoint; acknowledging how an individual perceives the world (Bell, 2005) and their place within it.

Autoethnography is a creative analytical process (CAP) which may be seen as 'a self narrative that critiques the situatedness with others in a social context' (Spry, 2001:710); a personal level of studying describing both method and text. Therefore, I became the research instrument, integral to the experience. Autoethnography can take the guise of stories, poetry, novels, personal essays, journals, performance related and more (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). It has been argued (Sparkes, 2002) that such alternative genres do not necessarily provide an enhanced result. Yet, they can draw the reader into the writer's story, as in the case of Meekums (2008) who uses an autoethnographical study with a partial narrative to express the formation of her identity as a counselling trainer. She discusses that she tried to write using Richardson's (2000) criteria: does the work offer a contribution to an understanding of social life, does it have aesthetic merit, is there sufficient reflexivity, is there emotional or intelligent impact and does it provide a lived experience? I too tried to meet such demands in my own work and also attempted 'verisimilitude' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:751) so that my reader(s) would feel that what they read was a believable and 'true' to life account. Furthermore, I tried to write evocatively (Richardson, 2000) to engage the senses.

Yet, how could I ensure congruence and validity (Reid, 2008) with my subject? The qualitative nature of my research may have undergone a 'triangulation' of methods as an alternative to an objective validation of findings. However, a multi-faceted 'crystallization' (Richardson, 2008) could be deemed more fitting when considering creative genre texts. Indeed 'what we see depends on our angle of repose – not triangulation but rather crystallization' (ibid:478). The author discusses an example of this process as when she and her husband shared similar experiences when co-authoring a travel book, but saw them through different professional eyes and biographies; keeping their own narrative accounts and engaging in inter-disciplinary conversations. Richardson, suggests that there is no single 'truth' but that the texts validate themselves (ibid:479). I sought such justification as my writing unfolded and included poetry and photographs to add further dimensions. The latter offered 'portals' to the past enhancing the meaning of my words bringing them to life, as I had found when I read the work of Meekums (2008) and Muncey (2005) whose own photographic inclusions added 'richness' to the text.

My choice of a 'free flowing' journal as a research tool seemed 'right' to me as since studying the QCG I have endeavored to write in a reflective diary: I find writing calms me and it is also a way to reflect on my actions (Schon, 1991). I feel an affinity with this writing genre (Bolton, 1999) but recognise it may not be for everyone. Perhaps the creative analytical process of autoethnography could offer suitable alternatives when considering individual needs in career guidance practice.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) state that, 'the stories we write put us into conversations with ourselves as well as our readers' (ibid:784) and as I began to write I became immersed in the past. Stanley (1992) suggests that our memory helps us to gain an understanding of the 'here and now' because it captures some understanding of the 'there and then'. My consciousness became saturated with previously forgotten almost painful memories; often the strength of emotion was frightening as the past surfaced and with it unresolved issues. Yet, by freely writing I was able to engage in a process of deep reflexivity and in doing so '…attend to the untold' (Sharkey, 2004, cited in Bolton, 2010:8). Further, Bolton (2010) notes it is paradoxical that we reflectively tell and retell our stories to feel secure, but an additional need calls for a critical reflexive examination of our actions and those of others, to heighten our self understanding and that of our practice so that we can 'develop dynamically' (ibid:10). By freely writing and analysing their own stories, career guidance practitioners could infuse their practice with new understanding of how individuals see their career identity. As such they may then be better able to assist others to 're-interpret' their stories (Reid and Scott, 2010). To make visible my reflective and reflexive thoughts, I re-visited my journal and added bracketed text in italic font. This amplified my 'writing voice' (Seamus Heaney, 1980, cited in Hunt and Sampson, 2006:33); my words both incorporated my feelings and had a feeling of 'me' about them. On completing the journal I wrote that I felt 'invigorated', 'relieved' and 'unburdened' and wondered if this could be a way for others to express deep-seated thoughts; heightening self awareness.

Tentatively I began to think of other creative writing practices, for example letters, scripts and memos. Poetry could become an expressive outlet for some. 'Rap' as a musical genre could be considered a form of poetry whereby the musician uses words to express their feelings and as such may appeal to those who struggle to vocalise their thoughts in other ways. Tomlinson (2006) suggests making music could be a coping mechanism, providing a space to create meaning and attain a sense of control. In an American study using 'rap' in the classroom, Cooks (2004) noted that students said it expressed their 'reality' and one said that it had 'flow' which was 'described as a combination of making sense, telling truth, and fitting words together' (ibid:75). Others, such as Weinstein (2006), discuss how the pleasure gained from such work beyond school literacy can affect school engagement and achievement; students were not just rapping but writing. So, perhaps 'rap' and other creative writing practices maybe a way to engage the disaffected.

Moving from my story to the stories of others

I became excited by the prospect of creative writing practices in career guidance and decided that on completing my MA I would investigate some possibilities. Therefore, I would now like to offer a sample of creative writing case studies. Where extracts are included it is with the kind permission of those involved, for writing is a private affair, 'a communication with the self until you decide to share it…' (Bolton, 1999:22).

The first opportunity to venture into this creative realm came when a young woman wanted to book a careers guidance interview. She seemed angry and her voice was clipped as if she was trying to control her emotions. I booked the appointment and was then taken aback when she said "is there anything I can do before I see you?" No one had asked this of me before. I enquired if there was something in particular that she wanted to talk about and she explained that she had just been diagnosed with a severe back problem and as a result was unlikely to achieve her dream of becoming a nurse. I suggested that she may want to write a letter to herself on how she was feeling at this moment in time as it may help to gain some perspective and clear a path to other possibilities. She readily agreed as it gave her something tangible to latch on to at a time when she felt lost. A week later she returned for our appointment, smiling. "How did you get on?" She told me that she cried 'loads' as she wrote the letter. My heart sank and I wondered if I had escalated her misery. Then she told me that she had been angry with herself but seeing the words on the page began to make things clearer. 'Forgiveness is a gift that comes with increased understanding' (Bolton, 2010:62). By writing a letter to her 'pain' she was able to forgive her body and move on. She said that she had a long chat with her tutor and now wanted to consider other career options.

On another occasion I was asked to deliver a group work to mature learners on progression opportunities and I decided that I would try something 'different'. I gave each person a large sheet of paper and asked them to fill the page with words that described their skills and qualities, writing them their way using different fonts and colours. At first people looked at each other, not sure where to start, so as they worked I asked them to call out words which I wrote on a board. Soon the room began to fill with expressive conversations. Some people filled their page with a myriad of coloured words in all shapes and sizes. Others wrote orderly lists in a more traditional way, for this was 'classwork' to them. Afterwards I asked if anyone would like to share their 'story' of how they came to return to learning. Interestingly, those who had embraced the creative exercise seemed to be more open to talking. This group had formed a bond prior to my interaction so it could be that they had already developed rules regarding confidentiality. People spoke freely on aspects of their lives which may not have been forthcoming under other circumstances. Was it that they had been waiting for the opportunity to tell their stories? This was not a therapy session (although creativity may be considered therapeutic) yet the participants wanted to talk. I felt energised by the positive atmosphere created through a creative activity. I also felt that I was more able to offer my clients genuineness and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957) as the exercise seemed to open heightened channels of empathy as a result of 'deeply' listening to the diversity of stories.

Would practitioners be willing to participate in creative writing practices? Nervously I pitched my idea and to my delight the response was positive; almost as if the individuals had been waiting for 'permission' to write their story their way. I suggested that they write about a time that resonated with them and to include their feelings and thoughts. The first, I will call her Lucy, wrote about remembering the moment she decided to leave her marriage: 'When I think of 2005, my stomach gets just a little bit tight. It's almost imperceptible, this tightness'. She wrote of how her days were defined by 'anxiety, of worrying, of tiptoeing around…' and that the day she received a 'list' of her shortcomings with 'bolded headlines, bullet points and 10 point font' she decided to leave. She wrote:

> I read it at the kitchen table. It was a cold January morning and the light outside was harsh, I remember thinking that as I peered out the kitchen window, blinking to clear the tears that clouded my eyes. The silence was loud in my ears. But for the first time, I was certain.

When I read her story I felt as if I was in the room with her; the depth of feeling demanded my attention as the reader. I emailed the participants and asked three questions:

- How did you feel before you started writing?
- How did you feel when you were writing the article? What did you notice?
- What were your immediate thoughts once the piece was written?

Lucy responded that initially she was excited as she loves to express herself this way and thought the project 'was unique and interesting'. However, she had doubted being able to write something that would be 'worthy', expressing that it was symptomatic of her experience in 2005. In response to the second question, Lucy noted that it was harder than she thought it might be as she was writing about a very difficult time in her life. In her response she wrote 'my body even got a little sick feeling' and that she had 'awareness that it wasn't real but it still didn't feel good'. She also wondered if what she had written was 'silly' and explained that it exemplified her struggle with self esteem at that time of her life. Finally, she felt relief that the piece was finished and importantly 'I felt relieved that I was no longer in that place in my life'.

The second, Sue, wrote a poem:

> A moment in time when the right solutions
> arrive at the right questions.
> A decision made and a plan made.
> No regrets.
>
> A moment in time when the right opportunity,
> pursued,
> results in a re-focus and the path forward is set.
> No regrets.
>
> A moment in time when all is black and all that
> has gone before seems pointless.
> A gathering of strength and focus and a new path
> is taken.
> No regrets.
>
> A moment in time to reflect on the past and
> recognise knowledge, to value experiences.
> An earned respect as a practitioner with an
> ongoing career ever changing.
> No regrets.

In response to my first question Sue said that after I had spoken to her she began to reflect on the previous fifteen years of work and her 'thoughts and emotions became complex and confusing'. She started to write with a 'brain dump' and just let the words out. 'On paper it became simple and uncomplicated and fifteen years were summed up in a few sentences'. The piece was written in one go with a few subsequent alterations. Sue's thoughts on completing the piece were 'Work wise I have been liberated from doubt and I feel more confident about the future at least for now. – More hopeful'.

Both participants wrote with 'verisimilitude' as described earlier in this work, both offered reflective and reflexive accounts of moments in time. Each chose to tell their story in their own way, providing narratives infused with feeling (Law, 2003). They are narrators of their own stories (Fine, 1992). It can be easy to lose sight of our actions and by engaging in a creative process these individuals may have heightened a sense of self.

Concluding Thoughts

This work aimed to share some of my MA experience and how writing has became for me a method of inquiry which 'documents becoming' (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2008). Inspired by the authors researched on my journey I wanted to explore creative writing processes as a possible tool for career guidance practice. Such creativity may engage some but it will not be for everyone. Yet others find the writing process therapeutic. It could be a way to explore feelings about certain events (Bould, 2001). The individuals who participated were women, but the group also included men who readily told their stories. Would male practitioners find creative writing a positive experience? Perhaps this is an area worthy of consideration for future research.

None of the participants were under 17 years of age. How would younger individuals respond? Direct scribing has been used by Martin (1998) to amplify the 'muted' voices of young people in child protection. She typed their stories as they dictated them to her and followed this with conversations about what had been written. This method would reinforce a collaborative relationship (Egan, 2002).

Yet, such activities are time costly and some practitioners find their practice constrained by institutions with their own agendas. If we, as guidance practitioners, do not pursue practice that applauds creativity we could find ourselves at the mercy of institutions who seek to protect their own interests. With a reduction in face to face guidance foretold in the plans for a proposed National Careers Service (Hayes, 2011) it is crucial to be more creative in our impartial practice. Moving towards professionalism calls for dynamic practice; creativity is the key if guidance practitioners are to be recognised as innovative professionals who embrace these challenging times.

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