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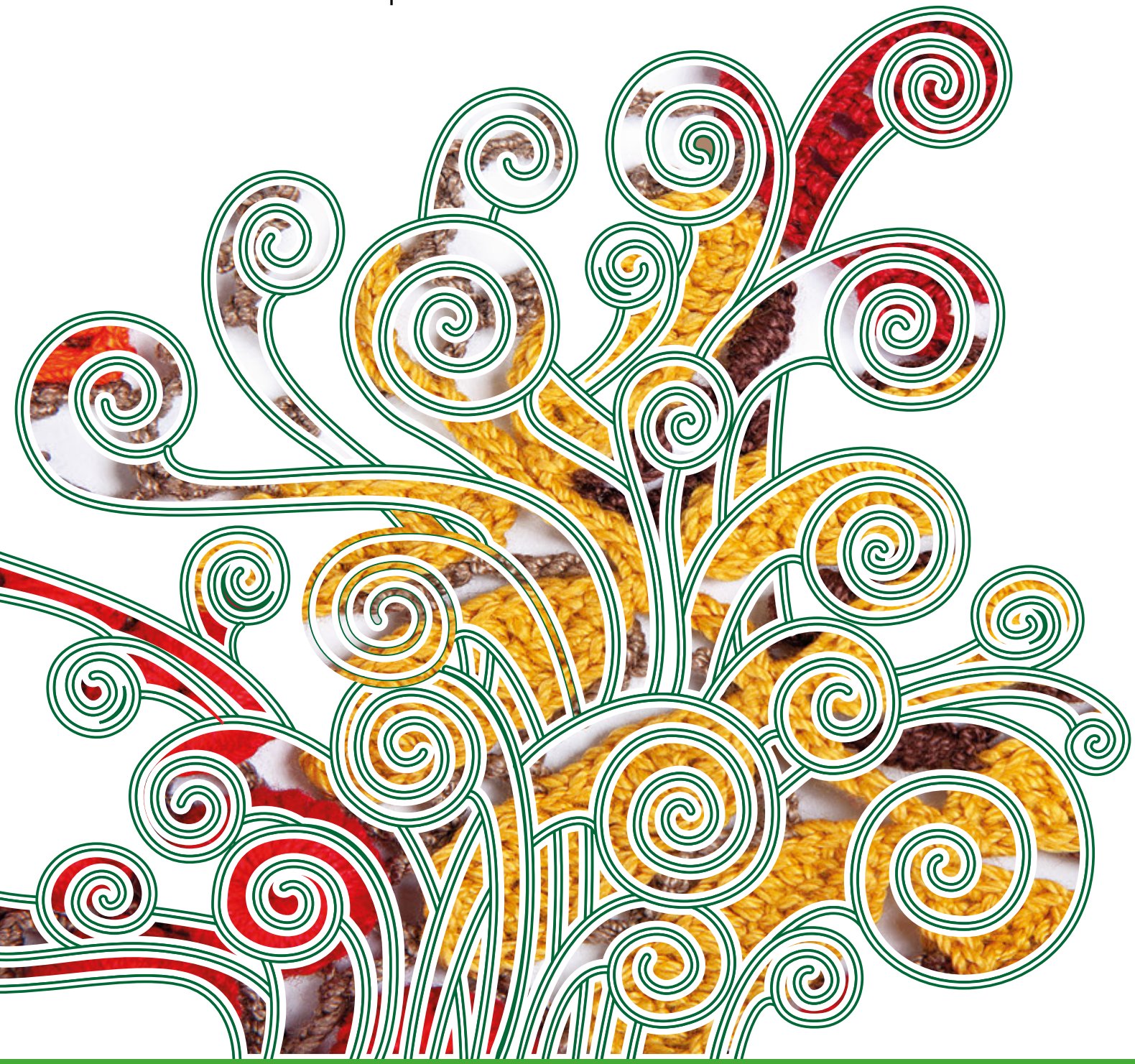

Promoting research and reflective practice in career development

NICEC

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

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The Fellows of NICEC agreed the following statement in 2010.

'The National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) was originally founded as a research institute in 1975. It now plays the role of a learned society for reflective practitioners in the broad field of career education, career guidance/counselling and career development. This includes individuals whose primary role relates to research, policy, consultancy, scholarship, service delivery or management. NICEC seeks to foster dialogue and innovation between these areas through events, networking, publications and projects.

NICEC is distinctive as a boundary-crossing network devoted to career education and counselling in education, in the workplace, and in the wider community. It seeks to integrate theory and practice in career development, stimulate intellectual diversity and encourage transdisciplinary dialogue. Through these activities, NICEC aims to develop research, inform policy and enhance service delivery.

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The NICEC journal publishes articles on the broad theme of career development in any context including:

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- Career development in education: schools, colleges, universities, adult education, public career services.
- Career development in the community: third age, voluntary, charity, social organisations, independent contexts, public career services.

It is designed to be read by individuals who are involved in career development-related work in a wide range of settings including information, advice, counselling, guidance, advocacy, coaching, mentoring, psychotherapy, education, teaching, training, scholarship, research, consultancy, human resources, management or policy. The journal has a national and international readership.

Designed & typeset by J. G. Wilkinson.

JOURNAL OF THE
National Institute for Career Education and Counselling
October 2023, Issue 51

Contents

EDITORIAL

ARTICLES

NEWS

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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Editorial

10.20856/jnicec.5101

Overview of this issue

Pete Robertson and Fiona Christie, Editors

This Autumn we have an open call issue of the Journal, featuring topics on diverse issues of interest to the career development community.

Three articles focus on careers work in higher education settings. **David Winter** provides a framework for thinking about the learning outcomes of career and employability interventions in a university setting. This gives a tool for reflecting on the assumptions underpinning the work. **Emma Lennox** considers the career decision processes of undergraduates studying arts, English and languages. **Maithili Pittea, Asra Saqib, Laura Oxley,** and **Helen Coulshed** look at another aspect of innovative practice in a university setting: peer-to-peer career learning to promote social justice.

Social justice is also the central theme of **Bo Klindt Poulsen**'s contribution. This article argues for a less individualistic and collectivist conception of social justice for career guidance.

Helen Root reports the research that made her the 2023 winner of the Bill Law Memorial Student Award. She describes the career experiences of professional women experiencing cognitive symptoms during the menopause.

Saira Iqbal brings together two different concepts into an approach to understanding career change: protean career theory, and the hero's journey narrative structure.

Sujin Kim provides a critical analysis of the development of certification for vocational counselling in South Korea, using the Australian system as a benchmark for comparison.

Laura Felby and **Randi Skovhus** unpick how teachers in secondary schools in Denmark make sense of their new role in career learning.

We are pleased to see international contributions in this issue, and hope you find something to inspire you here.

Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling
October 2023, Issue 51

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5102

A career guidance for social justice must include many voices

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Abstract

This article discusses the need to make the understanding of social justice in career guidance a collective task for professional communities. The article explores various understandings of social justice in career guidance and how these have been translated into frameworks for practice. Drawing on the theory of communities of practice, the article argues that a professional understanding of social justice could be developed through professional communities of practice with the aim of promoting a pluralism of understandings, not an ultimate consensus. Finally, the article presents a proposed model for such work.

Keywords: Social justice; reflective practice; professional practice; community of practice; equality.

Introduction and method

The concept of social justice is complex. It is a notion that is often used by different groups and individuals, so there are many ideas about what constitutes social justice (Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2018).

It is a concept that often appears as a statement of intent – we want to increase social justice in education, in schools, in the workplace, in society - without it becoming clear what is meant by social justice, how it should be concretely approached, and what

consequences it can have. A career guidance for (increased) social justice is thus no less complex, for what does career guidance for social justice actually mean, beyond its slogan value? Moreover, how should it be approached? And by whom? There already exists a large body of literature on career guidance and social justice, however, this article looks specifically at the importance of a collaborative approach.

In this conceptual article, I will discuss some challenges related to the concept of social justice, when the concept is to find a place in the practice of career guidance. Furthermore, I will provide some suggestions on how to think about social justice from the perspective of professional communities.

I begin the article by discussing different understandings of social justice in career guidance, derived from Sultana (2014) and Watts (2015). I move on to consider how these understandings of social justice in career guidance has been developed into frameworks for career guidance practice by Hooley (2015) and Hooley, Sultana and Thomsen (2019). I argue that these frameworks, however excellent they are, risk being a vehicle for an individualisation of the understanding of social justice, rather than a vehicle for professional discussion. I introduce the principles of community of practice theory (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023) as a way of counterbalancing the latent risk of individualisation in social justice work. Finally, I outline what a concrete model for working with social justice could look like.

Theories of social justice in career guidance

Sultana (2014) points to four (competing) philosophical traditions in the understanding of social justice, ranging from the desire for social harmony, equality, fairness, and (recognition of) differences. This includes both social justice focusing on the good of society, on self-interest of the individual, on just distribution, and on recognition of differences. In a more classical ideological perspective, one could, according to Watts (2015), speak of social justice as dependent on the socio-political ideology of the career counsellor: conservative and concerned with social adaptation; liberal and concerned with non-interference; progressive and concerned with individual change; radical and concerned with social change.

In other words, the content of social justice is not predetermined, and a conservative or liberal approach to guidance also includes a concept of social justice – it is just a different understanding than, for example, a radical approach. That means in order for career guidance for social justice to appear coherent, it must clarify which ideological positions or philosophical traditions it draws upon. One could say that any discussion about promoting social justice in guidance must begin with a clarification of values: what kind of justice?

Sultana (2014) encourages the career counsellor to take a stance, to find their position through conversations with philosophical and ideological traditions, and through experiences from their own practice and life. He does so himself by insisting that career guidance can make a difference and should work towards creating more equality and challenging ‘social class destinies’ - what we in Denmark often call negative social inheritance (Sultana 2014, p. 322).

Watts also takes a stance and points out that because career guidance is fundamentally a political process that deals with the distribution of life chances, and because life chances are unequally distributed in society, guidance must decide 'whether it serves to reinforce such inequalities or to reduce them' (Watts 2015, p. 171).

Sultana and Watts position themselves in a classical critical theoretical stance, where the purpose of knowledge, science, and professions is to help individuals achieve emancipation by uncovering oppressive structures and power relations. This is done, among other things, on the basis that all knowledge and action stem from often hidden interests and can never be considered value-neutral. Therefore, engagement and taking a stance become crucial (Held, 1980).

Frameworks for social justice in career guidance

In the same critical tradition as discussed above, Hooley (2015) has developed five areas of learning and associated questions that he proposes as a framework for emancipatory guidance. These are questions that guidance activities should help people think about and that he highlights as central to all education. The five areas of learning and questions are as follows:

1. Explore ourselves and the world we live, learn, and work in: Who am I?
2. Examine how our experiences relate to broader historical, political, and social systems: How does the world work?
3. Develop strategies that allow us to make the most of our current situation individually: How do I fit into the world?
4. Develop strategies that allow us to make the most of our current situation collectively: How can I live together with others?
5. Consider how the current situation and structure can be changed: How can I change the world?

(Hooley, 2015)

According to Hooley, working with these areas of learning and questions is important in guidance work to support the emancipation process of the guided individual(s) (Hooley, 2015).

This is important work, and Hooley points out crucial areas of learning and questions in guidance practice that have an emancipatory aim. It would be quite natural for counsellors who wish to work with social justice to draw inspiration from the five areas of learning and questions in conversations and other guidance activities with individuals and groups.

A key point emphasised by Hooley, which becomes central in this context, is that it is not the career counsellor who has the answers or should provide answers on how emancipation (or social justice) should be understood, but rather the career counsellor can support the counselee in exploring and deciding for themselves.

The perhaps most concrete and well-developed proposal for how guidance can work for social justice, namely Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen's (2019) five signposts for socially just career guidance, align with the same critical theoretical tradition. The five signposts encourage:

1. Building critical awareness by depicting the world as it is (i.e., uncovering interests of knowledge in the current structure of society).
2. Naming oppression (i.e., identifying oppressive structures and power relations).
3. Questioning what is normal (i.e., going beyond what appears as society's natural norms).
4. Encouraging people to work together (i.e., linking individual emancipation to solidarity and dialogue).
5. Addressing different levels (i.e., acting on the assumption that individuals and their challenges are intertwined with a dialectic between the individual and societal structures).

(Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2019; Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2021).

With these five signposts for social justice Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen ask crucial questions about guidance practice. However, in the following, I would like to point out a risk in this approach and propose, if not a solution, at least a suggestion for handling this risk.

The risk of individualising the meaning of social justice in career guidance

How do we ensure that Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen's five signposts for social justice will be seen not as primarily a task and a responsibility for the individual career counsellor, but a responsibility for both organisation and profession?

There is a risk, I will argue, that Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen's five signposts will be perceived and translated as concepts that primarily have a bearing on the relationship between the individual career counsellor and the person seeking guidance. It may be perceived as if it is primarily in the relationship between the career counsellor and the individual seeking career guidance that critical awareness should be built, oppression should be named, questions about what is normal should be raised, etc., with the aim of emancipating the guided individual(s).

If the focus for understanding what social justice in career guidance can be primarily lies with the individual counsellors and their respective engagement with social justice, the risk is that the understanding of social justice in career guidance becomes (too) closely tied to the career counsellors' own private stance on the concept. Thus, the necessity of reflecting on a broader value basis than one's own and the potential of letting in other voices in the discussion of social justice become underemphasised.

This has the potential consequence that as an individual counsellor in the realm of social justice, one may overlook the boundary between one's own goals and values, the goals

and values of the counselee, and the goals and values that typically characterise the organisation of which one is a part.

The risk is what I would call the individualisation of social justice. An individualisation that risks understanding social justice in career guidance as (primarily) the personal struggle of the individual career counsellor in her own office. And more concerning, it risks the individual career counsellor mistaking the values underlying their stance on social justice for morality, moral truth, and therefore considering disagreement and conflicting values regarding social justice not merely as a difference of opinion, but as something that calls for moral judgment. The other person who does not subscribe to the same set of values, the same ideological understanding of the "right" social justice, either must suffer from false consciousness or be a bad person.

It can be fine to act individually in response to injustice. Maybe the individual career counsellor is indeed right in her understanding of social justice in the concrete situation. However, when it comes to basing professional practice primarily on one's own individual values and ideological positions, I would like to encourage moderation. This may come into play if, instead of looking at the individual career counsellor as an agent for social justice, we view career guidance as a community of practice. By moderation, I mean a humility towards one's own values and ideological starting point for understanding social justice. Also, a willingness to involve, listen to, and acknowledge that others may have different starting points, that they have the right to have them, and that it holds value for us to try to understand each other. This points to the potential for a career guidance for social justice to be anchored and developed in a professional community.

The aim is not to achieve complete agreement on how social justice should be understood, or how socially just career guidance should be practiced. Such agreement is neither realistic nor desirable. However, the goal is to allow space for different voices, different perspectives, and different considerations to be acknowledged and made visible to the involved professionals.

In that sense, I believe it can be meaningful to start from the last two of Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen's five signposts, namely encouraging people to work together and addressing different levels. And include the last two of Hooley's areas of learning and questions mentioned above, namely, encouraging people to work together and consider if and how they want to change structures and the current situation – all of them with a slight twist. I would urge that we not only see these points in relation to the person seeking guidance – as something the career counsellor should encourage and support for the guided individual – but as a starting point for the career counsellor's own professional work with social justice within a community of other professionals.

Communities of practice as drivers for learning and practice development

In my understanding of professional communities, I draw on Wenger (1998) and Wenger-Trayner et al. (2023) and their definition of communities of practice. The professional community can be one version (but not the only one) of a community of practice.

Here, a group of professionals with a common domain of interest join together. They engage in activities around this domain of interest, they build relationships, listen to and learn from each other. In doing so, they develop a shared practice, qualifying it and using the shared understanding to develop approaches, techniques, and coping-strategies. (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023).

> 'The domain provides a common focus, both for members and for external stakeholders; community builds relationships that enable mutual engagement and collective learning; and practice anchors the learning in what people do, both as a source of lived challenges and as a place to try new things' (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023, p. 13).

Thus, in a community of practice, it is the challenges from practice (for instance how to develop a career guidance for social justice) that is the driver for the common learning. Common learning becomes relevant because it can help change the practice. An important point is that a shared understanding does not necessarily mean complete agreement; rather, it means a willingness to listen and learn from others' perspectives.

Communities of practice can take on many different forms. They can be very broad or very narrow in their focus. They can be based on a specific profession or they can encompass many different perspectives. According to Wenger-Trayner et al., communities of practice are structured by three fundamental elements: domain, community, and practice. These three elements provide a focus for the community by helping to address three basic questions: What is the community about? (domain). Who should be at the table? (community). What should members do together? (practice) (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023).

Communities of practice can be established as part of an organisation, between organisations, on a purely voluntary basis, or within civil society. The key factor is 'the active participation of members, who find value in the activities of the community' (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023, p. 65). The driving force behind establishing a community of practice is the desire to learn together and learn from each other in order to address the challenges encountered in one's practice. The starting point for establishing a community of practice is therefore development and participation. Wenger-Trayner et al. describe it in this way: 'You don't design a community on your own and then invite people into your design. You work with members to design it as you go, together, as a way to take the next step. The idea is to design a little, experiment some, do a lot. And repeat' (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023, p. 65).

Communities of practice understood as communities of professionals with a joint interest in developing a career guidance for social justice can also be seen as social justice arenas in their own right. An example of a community of practice could be the research circle, where researches and practitioners meet in a formalised setting to explore and produce knowledge in a reciprocal relationship (Persson, 2009).

Poulsen, Skovhus & Thomsen (2018) point to the potential of the research circle, which shares the features of the community of practice, i.e. a common focus, participant driven engagement and learning and trial in practice, for being both an arena for social justice and

an arena of social justice (Poulsen, Skovhus & Thomsen, 2018). An arena for social justice in the sense that the work in a research circle can 'inspire and develop initiatives and projects that promote social justice in practice' (Poulsen, Skovhus & Thomsen, 2018, p. 221). And an arena of social justice in the sense that 'they aspire to be socially just in their structure, because of the reciprocal exchange' between the participants, creating a higher degree of solidarity and understanding (p. 221).

Poulsen & Buland (2020) also point to the potentials of (professional) communities in professional learning and development. We argue that 'it is precisely the community, the reflections, challenges and co-research of the other participants in the circle that contribute to learning and changes in practice' (Poulsen & Buland, 2020, p. 227).

Thus, a community of practice, whether it is a research circle or another form of organisation, offers a range of experiences that can be valuable in the guidance professional's work of translating social justice into practice. There is potential to reduce the experience of isolation, to build trust and confidence in addressing social justice in one's own practice, and to explore and develop different practices.

In the following section I would like to propose a model for the work of understanding what guidance for social justice can be, built upon the ideas of a community of practice of career counsellors and taking its starting point in the last two of Hooley, Sultana and Thomsen's five signposts and the last two of Hooley's (2015) areas for learning as mentioned above.

A model for exploring career guidance for social justice in professional communities

As shown in Figure 1, the outer four boxes are four questions of reflection and action that can be beneficial to ask within a professional guidance community to uncover four central points.

Question 1: What are the various notions of value and ideological positions present in our career guidance community regarding the concept of social justice?

Question 2: How can these different positions enrich each other?

Question 3: What would we like to impact based on the community's values?

Question 4: Whom would we like to influence?

In the inner four-part circle are my preliminary suggestions for elements that can be included in reflections in the four phases.

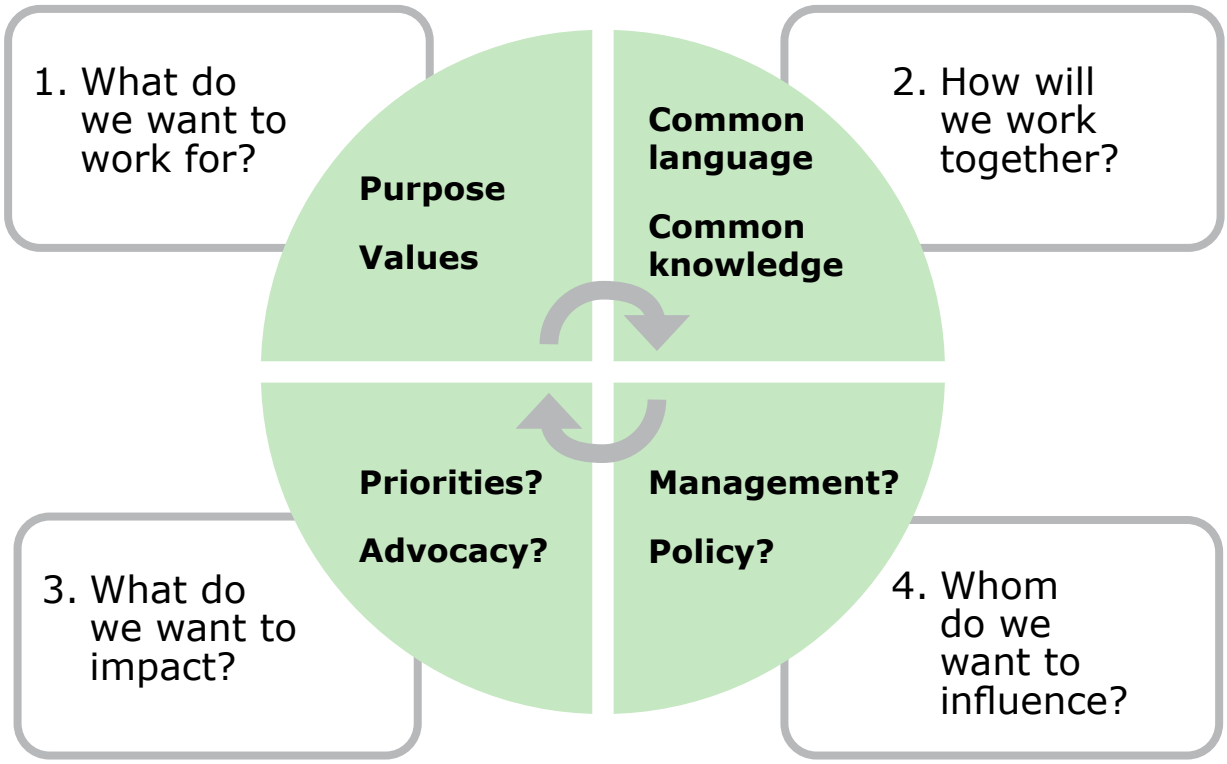

Figure 1. A model for exploring career social justice in professional communities (Bo Klindt Poulsen, July 2023).

In the following, I will briefly comment on the four phases.

Question 1: What do we want to work for?

This is about voicing, clarifying and discussing values in relation to social justice. What understandings of social justice do we each bring in our understanding of the role of career guidance? How and why are they different? Moreover, it is about being aware of the institutional or contextual perspectives on social justice, as they may exist in different mission statements. For example, if one works as a counsellor in secondary school, the secondary school's mission statement could be a co-constructor of the question about social justice. If one works in adult guidance, there may be reflections to be found in the EU's resolution on lifelong guidance. The key is to confront one's own value starting point with others', so that one can handle, accommodate, and listen to disagreement and understand that the notion of social justice is not unambiguous

Question 2: How will we work together?

This is about building a shared knowledge regarding social justice - based on the exploration in question 1. On what can we agree? On what do we disagree? What should we be curious about together? What should we investigate/read/discuss together to gain more insight? How can we support each other in the work of social justice in guidance?

Question 3: What do we want to impact?

Here, it is about considering what we can collectively work to influence, leveraging the strength of the community. It could be about priorities within our career guidance organisation. What is perceived as important and what is seen as less important? How are the counselees and the career guidance and the counsellor evaluated, and does it hinder or promote the forms of social justice we want to support? Could we for instance ask different questions of evaluation?

Question 4: Whom do we want to influence?

This is about exploring who (outside the professional community) can help us address the issues related to social justice that we want to influence. Is it management, and if so, at which levels? How should we discuss this with them? Is it partners/colleagues within the same organisation but in different roles? Is it partners/colleagues in other organisations? How do we engage in conversations with them about this?

I do not see this model as an alternative to Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen's five signposts (or Hooley's five areas of learning) but as a supplement that, based on their ideas, highlights the potential of approaching the development of social justice in career guidance from a collective perspective within professional communities.

The key point of this model is that the criterion for success is not agreement or consensus, neither in terms of understanding what social justice can be nor how it should be practiced. Instead, it is about allowing space for many different voices, so the development of socially just guidance can occur on a polyphonic basis. It is important, as Mouffe points out in her insistence on pluralism and agonism as the basis for a more democratic society, to 'make room for dissent and for the institutions through which it can be manifested' (Mouffe, 2004, p. 47). The aim of the community of practice is to engage in learning and development together, however, it is also central for this process that the community of practice has 'a vibrant public sphere where many conflicting views can be expressed and where there is the possibility to choose among legitimate alternative projects' (Mouffe, 2004, p. 42).

Conclusion

The model presented above is an attempt to shift the focus from the individual counsellor's relationship with and valuation of social justice to a collectively oriented perspective on social justice. It aims to transform diversity in the understanding of social justice in career guidance into a strength. It seeks to include a multitude of voices in the qualification of what social justice can be both conceptually and as concrete practice.

As mentioned above, I see the individualisation of the understanding of social justice as a risk, a risk that can involve a confusion of values with morality and a rejection of other diverging views on social justice as either false consciousness to be dismantled or morally reprehensible. I do not believe that this model can completely prevent this - particularly if the professional communities in question have a very high degree of ideological agreement or homogeneity of values - and it is a risk that I do not address here.

Neither do I address the potential and obvious challenges to working with a model like this in professional communities of practice such as lack of time, commitment, or organisational support. It would be interesting to transform this conceptual model to a concrete, action-research based study, where professionals from different arenas of career guidance – for instance career counsellors, career guidance researchers, managers, etc. – could join in a conversation and development of a career guidance for social justice.

However, I believe that reflecting on hearing and accepting other perspectives and reflecting on social justice as a collective project can counteract a professional individualisation of social justice in guidance, harvest other potentials through dialogue and exchange and professionally strengthen the legitimisation of working for social justice in career guidance.

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Article

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A framework for analysing careers and employability learning outcomes

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Abstract

This paper describes the development of a framework designed to aid the critical analysis of the theoretical and ideological assumptions underlying the stated learning outcomes of curricular and non-curricular careers and employability education activities. The framework was developed by integrating a learning-oriented definition of employability with a rationalised set of graduate capitals and explicit considerations of social justice. The framework differentiates between the performative and transformative functions of graduate capitals and introduces the novel concept of critical capital. Locating learning outcomes within the framework should enable careers educators and researchers to identify patterns which could indicate inherent theoretical and ideological biases and blind spots in careers and employability education.

Keywords: Higher education career services; employability; career capital; career learning

The context of careers and employability in higher education

The last decade has seen an increasing drive to integrate careers and employability learning into the mainstream curriculum of higher education (HE) institutions as a way to ensure that all students are given an opportunity to benefit from support (Winter &

Yates, 2021). The highest level of integration is the inclusion of careers and employability education within curricular teaching and assessment. This has led to an increased focus by careers professionals on pedagogical principles such as the formulation and assessment of learning outcomes related to careers and employability and how best to integrate those outcomes with subject specific learning outcomes. Should they be grafted in as outcomes that are obviously related to careers and employability and distinct from subject learning outcomes (inserted), or should the existing subject learning outcomes be modified to enhance their relevance to careers and employability goals (extracted) (Daubney, 2020)? The answer to these questions is often determined by the willingness of university teaching staff to accept careers and employability learning as a valid aspect of learning within an academic discipline or, at least, to view it as beneficial rather than harmful. However, some academics see the integration of careers and employability education as not just an encroachment on scarce teaching time but as a threat to the rigour of their discipline (Speight et al., 2013). Perhaps part of the problem is the tendency for HE career services, when they do gain access to the curriculum, to develop learning outcomes that are focused mainly the acquisition of skills and attributes that are perceived as being only attractive to employers, in what Leonard Holmes (2013) has termed a 'possessive' approach to graduate employability. Such approaches often contain unquestioned, and even unarticulated, theoretical assumptions about the nature of employability and ideological assumptions about the purpose of careers and employability education.

A potential, but frequently unrealised, benefit of this increased focus on pedagogy by careers professionals is the opportunity to critically examine all careers and employability activities as educational endeavours, even if they are not part of the formal curriculum. Many of the extra-curricular and co-curricular activities of HE careers services are undertaken for reasons of political expediency, financial pragmatism or just traditional expectations rather than a systematic analysis of their potential learning outcomes based on clear and explicit theoretical underpinnings (Winter & Yates, 2021).

A framework for analysing learning outcomes

In developing the module *Strategic Approaches to Careers and Employability in Higher Education* as part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning & Teaching in HE at the University of London, we wanted to develop a framework to help course participants to identify and reflect on the theoretical and ideological assumptions underlying the stated learning outcomes of curricular and non-curricular careers and employability learning activities as a starting point for critical reflection on their approach.

The framework consists of two elements:

- a simple hierarchical taxonomy to evaluate the level or depth of careers and employability learning implied by the outcome
- a set of possible domains the in which learning could occur which is sufficiently comprehensive to encompass a range of factors that contribute to graduate employability

Our assumption here is that outcomes associated with deeper levels of learning in a particular domain indicate that a higher value has been placed on that domain, as the achievement of such outcomes require more investment by the educator and the student. Depth of learning is, therefore, a proxy for the importance placed on particular aspects of employability by the educator. The distribution of high value learning across different domains would, therefore, provide some indication of underlying priorities and assumptions in the learning design.

Defining depth of learning

For the purposes of the framework we needed a taxonomy of learning that was hierarchical in order to analyse the level of importance associated with each outcome. There are a range of such learning taxonomies we could have used (Biggs & Collis, 1982; Bloom et al., 1973). However, these often focus on the cognitive domain of knowledge or have different hierarchies for affective and psychomotor domains. Instead, we used a simpler learning hierarchy embedded within a definition of employability which frames employability development as a learning activity rather than just a process of acquiring attributes desired by employers.

> Employability means that students and graduates can discern, acquire, adapt and continually enhance the skills, understandings and personal attributes that make them more likely to find and create meaningful paid and unpaid work that benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.
>
> (Oliver, 2015, p. 59)

This definition clearly places employability as a life-long learning task linked to the discovery and creation of meaning through work-related activities. In addition, the verbs 'discern', 'acquire', 'adapt' and 'enhance' provide a concise and useful hierarchical taxonomy of learning processes which enables us to assess the intended depth of learning in any proposed learning outcomes. To facilitate analysis of outcomes, we assigned a numerical value to each level, from discerning (1) to enhancing (4).

To facilitate the identification of the relevant hierarchical level of learning, we further sub-divided each of the processes (see Figure 1). In order to 'discern' what is likely to make them more successful, individuals need to be able to recognise and articulate the extent to which particular resources are available and useful to them. To 'acquire' particular employability assets, individuals need opportunities to experiment in various contexts and then reflect on what they have gained from their experiences. To 'adapt' these assets, individuals need to explore the extent to which what they have acquired can be applied in different contexts and be translated between contexts. To 'enhance' their assets, individuals need to be equipped to evaluate the usefulness of their acquired employability resources in achieving their goals and formulate plans to develop their resources further.

Defining learning domains

Oliver's definition of employability suffers from one shortcoming that is common to a number of such definitions — it appears to focus solely on the characteristics of

the individual as determinants of employability ('skills, understandings and personal attributes'). This issue also applies to commonly used cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning. They fail to draw attention to the interaction between these individual characteristics and socio-economic factors in the prevailing labour market in determining the individual's likelihood of achieving success (Healy, 2023). One concept which facilitates a focus on this interaction is that of sociological capital, which articulates the relative value ascribed to particular individual attributes within specific social contexts (Bourdieu, 1986). Several authors have attempted to describe the various forms of capital that might be linked to graduate employability, resulting in a number of divergent frameworks (Brown et al., 2020; Clarke, 2018; Lehmann, 2019; Tomlinson, 2017). They all tend to include broadly similar concepts of social capital. Lehman refers to 'personal capital', within which he includes relevant work experience or volunteering that might make an individual attractive to potential employers. In contrast, Clarke includes these factors within human capital but separates out career self-management and career-building skills even though it could be argued that they are merely a specific subset of human capital. Brown et al. group a mix of human and cultural capital together under the headings of 'knowing self' and 'knowing how'. More justifiably, Tomlinson includes such enhancing experiences and achievements within the concept of cultural capital. Clarke separates out personality variables and adaptability as important factors influencing employability. Tomlinson includes the latter within what he refers to as psychological capital alongside resilience and self-efficacy. He further goes on to describe identity capital as the extent to which the individual invests in developing work-related identities which is similar to the 'knowing self' grouping of Brown et al.

Rather than just being viewed as individual attributes or 'heroic' character traits, qualities such as resilience and adaptability can be viewed as resulting from the possession of various forms of capital, such as a strong sense of personal identity, supportive social networks, good self-management skills and enriching life experiences (Estêvão et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2022). In developing a useable analytical model, we considered that it would be more economical to combine Tomlinson's concepts of psychological and identity capital into one form of capital similar to 'knowing self' in Brown et al. and to borrow Lehman's misused term personal capital to encapsulate this combination. Lehmann also emphasised the importance of economic capital — the extent to which your access to financial resources allows you to develop other forms of employability capital. Whilst this is an important factor, it is not one that necessarily lends itself to the development of learning outcomes.

Our analysis of these capitals frameworks led us to adopt four types of capital for our initial analytical model:

- social capital – the breadth and depth of an individual's social networks and their value in providing a sense of belonging and in opening access to new opportunities.
- human capital – the breadth and depth of the skills and knowledge that an individual accumulates that are of value to the individual throughout their life and of value to others in particular social contexts
- cultural capital — the breadth and depth of awareness and contextualised behaviours developed though previous experiences and the value they have in facilitating admittance to and credibility within particular social groups
- personal capital — the range and coherence of the contextual identities, values and

meaningful personal narratives that an individual has been able to develop and articulate which enable them to identify with different social groups and maintain a sense of purpose.

The common distinction between bonding and bridging networks in social capital (Claridge, 2018) indicates the possibility that each of the capitals may be used to achieve two distinct purposes. Some capitals may have a *performative* function, enabling the individual to successfully integrate and progress within an existing context under relatively stable conditions. Other capitals may have a *transformative* function enabling the individual to manage voluntary and involuntary change and to successfully transition into new contexts or operate across multiple contexts. It is entirely possible that some of the same capitals will be useful for both performance and transformation.

Performative social capital refers to the strong 'bonding' micro-level networks that promote embedding within a specific context. Transformative social capital refers to the varied 'bridging' macro-level networks that facilitate transitions. Performative human capital refers to the skills and knowledge relevant to and valued within a specific context, development of which usually involves acquiring deeper levels of specific contextual expertise. Transformative human capital refers to the skills and knowledge that facilitate change and transition. This could include so-called 'transferable' skills as well as life-long career management skills. Performative cultural capital refers to achievements and experiences that are highly relevant to the perceived credibility of an individual within a particular existing professional context. Transformative cultural capital refers to the diversity of achievements and experiences that provide evidence of an individual's ability to move between and operate across multiple contexts. Performative personal capital consists of the goals, values and sense of self that enable an individual to strongly identify with a particular professional context. Transformative personal capital relates to the flexibility or diversity of an individual's goals and values and their sense of having multiple identities that allow them to manage change.

It is possible to extend the idea of capitals used for transformative purposes beyond that of transforming the individual to meet the needs of different contexts. We could also consider the possibility of individuals transforming the societal context to better meet their needs or achieve their goals. This led us to explorations of socially just and emancipatory approaches to career development work. In particular, the five signposts to social justice (Hooley et al., 2021) which references ideas from critical pedagogy. Although the signposts seemed to be primarily aimed at practitioners, they could also be considered as potential learning outcomes for students which incorporate personal human, cultural and social capitals of a particularly transformative nature.

The preceding considerations led us to develop the framework by defining a fifth type of capital which could be developed by careers and employability learning:

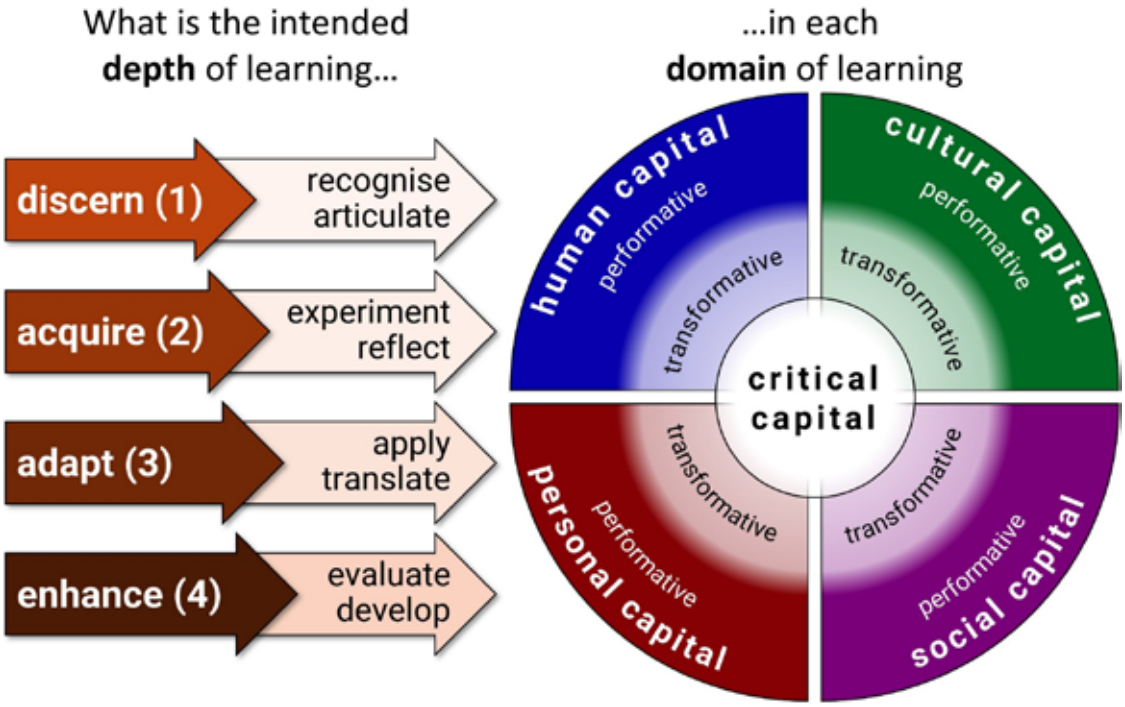
- critical capital — a set of transformative capitals that enable the individual to develop a critical approach to dysfunctional or restrictive societal structures and empower them to pursue social change.

Unlike the other capitals, this capital is, by its very nature, transformative but with a focus on equipping individuals to drive change rather than just adapt to it. As well as an orientation to social justice, this capital could also be relevant to entrepreneurial education,

which has also been linked to critical pedagogy (Walmsley & Wraae, 2022). According to the Quality Assurance Agency developing an 'entrepreneurial mindset involves students acquiring 'self-awareness of their own enterprising and entrepreneurial capabilities, as well as the motivation and self-discipline to apply these flexibly in different contexts to achieve desired results' and recognising 'themselves as a person who is creative or resourceful; who can translate ideas into actions; or who is prepared to challenge assumptions through critical investigation and research' (QAA, 2018, p. 19).

The resulting analytical framework is graphically represented in Figure 1. This incorporates the five forms of capital that could be developed as outcomes of careers and employability learning activities.

Figure 1.



Using the framework to indicate underlying assumptions

To analyse a learning activity, one must examine each stated learning outcome to determine (a) the indicated depth of learning (scored 1 to 4) and, (b) the particular capital domain(s) where the intended learning takes place. Where multiple domains are indicated the depth of learning score is added to each domain.

The extent to which this analysis is possible will depend on how precisely the learning outcomes have been articulated. Difficulty in identifying depth or domain may indicate that learning outcomes are potentially ambiguous.

Once all learning outcomes have been analysed the depth of learning scores in each domain are summed to provide a numerical indicator of the relative importance of each form of capital. Two examples of this analysis are given towards the end of this article.

Assumptions about approaches to employability

In Holmes' (2013) categorisation, a 'possessive' approach to graduate employability will have learning outcomes mainly situated within the domain of human capital, although they may to extend to varying degrees into personal and cultural capital. A social 'positioning' approach will have outcomes primarily situated within social capital, although they may also extend into personal and cultural capital. A 'processual' approach is likely to have learning outcomes distributed between personal and cultural capital as it relates to the claiming and warranting of different social identities throughout various educational and work transitions (Holmes, 2015).

Theoretical assumptions

Learning outcomes mainly located within the domain of personal capital may indicate a preference for subjective definitions of career success, especially if they emphasise the importance of personal meaning and identity (Heslin, 2005). Learning outcomes located in the domain of cultural capital, focusing on concrete achievements and experience, are likely to indicate a preference for objective definitions of career success.

Learning outcomes mainly distributed within the domains of human and personal capital are likely to be related to assumptions of *contest mobility*, where success is deemed to be determined by individual characteristics such as talent, effort and personal motivation (Kinloch, 1969). Such a distribution may also indicate a focus on individualistic, psychological theories of career development. Learning outcomes mainly distributed within cultural and social capital indicate assumptions of *sponsored mobility*, where success is deemed to be determined through acceptance and support from those in positions of power. Such a distribution may indicate an underlying focus on sociologically-oriented career theories.

Deeper outcomes in performative sub-domains, particularly in personal, human and cultural domains, could indicate a tendency towards person-environment fit theories related to how individual characteristics and experience lead to acceptance and success within specific contexts. They may also indicate assumptions that career choice is an event that happens at a limited number of transition points (static or punctuated equilibrium development assumptions).

Deeper outcomes in transformative sub-domains could indicate a tendency towards developmental theories (particularly concentrated in personal capital linked to development of self-concept); or those related to unplanned opportunities driving change (if concentrated in social capital or cultural linked to opportunities created by bridging networks or transformative life experiences) (Winter, 2023).

Deeper outcomes in critical capital indicate an emphasis on social justice approaches to career choice and development or highly agentic assumptions linked to entrepreneurship.

Ideological assumptions

A professional ideology is a set of assumptions about what you believe your role is and what issues you think take priority. Tony Watts developed a framework which presents four potential ideologies underlying careers and employability work, based on whether you prioritise the needs of the individual or the needs of society and whether you see your purpose as supporting the status quo or promoting change (Watts, 1996).

Whilst it is not completely clear cut, a preponderance of deeper outcomes in performative human and cultural capital could indicate a 'conservative' ideology — directing individuals towards meeting the needs of society. Deeper outcomes in performative personal and social capital could indicate a 'liberal' ideology — equipping individuals to pursue their current aspirations. Deeper outcomes across the transformative sub-domains (especially related to personal and social capital) could indicate a 'progressive' ideology — encouraging individual to raise their aspirations and transcend limitations. Deeper outcomes in critical capital indicate a 'radical' ideology — equipping and working with individuals to challenge and change societal structures.

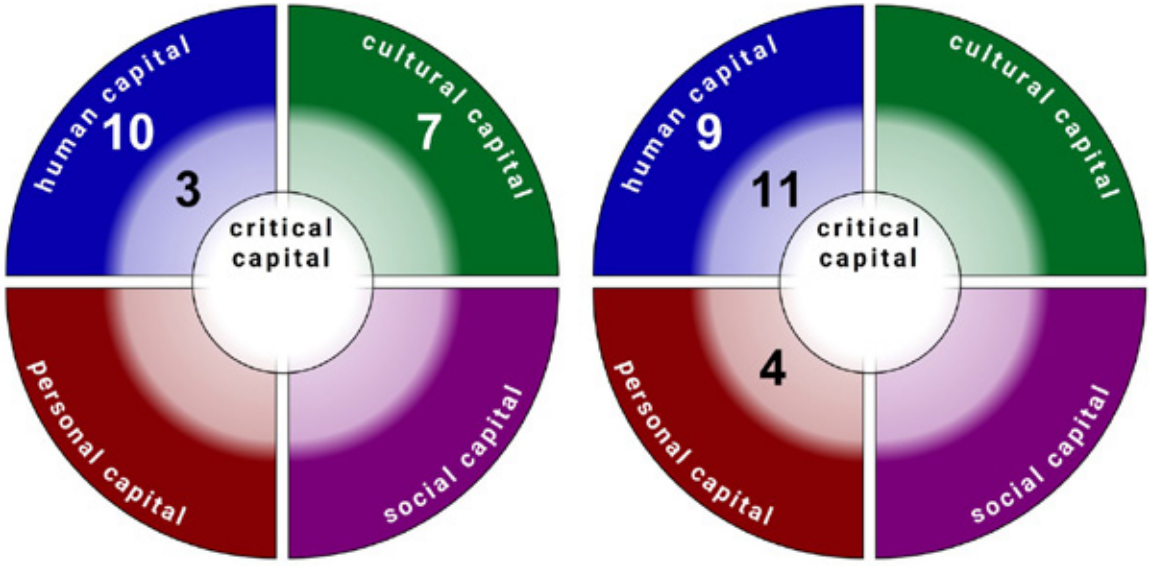
Uses and limitations of the framework

The framework was developed to help careers professionals, academics and university leaders to critically evaluate their approach to careers and employability education by exploring the implicit assumptions behind any intended learning outcomes, whether defined or implied. In particular, we wanted to encourage exploration of the extent to which curricular and non-curricular careers and employability learning had been designed to reflect the mission, values and identity of a particular higher education institution and its socio-political context. It requires learning outcomes to be articulated and their level and domain to be identified. The total of the numerical values of the learning level of the outcomes contained in each domain can then be summed to provide an indication of the weight given to the various capitals in the intended learning outcomes.

Figure 2 shows an illustrative example of completed analyses of the learning outcomes for (a) a work placement module in a social work course and (b) an optional professional skills and employability module in a business school. Both show a preponderance of outcomes in the domain of human capital indicating a mainly 'possessive' approach to employability development. For the work placement module, most of these outcomes were determined to be performative capitals, which is predictable with a vocational course where the students are being equipped to succeed in a pre-defined occupational environment. The employability module, on the other hand, had more of a balance between performative and transformative human capital. This might reflect the wider vocational focus and the need to concentrate on capitals that can be used in transitions between employment contexts. The work placement module also had outcomes located in the domain of cultural capital, with nothing explicit in personal or social capital, which would indicate an ideological focus on the needs of 'society'. This is consistent with a course focused on equipping students to meet the established standards of a professional body. The employability module had some outcomes in the domain of personal capital, with no explicit reference to cultural or social capital. This might indicate contest mobility assumptions about the labour market. Neither module had explicit outcomes in the social or critical capital domains. Whilst it may

not be appropriate for the modules to have outcomes in these domains, analysis using the framework allows us to reflect on whether these omissions are intentional, accidental or indicative of some form of theoretical or ideological bias.

Figure 2.



a. Work placement module b. Taught employability module

Whilst the framework can be used to highlight certain biases and omissions in the learning outcomes for careers and employability activities, it does not enable an evaluation of whether particular intended outcomes are valid or sufficient. It will not tell you whether you have chosen the right components of human, cultural, social, personal or critical capital to include as intended outcomes. However, it could help to highlight the assumptions behind any theory of change or logic model that underpins those choices. For a relatively concise framework, it allows for a broad but reasonably sophisticated analysis of many of the key theoretical and ideological assumptions underlying the intended outcomes of careers and employability learning activities. As a result, it could be used to prompt an examination of how careers and employability learning activities might be modified in order to have a more balanced range of outcomes.

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Article

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From passion to profession: Career journey influences on Arts, English and Language students

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Abstract

This study examines career decision making journeys and expectations of undergraduate Arts, English and Language students, and potential benefits of appropriate interventions to support graduate outcomes. Employing a mainly social constructivist theoretical framework, objectives included gaining an understanding of student perceptions of their own employability, meaningful employment and perceived barriers to graduate progression. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with final year students, and through thematic analysis results revealed students' passion for their subject and the desire to use their skillset in paid employment. Significantly, embedding a work placement option removed the barrier of limited time and increased workplace confidence.

Keywords: Higher education; graduate careers; creative careers; work experience

Introduction

While creative industries contribute significantly to the economy (DCMS, 2021), the career journeys of these graduates are less linear and predictable than other vocational professionals (Bridgstock, 2011). This can present challenges for careers practitioners supporting this cohort. Within Queen's University Belfast (QUB), the school with the most traditionally creative subject focus is Arts, English and Languages (AEL). While many of

the drama, film, music and broadcast production students within this school aspire to the creative industries, graduate outcomes data has shown it has increasingly become an area of interest for English and modern language students as well, who pursue careers in creative and screen writing, social media creation, and arts administration (QUB CES, 2020).

Student feedback on employability support is important for Careers, Employability and Skills (CES), the central careers service within the university, to develop appropriate targeted guidance and opportunities. The employability challenges faced by Arts, English and Languages (AEL) students were highlighted by data from the Graduate Exit Survey (GES), commissioned by Queen's University Belfast (QUB) in 2020 as a one-off review to examine if and how Covid had impacted the status and future plans of university leavers. Of 16 schools, AEL ranked the lowest in the GES when asked if they had secured a graduate job - only 5% had been successful.

Analysis of data gathered from the First Year Experience Survey (QUB, 2020) and the Second Year Experience Survey (QUB, 2020) revealed that students in AEL showed the lowest levels of satisfaction and awareness regarding careers and employability support. Notably, when comparing data from the two surveys, it was evident that satisfaction and awareness declined from the first to the second year of the degree. This decrease suggests a reduction in confidence and visibility concerning career support—a deviation from the overall faculty and university trends, where students typically exhibited an increase in satisfaction and confidence as they progressed in their studies.

Details from the National Student Survey students' optional comments section revealed of the 124 comments submitted, 100 addressed employability (Office for Students, 2020). That 81% of the comments freely referenced employability demonstrates a strong interest from this cohort, that they were considering options post-graduation and their transition to the workplace.

The university, and CES, were being held accountable by students for some of the barriers to gaining meaningful employment, with comments including 'We don't get the same treatment regarding careers and employability fairs and resources', 'Arts students feel very ignored by the university', 'the careers service was confusing and unused' and 'the university could have enhanced my employability' (anonymous AEL students comments, NSS, 2020). This raises questions about the balance between university support and student initiative. In what is meant to be a partnership does one side feel the other is not doing enough. In an attempt to understand the AEL student mindset towards their subject, assess any gaps in communication between students and CES, and improve support for this cohort, the research questions aim to investigate student perceptions of the following:

- What are the perceptions of AEL students regarding the employability requirements within their chosen labour market, and to what extent do their current skills align to these requirements? (Addressing sector and self-awareness).
- What does 'meaningful employment' mean to AEL students? (What do they consider 'success'?)
- What barriers do AEL students face? (What have CES missed?)
- How can CES work with AEL students to help them reach their potential?

Literature review

The purpose of this literature review is to highlight the existing collection of research featuring undergraduate students in creative arts and how they navigate their careers.

An overview of the theoretical framework applied in this context will also be outlined.

This review helped to define the interview questions to meet the research objectives of understanding student mindset and improving student support.

While studies in the area of career journey influences and decision making have been conducted with undergraduate cohorts including business (Taylor & Hooley, 2014; Wilton, 2012) and STEM subjects (Sucan, 2019; Castellanos, 2018), literature for AEL disciplines has focused more on PhD level students (Guerin, 2020), policy (McCormack & Baron, 2023), multiple stakeholders (Harvey & Shahjahan, 2013) or post-conservatoire employability (Bennett, 2008; Blackstone, 2019). However, Bridgstock's (2011) research with creative arts students highlighted the importance of strong career management skills by graduation to enable student progression, a need to develop a student's career identity, and that embedding careers in the curriculum helped to build career confidence. There is also a need to introduce the concept of arts entrepreneurship (Bridgstock, 2013), to prepare students for portfolio careers (Bartleet et al., 2012) and to manage student expectations by increasing career awareness of the realities of the creative sectors (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015). This study wants to highlight the student voice behind the quantitative data of the GES (2020) and the first- and second-year experience surveys (2020), to document the undergraduate AEL student experience and add to the body of relevant literature.

When establishing parameters, the research adopted a mainly Social Constructivist viewpoint; this allowed consideration of the individuals sense making process but within a social context, through previous life and learning experiences, observations and interactions with others. Social Constructivism in careers theory is a category of perspective that places increased importance on the influence of culture and communication with others when making sense of reality and therefore making decisions (Derry, 1999), and holds that knowledge is constructed through social and cultural lenses (Ernest, 1998). It emphasizes the importance of external factors which surround an individual in understanding their career management decisions. As 'employability' is a socially constructed concept, this research was interested in how AEL students had assimilated influences and how these would be used to define 'meaningful employment'.

In particular, the work of Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) has been influential in this study as it highlights three interacting fields of influence when making career decisions; 1) that decision making is a pragmatically rational process to the individual, 2) that interactions with others are influential and not always fairly distributed, and 3) that timings of decision making can mean that career paths and decisions are not always linear, that 'the location of decisions (often lay) within the partly unpredictable pattern of turning-points and routines that make up the life course' (p.29). Therefore, no decision, including career decision making, can ever be truly context free. They introduced the idea of 'horizon for action' (p.35), defining the arena within which an individual is either set, or perceives themselves as being set in, from which they identify they can move within.

Another relevant thinking tool is the Systems Theory Framework (STF) of Career Development developed by Patton and McMahon (2006), which hovers between constructivist and social constructivist lenses. They highlight that reality is made or constructed by the individual, that viewpoints and beliefs are subjective, relative and not fixed. It recognises the influence of external factors on an individual and also the role of chance and unplanned opportunities. The analysis will focus on when students mentioned intrinsic and extrinsic factors as career influences, as well as chance circumstances.

In regard to student identity and perceptions of future employability, previous research and writing by Bérubé (2002) and Ashton (2015) draw attention to the importance of the subject studied by Arts students as part of, and an extension of, their identify. Knights (2005) discusses 'an academic tribe' (p.33) to describe the importance of belonging. However, the introduction of an employability agenda (HEA, 2015) was a reinforcement that individuals are expected to gain the skills they need to construct and manage their own careers, regardless and independent of academic subject studied. Transitioning from an academic to professional identity can be difficult for non-vocational students (Daicoff, 2014) but Reddan (2015) was able to demonstrate the increase in student confidence and decision-making ability simply by completing an optional career management module.

How students view this social construction of employability, and the figure of 'The Graduate', influences both pre-graduation behaviours and the cultural meanings and perceptions associated with being a graduate (Christie, 2019). Holmes (2014) also highlighted the students process of how they assimilate then present their employability, how others perceive them in that identity, and the interactional nature of 'becoming a graduate' (p 220). This will impact on student goal setting and defining achievement - do students have a strong career identity to which they aspire influencing their career management, or do they have broader and more flexible identities in mind? Importantly, how can a careers practitioner best support students through these multitudes of career trajectories.

This literature review focuses on understanding how undergraduate students in creative arts navigate their careers, and the theoretical frameworks used in this context. It highlights the influence of social constructivism and how intrinsic and extrinsic factors impact career decision-making. The review also references key concepts like Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) horizons for action, and Patton and McMahon's Systems Theory Framework of Career Development. Additionally, it discusses the significance of student identity, perceptions of future employability, and the impact of the social construction of employability on students' behaviors and goals.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology (Ritchie et al, 2013) was used in this study as the objectives were interested in student experiences and how these had been processed and developed in a careers decision making context. Semi structured interviews were chosen to give the balance of structure and flexibility needed with a narrative approach (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). For the fluidity that this study required, thematic analysis was the analytical tool used (Terry et al, 2017). This allowed for the inclusion of potential new and unique themes being identified and constructed from the data, as well as possibly accounting for and confirming trends from previous research. Qualitative research is inductive and

inductive coding (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019) was used throughout to accommodate the viewpoints expressed.

Semi structured interview questions included:

- Tell me how you went about choosing your degree subject.
- Concerning the career goals you set for yourself when starting university, what is your assessment of the progress you have made towards achieving them?
- Since you have been at QUB what support have you had to understand your career options or gain relevant experience?
- Is there anything that has prevented you from engaging in career development activities?
- If you could have designed careers support throughout your time at university, what would you include and when?

These interviews were held with final year AEL undergraduate students who were completing an optional but credit bearing Work Placement Module (WPM). This double credit module spanning two semesters, integrates 100 hours of practical work placement with employability lectures led jointly by academic staff, CES and employers. These students had completed three years of study with QUB and could reflect across their time and experiences of their degree. They were also just about to complete their education and enter the world as graduates so were contemplating their next steps. This combined viewpoint at a time of transition made them motivated and engaged stakeholders, and they volunteered to participate in the interviews. The study recognises that the small sample size of twelve students, approximately 20% of the WPM cohort, could not be representative of the entirety of the AEL student body, and further research with unengaged students would also be useful.

The research project received full ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee in accordance with established protocols and guidelines. All interviewees gave informed consent to participate. Interviews were conducted online, recorded then transcribed with each participant being given a pseudonym to avoid identification. After transcription, answers and comments were analysed for recurring themes and opinions expressed, both positive and negative, and also new areas of discussion. As advised by Kvale (1996), analysis was an ongoing process and took place after each interview. Any coding was dependent on the information gathered to anticipate new themes and ideas while relating back to the literature review and research questions.

Findings and discussion

After transcription each interview was coded against the four main research questions, and six key areas of discussion were identified as being important to understanding the AEL student mindset towards employability and providing relevant support.

1. Making career decisions

When asked why they had chosen their degree course, ten of the twelve students specifically mentioned the intrinsic factor of enjoyment of their subject, for example 'I just love music, I just felt it was the only thing worth going to uni to do' (Leah, music) and 'it was my passion' (Sophia, film). Higher education was chosen as there was underlying awareness this would be an appropriate path to move closer to an end goal, even if that wasn't yet clearly defined. While three students had maintained a clear employment target, others were open to new opportunities. Four students had changed career orientation during their degree, some through disappointment realising how much they still had to learn, others had expanded their horizons for action with what they could do with their degree (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). This included Rachael (drama) who was inspired by an entrepreneur programme and pursuing business, and Lola (English) who was considering using her skills in leadership and activism.

The influence of pre-university school or college careers support when considering higher education, and then what to study, was a key extrinsic influence in the student's career stories (Acquah et al., 2017). The interviewees had mixed responses when recalling their previous experiences of formal career support. One said 'it was more university guidance than career guidance' (Joel, film) with institution choice taking precedence over subject. Five students remembered a bias against creative subjects and Evan (music) felt so pressured towards STEM he initially applied for a maths and physics course. Regardless of the quality delivered, each respondent recalled embedded, in-curricular classes, in all pre-university contexts. Reflections on this structure of provision provides a framework of reference for students regarding career management support and the expectations they bring with them to higher education. Transferring this contextual environment, where the institution took the lead in career development, to HE where the student is expected to use their initiative to self-manage their professional progression, highlights the mismatch in communication and responsibility. Students have not been told effectively that they are responsible for their career development and must actively pursue initiatives, guidance and support outside of their course. In waiting for the institution to initiate and provide careers support, in line with their pre-university experience, AEL students have missed out on relevant career opportunities, including meeting employers and time to benefit from experiential learning to assess different options (Kolb, 2015).

The students struggled to find sector specific information to support career planning and expected the linear step-by-step path of previous experience. Three used snowball research strategies (Everitt & Skrondal, 2010) but found creative industries very non-prescriptive. Four embraced the experiential process of gaining knowledge through practical experience (Kolb, 2015) supporting making informed decisions before taking next steps. Subject academics were viewed as key sources of relevant sector or careers information, as were relevant industry professionals, either visiting class speakers or placement providers. Five students mentioned CES services as an information source, and all found them very useful. Limited engagement with relevant CES resources needs to be addressed to best support AEL students, matching engagement strategies with student preferences for communication to increase their social capital.

Eight of the students also acknowledged happenstance (Krumboltz, 2009), for example speaking with academic staff during university open days, employers facilitating lectures in their course, attending events and asking for work experience, and opportunities to

get involved in a project. While some viewed happenstance as something out of their control, for others they had been proactive to position themselves to be in the right place at the right time, and with hindsight can see how they helped to shape these influential interactions. These occurrences align with the Systems Theory Framework of allowing flexibility for chance extrinsic factors to influence decision making.

2. Student Identity

A strong recurring theme was the importance of students using their subject in their career and as an extension of their identity - every student referenced their creative skill set. For one student, working in music was non-negotiable and they hadn't even considered a career outside of this sector. The subject and skills are part of who they were and saw their degree as granting peer credibility. They commented 'I've been in music education, production and technology for six years. Six years, goodness, I could literally be a doctor but I don't want to be a doctor!' (Zarina, music)

AEL students described themselves as 'writer' (Lola, English), 'artist' (Zarina, music) and 'media producer' (Taylor, broadcast production), already starting the transition from student to professional identity in how they refer to themselves (Smith et al., 2014). The WPM created excitement seeing university skills being used in industry and made their goals appear tangible, highlighting the value of extrinsic influences and experiences. They were realistic about the challenges of becoming professionally established but determined to try. Four highlighted a sense of pressure, that if their degree wasn't being used in employment 'then I'd be a failure' (Leah, music). Having fought to study this subject, AEL students wanted to prove they had made the right decision through their graduate success. Lola (English) described her degree as a 'gateway' and a 'starting point' and had increased in confidence about her options, broadening her horizons for action.

The role of their academic peers was significant, feeling 'a sense of belonging' (Knights, 2005), and often working towards common career goals. For some it has validated their decision to study an arts subject, and many intended to retain the contacts made. Others found it added pressure, comparing themselves to peers they perceived as achieving more. They found it difficult to keep striving for their passion when they could 'settle' for a generic graduate job. Being exposed to and surrounded by this creative habitus (Hodkinson & Sparkes) influenced the students in their career resolution, either to pursue the creative arts or consider other options.

3. Measuring success

The key research questions aiming to help CES identify core student values included determining how students define success and understanding the construction of meaningful employment for AEL students. Did the students have a target in mind and how would they know they had attained it. The interviewees struggled to define this, and responses were very individual. Common themes included being paid for their skill set, aiming for an industry as opposed to a job title, using multiple transferable skills in a tangible way and being open to new opportunities. The non-linear protean (Hall, 2004) aspect of career management caused some to feel 'very overwhelmed' (Lola, English) or procrastinate; others embraced the idea that careers 'are a mix of a lot of different things' (Leah, music). How they had previously defined success, particularly within a certain time period, had

completely changed, and they were having to recalibrate how they were going to navigate the world of work in the graduate landscape. This may impact on their future horizons for action and ultimate level of professional satisfaction.

4. Perceived barriers

Several consistent themes were mentioned throughout. Before coming to university, five had direct negative reactions to their choice of study, from family members, teachers and peers, with comments including 'how are you going to get a job after' (Esther, English) and 'there's no careers in that' (Leah, music). Two were actively discouraged from attending university, notably first-generation applicants. The resilience some students demonstrated even before application showed determination and tenacity already in this cohort, and the ability to filter negative extrinsic factors to focus on positive intrinsic factors.

Since starting their course, six of the students discussed the stereotypical perceptions of career outcomes of arts students they have experienced directly in the comments of peers and notably with current academic staff. These have included assumptions they would go on to teach, do a conversion course or end up in low paid employment or underemployed. Students had experienced scepticism around gaining steady employment in what were seen as non-vocational subject choices. This had a direct impact on confidence and reinforcing feeling like an imposter. Nearly all of the students found themselves having to advocate for their subjects, and during their interviews they passionately defended their career decisions to this point in time.

Other barriers included time, balancing rehearsal, study, part time work, university society involvement and family commitments. Having the WPM built into the timetable was key, as students couldn't afford to pursue unpaid experience. Being able to approach an employer with the support of the formal QUB module gave credibility to their request for work experience and increased sector confidence, supporting the findings of Reddan (2015). Geographical factors also played a role. Situated as a regional university, numerous prospects appeared concentrated in London, rendering them less accessible as students looked for opportunities.

5. Shared values

Throughout the interviews this group exhibited similar personal values and qualities that brought them together as a cohort who were best suited to study within AEL. The similarity of attributes supports the findings of Knights (2005) who described students as having 'a sense of belonging to a cultural resistance movement' (p. 42) by choosing subjects that weren't deemed to have direct career paths and have 'discarded previous educational identities' (p. 38). Speaking about their decision to pursue a creative subject, they talked about personal bravery and persistence. The students recognised that to be successful within the arts they would have to demonstrate flexibility, show passion for their work, be adaptable within the role, and actively seek out and create opportunities.

None of the interviewees indicated a concern about having a detailed future plan, implying that such long-term thinking might not have been a significant concern within this particular cohort. After completing relevant workplace experience, the students exhibited a pragmatic understanding of the labour market and potential fluid landscape of employment. Whether they were considering a full-time commitment to creative arts, pursuing a diverse

portfolio career, or considering other options in other industries, their expectations had been clarified through their work placement. They were realistic about taking time to find their place in the post-university world of work, and none of the students indicated they had accepted a full-time graduate level position at this stage.

6. How can CES help?

A recurring theme was the perception that any careers input was random, unstructured, rarely relevant, and students were unsure who had delivered it. Outside of their WPM 'there's been no sit down and here's where you can go with your career' (Leah, music) and this was echoed across the subjects. They appear to have transposed their existing point of reference of pre-university career guidance on to a new educational framework and found they didn't match. Of the twelve students interviewed nine stated that they had received no information or encouragement from their school to gain relevant work experience outside of the WPM. While waiting for explicit careers guidance, they had delayed decision making and labour market research, impacting on their preparedness for the job market.

All appreciated the in-curricular opportunity and wanted it earlier in their university course, ideally in second year, some from first year. They also wanted career management skills prioritised and embedded in a format they recognised. They wanted better representation at careers fairs and recognition of their career drivers. Co-collaboration with students developing these resources would be ideal, managing student expectations while also supporting the development of self-efficacy as they use initiative to progress in their careers, building networks and social capital.

Communication also needed to be improved, with future CES messaging targeting AEL cohorts through channels students used, with interventions they needed. Liaising with school academics for endorsement would increase the likelihood of student engagement (Savickas, 2005).

Summary

This study aimed to address four key areas to help understand AEL student mindset and appropriate professional progression initiatives – student awareness of employability requirements within the current labour market benchmarked against their own skill set, the concept of meaningful employment, perceived barriers faced and preferences around career management support. The students provided rich data to code and construct themes, highlighting the multiple intrinsic and extrinsic influences which had impacted upon their choice of degree study within the Systems Theory Framework.

With regard to awareness of employability requirements, the students appreciated the experiential learning of the WPM which has improved and developed their knowledge of the current labour market. Contact with relevant employers, and industry experience, has given an insight into what is and will be required when they look for post-university employment. The participants were also able to benchmark their own skill set against industry standards. Some were encouraged, and plan to follow the creative industries route, others have expanded their horizons for action (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) and will take their skill set into other sectors.

All of the students stated how much they enjoyed their subject. When discussing meaningful employment, a majority saw success as using their creative skills in future paid work, regardless of the level of the job. All wanted to use their degree skills in some capacity even if that was within another non-creative sector. Their experiential learning influences and exposure to a contextual variable (Patton & McMahon, 2006) have given new labour market insights to support their career management and broaden their horizons for action (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

Barriers mentioned included time, non-linearity of career trajectory, social capital and confidence. Additionally, students reported having to defend their academic choices to peers and external influences, which impacted on their decision-making confidence. Being able to experience professionals working in the area to which they aspire has increased their determination to succeed.

The research revealed that participating students demonstrated resilience and determination but brought previous experience of career guidance with them to the new model in HE. In most cases their expectations regarding career support have not been fulfilled, and they wanted more interaction with relevant employers, integrated curriculum support in a familiar format, and acknowledgment of their distinct career motivations. To address these findings, fostering stronger and more effective collaboration between students, academics, employers, and CES is recommended. This collaborative approach would enable the development of tailored interventions that benefit all stakeholders involved while supporting AEL students to achieve their career goals.

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The Hero's Journey: A new model for protean career change

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Abstract

The protean career is a values-driven and self-directed career where individuals seek greater independence in their work. Despite its increasing prevalence, the ways in which a protean career might develop over time outside of a traditional organisational setting is under-researched. This article draws from a dissertation research project exploring how nine protean career-changers narratively construct and understand their protean career path outside of the organisational setting. A new model of protean career change is proposed; it suggests that protean career change can be understood based on a narrative template known as the Hero's Journey. This model can be utilised by career practitioners and researchers to understand, facilitate, and optimise protean career change.

Keywords: Protean career; career theory; career transition; career change; narrative counselling

Introduction

The protean career path is characterised by self-directed and values-driven career moves (Hall, 2002). It is a non-linear career path, driven by the person rather than the organisation (Hirschi, 2018; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). This contrasts with the traditional, linear career routes which have been characterised by hierarchical advancement,

organisational career management and low career mobility (Gubler et al., 2014). Exploring the protean career today is particularly important as self-directed career change is becoming increasingly common (AbouAssi et al., 2019). In a survey of 4,000 adults in the UK, 87% of under 25s were looking to re-evaluate and change their career paths in 2021 (Aviva, 2021). Gig work, technological advances, as well as the increased expectation and offering of work flexibility post-pandemic (Hite & McDonald, 2020) mean that career paths may be becoming more individualised, with the power shifting to the person from organisation (Baruch & Rousseau, 2019). Researchers have indicated a growing need to understand how the protean career path is developed (Gubler et al., 2014). Previous research has mainly studied the protean career quantitatively (Bakhri & Mahfudz 2020; Mahler & Hoare, 2010; Mintz, 2003). Further, studies tend to focus on career change that takes place inside the structure and direction provided by the organisation (Wolf, 2019). Considering those on the protean path may be more likely to change career trajectories and exit the organisation (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), there is a need for more qualitative research on a career path that takes place outside of the organisational setting.

Literature review

The protean career is a widely acknowledged concept in contemporary career literature. Despite its popularity, protean career theory (Hall, 1976) remains largely unchanged and under-examined almost four decades after its conception (Baruch & Vardi, 2016; Gubler et al., 2014). The protean career theory suggests two main principles underpin a protean career. Firstly, the individual is values-driven; so that the person's internal values provide the measure of success for their career, and secondly, the individual is self-directed and personally manages and adapts their career when required (Hall, 2004). Researchers have paid the most attention to researching protean careers quantitatively; the protean career orientation has shown a positive, quantitative relationship with outcomes such as career success, job and employee satisfaction, employee commitment and work–life balance (Bakhri & Mahfudz 2020; Mahler & Hoare, 2010; Mintz, 2003), however, less attention has been paid to the qualitative aspects of the protean career path. Exploring the experience of building a protean career path (Gubler et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2018; Hoyer, 2020) can help broaden our understanding of why, despite challenges, some individuals choose this path; and how they keep up motivation during challenging times that occur during career change (Bardon et al., 2017).

Protean career path

Individuals on a protean career path may be more likely to be involved in some form or career change or transition (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). The development of the protean career path has been largely overlooked (Gubler et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2018). The few studies that investigate the protean career path tend to focus on leadership and management within organisational settings with career changes happening as a result of organisational procedures e.g. promotion, transfer, retirement (e.g. Crowley-Henry & Weir, 2007; McDonald et al., 2005; Reitman & Schneer, 2003; Wolf, 2019). There is a lack of research on protean participants' career paths when career changes do not take place within the social and formal mandates of the organisation.

Protean career path models

It is important to understand how the transition to a protean career path has been previously constructed by individuals and studied by researchers. Wolf (2019) studied the protean career path of managers from a lifespan perspective and found that managers built a protean career by undertaking a number of steps. First, the discovery of conflicting expectations, second, the exploration of one's own values and capabilities, third, the commitment to one's own path; and finally defending that path. Ibarra (2007) observes that existing models that aim to explain how individuals transition career paths tend to follow a similar milestones based on Van Gennep's (1960) model; such as separation, transition, and incorporation. However, the models have not focused on what drives movement from one stage to the next outside of organisational structure. In response, Ibarra (2007) suggests a model that can be used to explore non-institutionalised career change, where an individual is able to explore future possible selves outside of the traditional work environment. In this model she highlights early transition, where individuals start to act on new possibilities; the liminal stage, where individuals start to explore their identity and enact possible selves; and late transition, where an individual becomes integrated with their new identity. Whilst there is promise in Ibarra's model, it is yet to be empirically evaluated in much depth in relation to protean career change. Overall, in-depth research on the protean career path is lacking, suggesting a need to more effectively understand how it is constructed and developed.

Research Gaps and Research Questions

The literature review has identified research gaps which are important to address due to the shifting nature of careers and an increasing movement toward protean work (Hall, 2002). First, there are very few studies that investigate protean careers from a qualitative perspective. Second, research tends to investigate traditional, organisational career paths focusing on managers where career changes are normally mandated by the organisation. Changing work dynamics signify the importance of understanding the protean career path and identity from a non-institutionalised perspective when an individual chooses to leave an organisation. Therefore, the aim of this research is to explore how protean career-changers narratively construct and understand their protean career path outside of the organisational setting.

Methods

Nine individuals who had undertaken a significant career change from a traditional organisational based career to a protean career route were interviewed (table 1). Individuals were recruited by word-of-mouth and using the researchers' professional network. A number of pre-screening questions were asked to indicate if participants fit the criteria of voluntarily moving to a protean career path. Purposeful sampling was used to select potential information-rich cases for analysis, to give a better chance of developing useful insights (Patton, 2002). The British Psychological Society's (2021) *Code of Human Research Ethics* guided this research and ethical approval was granted by Birkbeck, University of London. Nine semi-structured interviews are deemed suitable for studying subjective interpretations (Arksey & Knight, 1999). An interview guide was developed using the life story interview method (Atkinson, 1998); life story interviewing, which is based on biographical narratives, gives a broader understanding of an individual's journey over

the lifespan, emphasising a series of events rather than just one incident (Wolf, 2019) and is effective method to investigate how individuals construe meaning during significant life events such as career changes (McAdams, 1997).

Data analysis

In comparison to other qualitative methods, narrative methods have been found useful to study those navigating complex career challenges such as career transitions over time (Hoyer, 2020; McAdams, 1993). This is because they can provide a lifespan view of the career and can capture ambiguity (Hoyer, 2020). Holistic narrative analysis studies a story structure and finds common denominators, this can give an idea of career and life patterns (e.g. Cochran, 1991; Denzin, 1989; Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; Savickas, 2001; Tonkin, 1995). By using elements of a chronological story structure from the holistic narrative analysis, a narrative plotline analysis was also conducted, was chosen as the method of analysis as it enabled an understanding of the career journey of individuals i.e. high points, low points, turning points in their career as a whole, and over their lifespan.

Table 1. Participants included in research

Name	Previous Career	Protean Career
Amy	Marketing	Research
Anita	Finance	Health & Beauty
Cait	Teaching	Career Coaching
Ellie	Healthcare	Life Coaching & Training
Lily	Marketing	Coaching & Facilitation
Nat	Government adviser	Health & Beauty
Nimra	HR	Coaching & Training
Nathan	Heathcare / Facilities	Life Coaching
Val	Nursery worker	Life Coaching

Findings

Holistic Narrative Analysis

It became clear during narrative analysis that the structure of most participants stories closely represented The Hero's Journey template. As a result, this template was retrospectively used to analyse three themes that were prominent within the text: these were separation, initiation and return. In The Hero's Journey, the protagonist or 'hero' adventures out of their familiar world where they face various trials, and transitions through these three main phases. During the separation phase, there is a movement away from everyday life, during the initiation, the hero moves to a new career phase, and challenges are met and overcome; and during the return, the final phase the hero returns from his adventure with newfound learning and wisdom (Campbell, 1956; Vogler, 2007; Williams, 2019).

Separation: The critical scenes

For the hero, the separation stage indicates a growing awareness that something is not quite right (Williams, 2019). The idea that something was lacking in their early careers was evident in all accounts of participants interviewed. The majority of individuals recalled a certain triggering event; these memories are often the most vivid, and well explained in the participants stories. It has been argued that these 'trigger-points' in stories are critical components of good stories, helping enhance understanding of both the storyteller and the listener (Ibarra, 2004).

> **Ellie:** 'Literally one day on the way to school, I had a bit of a what I refer to as a nervous breakdown…'

> **Nathan:** 'I remember really clearly, I was stood in the office at work, and I had a couple of report pieces of paper in my hand and I thought, I don't know what I'm doing here anymore, what am I doing?'

These texts illustrate a point in the hero's life where it has been decided that they have had 'enough,' and that they cannot go on. They decide to take action to separate from their previous careers or jobs. There are big realisations here that they are in the wrong place, and something needs to happen. Some of the activities that individuals are involved in include: some disengagement from their current career, becoming aware that alternatives are available, and testing these alternatives. At this stage individuals are sometimes in denial, and often feel a 'push' and 'pull' between current career and job and new career. They may start to transition physically or emotionally to their new career.

Initiation: Learning my way

Every hero faces trials, mistakes, and roadblocks (Campbell, 1956). This was especially apparent as individuals described their lack of knowing as trials. In these new jobs there were many things had to be learnt and weaknesses that had to be overcome. These included both practical and emotional challenges.

> **Nimra:** 'At the beginning it was like; I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know how this works. The bit that's tricky are the unknowns.'

> **Nathan:** 'Doubt creeps in, then those dips are quite significant.'

Some of the activities might include increased job search activity and frequent changing of jobs as individuals explore alternative options and live out alternative roles and values.

Return: The transformation

During the return, as mentioned by Campbell (1956) the Hero must retain, integrate, and possibly share with the world the wisdom that he gained on his quest. In relation, Hero's here talk about how their life has changed been transformed for the better. They have learned lessons and reached points where they can look back on their path and understand what has come from their journey (Vogler, 2007). Nimra who talked about her previous career being chosen for status and money suggests that this is no longer important to her.

> **Nimra:** 'Me and my siblings are probably seen as the least successful…a lot of my cousins have these massive mansions, these huge salaries, these big holidays. But

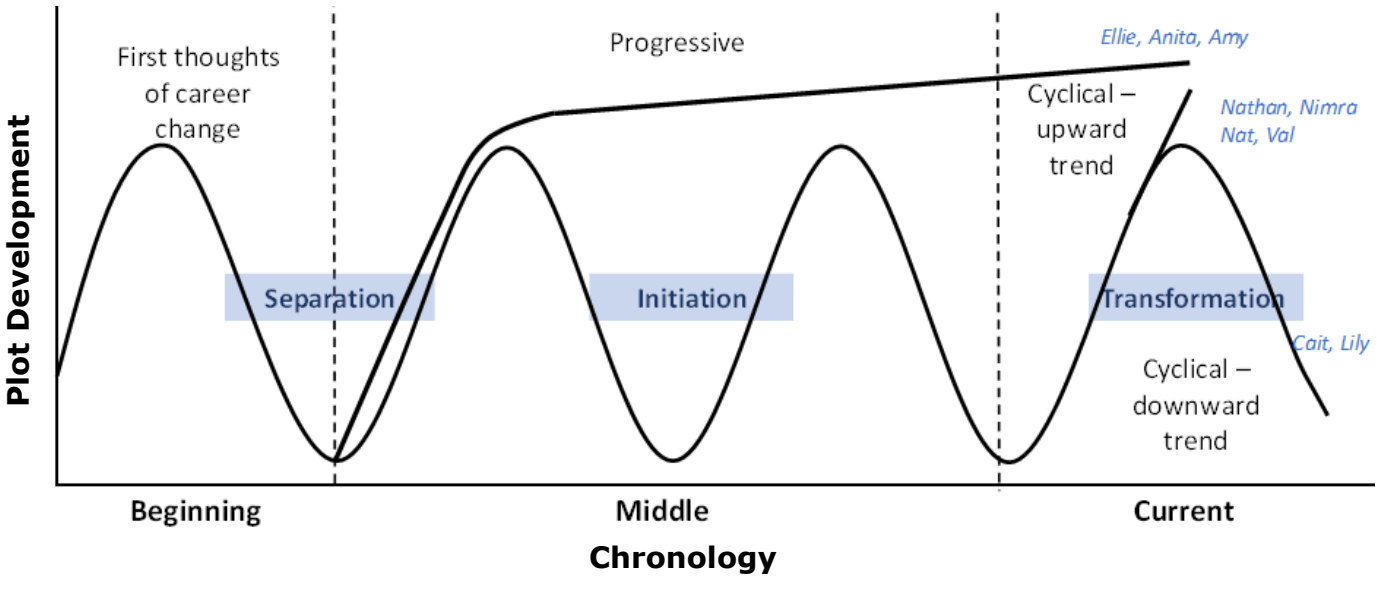
I'm so content with what I have, and…honestly, I don't want anymore. Mansions... they take a lot of cleaning, right?'

In all stories, the transformation or wisdom gained is connected to the overall holistic themes in their life stories. Nimra's life story is about moving away from status to connection, Ellie's story is about being self-sufficient in business because in the past she had not been, and Nathan's story is about being wounded in his life and completing his journey of healing. All individuals have found new wisdom, which shapes which direction their career will take next. During the return stage individuals feel mostly stable in their careers and there is often less action and more reflection than the first two stages. Individuals are reviewing how to shape their career and life in accordance to their values. At this point, new work values and activities start to replace old ones.

Narrative plotline analysis

The plotline analysis created from datapoints during the holistic narrative analysis, is a graphical representation of the journey the individual went on to reach their 'current' state (Figure 1). A plotline analysis was conducted as suggested by Lieblich et al. (1998) and guidance provided by Cooper (2020), which was used as a template to guide the analysis. Narratives and timelines of events were analysed to identify progressive, regressive, or cyclical plotlines. Polkinghorne's (1988) division of narratives was mapped on to The Hero's Journey to create a beginning, middle and ending. The 'beginning' demonstrates the beginning of the career up to when thoughts of a career change became evident; this is the 'separation' stage in The Hero's Journey. The middle phase indicates the in-between, liminal stage (Ibarra, 2007), marked as initiation. The 'return' represents the final and current stage of the journey. Ellie, Anita, and Amy had progressive narratives; they narrated mainly positive learning experiences, with little negative affect and one to three changes over their career lifespan. All others had cyclical narrative with many more ups and downs and job and career changes. Whilst there were not any regressive narratives, there were two cyclical narratives with a downward trend, this is where Cait and Lily were starting to present some disaffection toward their current careers and were looking to make further changes to the nature of their work.

Figure 1: Graphical representation of narrative plotlines



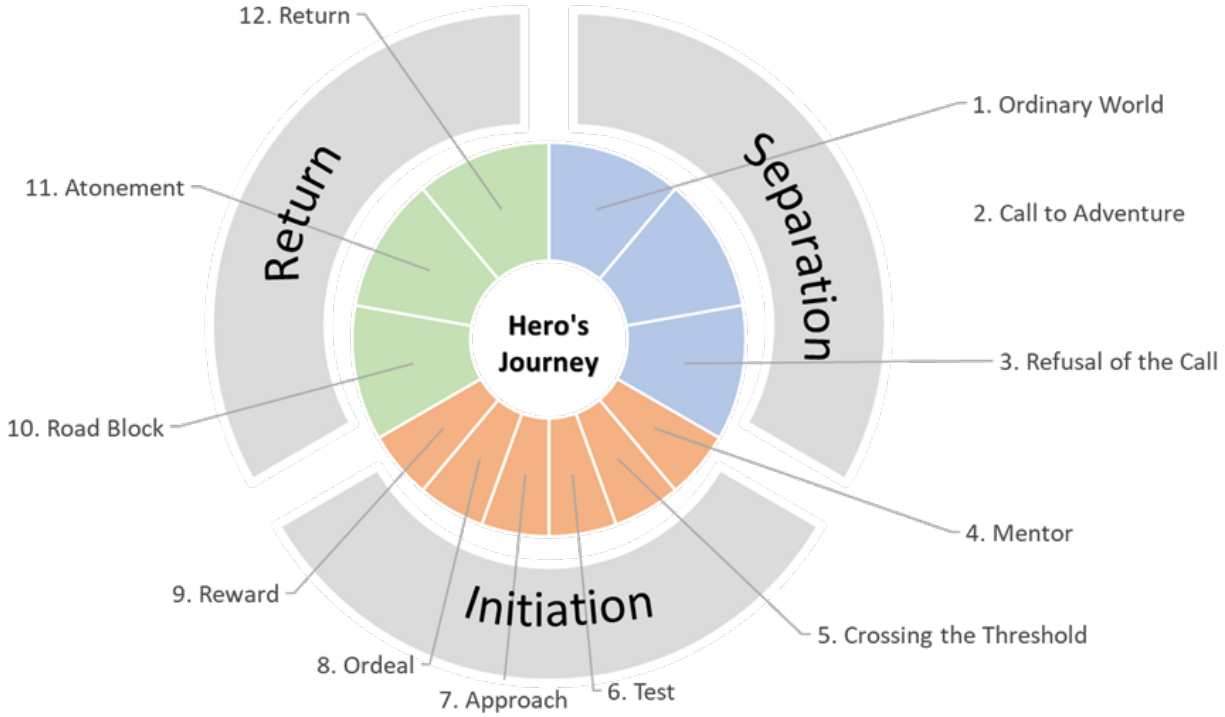
Discussion

This research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how protean career-changers construct and understand their protean career path. The results find that the protean career-changer is very much constructed by participants like The Hero's Journey, as someone who undertakes an important journey and returns transformed and renewed with a better understanding of themselves and their career (Campbell, 1956; Williams, 2019). This study adds to protean career research by suggesting a novel Hero's Journey template that protean career-changers use when narrating their journeys. This model may also be utilised as practical coaching tool to understand and ease transition for the protean career-changer when they exit an organisational setting.

The Hero's Journey showed similarity to other models of change and identity transition e.g. Ibarra's (2007) model of career transition which she suggests as applicable to non-institutionalised career contexts. Like Ibarra (2007) this research recognises that 'push' and 'pull' factors are prominent within both the separation and initiation stages, where individuals weigh the risks and experiment with different jobs. The Hero's Journey, however, differs in one fundamental way; it is a legend that is well-known; often used in media (Vogler, 2007) as well as clinical and therapeutic settings (Duffy, 2010; Hartley, 2010), its strength lies in its ability to be easily used and understood by researcher, and practitioners in both academic and practical work-place settings. For example, it has been identified that 'journey' is a metaphor used by careers advisers to talk about career transitions, movement, and change (McIlveen & Creed, 2018). Researchers have indicated that The Hero's Journey can be used as a comprehensive map for those either seeking change or those that must take forced change (Williams, 2019). There is clearly room to explore this model in more depth when individuals seek to change career paths. How a career coach or adviser might make use of this model and ask questions to help navigate career change is outlined below.

Figure 2: Hero's journey applied as coaching tool for protean career change.

The stages in this figure are adopted by Vogler (2007) from Campbell (1956).



Below are examples of some coaching questions suggested by the researcher that might potentially be asked at each stage to enable movement for the protean career changer. This is not an extensive list.

Separation

1. The coach may ask the client where on the Hero's Journey they are and what that feels like.
2. Have they had the call to the adventure/ career change? What might be the obstacles to this adventure?
3. If they have refused the call – what is going on for them? If they did follow the call – what might happen?

Initiation

4. Who are the mentors that might help them take on this task of crossing over/ changing paths? Who is in their network that might help?
5. What might crossing over to the other side look like? How has/ how might their life change?
6. What setbacks are occurring/ might occur? How can these be handled?

Return

7. What resources are needed to help with these challenges and set-backs?
8. When facing the challenges, what changes have occurred? How will things be different moving forward?
9. What is the reward or payback of having overcome challenges?
10. Are there any additional challenges that need to be overcome?
11. What has been learned?
12. How can these learnings be applied?

The plotline analysis illustrates that individual journeys are either progressive or cyclical over time; suggesting that generally individuals tend to narratively construct their career changes as positive and without regret. The plotline pattern highlights the normality of the cyclical nature of the protean career which is full of high and lows. As well as supporting research that indicates career maturity happens via series of learning cycles (Super, 1990); the novelty of plotline analysis lies in its ability to offer a graphical representation of the protean career journey over the lifespan.

Future research & implications

The Hero's Journey as a model to assist protean career-changers

The Hero's Journey template has been suggested as useful for when individuals experience transition and unfamiliarity (Williams, 2019). This template has been used largely in therapeutic settings and counsellor development training (Duffy, 2010; Duffy & Guiffrida, 2014; Hartley, 2010; Williams, 2016); currently no academic research looks at this tool from a career change perspective. Based on this research gap, this study contributes a novel finding; the utility of the Hero's Journey as a narrative template for protean career change. Practically, there is room for career coaches to use this template to explore individual protean career change journeys inside and outside of the organisational context and have more meaningful career conversations. The scope of the dissertation research allowed exploration of the three main facets of the Hero's Journey (separation, initiation, and return). However, there are many more sub-categories with these stages, suggesting the need for future research to explore this model in much more depth and detail (e.g. Boklage et al., 2018) in relation to change.

Narrative plotline analysis as a tool to understand careers over the lifespan

Cooper (2020) suggests a systematic approach for identifying key plotlines; mapping out narrative chronology (Young et al., 1994), identifying evaluative text (Lieblich et al., 1998) and using researcher reflexivity (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011). There is greater role for systematically applied plotline analysis in narrative research, as it can help researchers analyse career and life patterns over time (Cochran, 1991; Savickas, 2001). From a practical perspective plotline analysis may be useful for career practitioners in increasing the quality of mid-career or late-career conversations. There is room for complexity and different variations of plotlines, which could be explored in more depth in combination with The Hero's Journey model for career conversations.

The Hero's Journey as a model for broader change

The Hero's Journey is an under-researched tool when it comes to careers. It is a powerful and easy-to-understand model with similarities to other models of change. Therefore, arguably, has the potential to aid general change as well as protean career change.

Limitations

Narrative analysis can be conducted in a multitude of different ways (Elliot, 2005), and some of the methods of analysis are still evolving e.g., plotline analysis (Cooper, 2020; Lieblich et al., 1998), therefore, unlike other methods, there is no recommended way to conduct narrative research. This research was guided by the idea not to 'reify' any qualitative methods at the expense of reflexivity (Watts, 2014). Out of the individuals interviewed, six of nine worked primarily as a coach; so these results may not be generalisable outside of this career category.

Conclusion

By exploring how protean career-changers narrate and construct their career path, a unique model of protean career change drawing on Hero's Journey template was developed (figure 2). This model has implications for career practitioners and researchers who can use it to understand and facilitate individuals navigating protean career change. It also has the potential to be used to investigate change more broadly.

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Article

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Enhancing South Korea's Vocational Counselling Certification System: A comparative analysis with Australia

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Abstract

This study examines strategies to enhance South Korea's vocational counselling certification system, drawing on the Career Development Practitioner scheme in Australia. An analysis is provided of Australia's model, which involves practice-oriented competencies defined and updated by the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA). This research recommends several key initiatives to improve provision in South Korea, including enhancing eligibility criteria, implementing maintenance and revocation mechanisms, instituting a centralised governing authority akin to the CICA, and introducing specialised undergraduate and graduate programmes focused on career counselling. These insights contribute to the advancement of South Korea's vocational counselling certification system.

Key words: Career Development; Career Counselling; South Korea; higher education; professionalism

Introduction

In South Korea, there is an ongoing discussion regarding the legal status of counselling certifications in Psychology. Presently, within the domain of counselling, national

certifications encompass the youth counsellor, which is exclusively geared towards adolescent counselling, and the vocational counsellor designation, which centres on the provision of career and vocational counselling services. However, the vocational counsellor certification has been the subject of discussions for its shortcomings in assessing practical competence, supervision, and insufficient continuing education (Choi et al., 2013; Jung et al., 2018; Kim, 2021).

Vocational counsellor qualification is administered by the Human Resources Development Service of Korea, a subsidiary of the Ministry of Employment and Labour. As of the year 2021, subsequent to the initiation of the nationwide vocational counsellor programme in 2000, a combined aggregate of 69,635 associate counsellors and 1,086 professional counsellors have obtained official certification (Human Resources Development Service of Korea, 2022). The demand for employment services has been increasing in both public and private sectors, including the national employment support programme and university career centres (Lee & Choi, 2019). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant changes to the job market, leading to a growing interest in career professionals who can provide career services in the field of career and vocational counselling (Kim, 2021). Nonetheless, a requisite for enhancement exists within the vocational counsellor certification system, particularly in aspects pertaining to qualification attainment, sustenance, and pedagogical backing, warranting due consideration of global benchmarks (McMahon, 2004) as well as facets encompassing system augmentation (Choi et al., 2013).

In this study, I introduce the Registered Professional Career Development Practitioner scheme operated in Australia, to provide insights for improving South Korea's vocational counsellor certification system. Through the analysis of both countries' certification systems, including qualification acquisition, maintenance, and training, I discuss recommendations for enhancing the Korean system.

Methodology

This study conducted an analysis based on literature and online resources from relevant institutions to compare the vocational counsellor qualification system in Korea with the Professional Career Development Practitioner qualification system in Australia. To analyse the vocational counsellor qualification system in Korea, data from the relevant agencies under the Ministry of Employment and Labour (such as the Human Resources Development Service of Korea and Korea Employment Information Service) were utilised. The analysis of the Professional Career Development Practitioner qualification system in Australia was conducted using public documents provided by the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA), an organisation that is a council of several professional associations for career development practitioners.

Findings

Vocational counsellor qualification system in Korea

Vocational counsellors engage in the collection, analysis, and provision of comprehensive information related to occupations, employment, and career development, drawing upon the principles and techniques of counselling (Korea Employment Information Service,

2023). While vocational counsellors do not actively address clients' psychological issues, from a lifespan career development perspective as proposed by Super (1980), individuals' vocational and career paths are intricately linked to other aspects of life and may be intertwined with psychological challenges. Therefore, for vocational counsellors to effectively understand and address clients' career issues, it is essential for them to have a clear understanding of their own scope of competencies and possess a range of skills, including in-depth counselling, to provide professional assistance to clients. However, the current qualification acquisition system for vocational counsellors in Korea primarily focuses on assessing knowledge through subject-based examinations, rather than evaluating competencies. Furthermore, systematic post-qualification education and training for vocational counsellors are currently insufficient.

The qualification examination for vocational counsellors is classified into two types: The examination and the course assessment. The examination type evaluates the relevant knowledge in the form of written tests, while the course assessment grants qualification upon completion of an accredited course and successful internal and external evaluations. The qualification for vocational counsellors is divided into two levels: Level 1 and 2. Regarding the vocational counsellor Level 2 examination, as of 2023, the examination is conducted three times a year and is at a level comparable to a regular technician certification. There are no restrictions on eligibility based on educational background or other factors. The written test consists of five subjects (vocational counselling, vocational psychology, vocational information theory, labour market theory, labour relations, and regulations) with 20 multiple-choice questions per subject. Upon passing the first round, candidates are eligible to take the practical examination, which requires a written response to address vocational counselling practices.

The qualification course for level 2 vocational counsellors, based on course evaluation, was first introduced in 2018. It requires a minimum of 12 hours of vocational basic competency training and 330 hours of essential competency units (Human Resources Development Service of Korea, 2023a). The training curriculum includes various counselling-related subjects such as vocational assessment, initial consultation, career counselling, employment counselling, and vocational reintegration counselling. As of 2023, there are 18 vocational training institutions and one 4-year university offering training programmes. The training period spans 3 to 22 months, totalling 500 hours. Since its implementation in 2018, until 2021, a total of 970 individuals obtained the qualification through the course evaluation method, accounting for 68.4% of the total 1,302 trainees (Human Resources Development Service of Korea, 2022).

In the case of the professional career counsellor (1st grade) certification, a qualification examination is conducted once a year. The Human Resources Development Service of Korea specifies psychology, management, economics, legal studies, educational psychology, and related fields as relevant majors for obtaining the qualification, but it does not specifically require a certain degree (Human Resources Development Service of Korea, 2023b). Eligibility for the 1st grade examination is granted to those who have obtained the 2nd grade vocational counsellor qualification and have worked in the field for at least 2 years or have worked in the career counselling field for at least 3 years. The examination consists of written exams, similar to the 2nd grade examination. The first written exam includes multiple-choice questions covering advanced career counselling, advanced career psychology, advanced career information theory, labour market theory, and labour relations

regulations. The practical exam requires the completion of a descriptive task on career counselling practice.

The course evaluation-based 1st grade Professional Career Counsellor qualification requires a minimum of 24 hours of basic career competency training and 540 hours of essential competency units. It includes subjects such as in-depth career counselling and career counselling supervision, which enable training and supervision of 2nd grade qualification holders. As of 2023, 8 vocational training institutions and 1 four-year university offer training programmes for 1st grade Professional Career Counsellors. Training periods range from 4 to 12 months, comprising 840 hours. The course evaluation-based qualification system for 1st grade Professional Career Counsellors was introduced in 2021. In that year, out of 154 trainees, 89 individuals obtained the qualification, resulting in a pass rate of 57.4% (Human Resources Development Service of Korea, 2022).

The institutions responsible for conducting vocational counsellor training programmes were predominantly private institutions such as vocational education and training, lifelong education centres, and private academies, with only one four-year university for each level of certification. Furthermore, both the written and practical examination types do not impose specific educational requirements to sit for the qualification examination. This indicates that the qualifications for vocational counsellors are not equivalent to the prestigious counselling certifications offered by the Korean Counselling Psychology Association (2023) or the Korean Counselling Association (2023) in terms of the eligibility criteria. While considered a nationally recognised counselling qualification, the vocational counsellor certification in Korea does not fully meet the rigorous standards established by these private associations.

The study conducted by Jung et al. (2018) on employment service practitioners, which interviewed vocational counsellors, revealed a significant dissonance between the self-evaluation of vocational counsellors' job competency levels and the perceived importance of their job responsibilities. This incongruity suggests a decline in vocational self-efficacy among vocational counsellors, indicating a discrepancy between their perceived competence and the actual demands of their professional roles.

It is evident that the vocational counsellor qualification system currently implemented in South Korea necessitates remedial measures. Australia's qualification framework operates by prioritising competency-based qualifications that connect education with practical skills and competencies (Kang et al., 2003). It provides a useful benchmark from which to identify improvement to the Korean vocational counsellor certification system.

Australia's career development practitioner qualification system and training programmes

Australia operates a Professional Career Development Practitioner qualification system, the "Registered Professional Career Development Practitioner," based on the career industry quality standards of OECD advanced countries (McMahon et al., 2004). The usage of the term "practitioner" is intended to collectively refer to various professional groups engaged in the career industry field. In practice, qualifications are conferred upon career professionals, including career advisers, career counsellors, and career coaches, with the goal of ultimately enhancing the quality of services. CICA plays a fundamental role in managing the service quality in the career industry sector in Australia.

CICA was established in 1999 in response to the demands of the field. Professionals in the employment services sector and scholars researching careers in Australia recognised the need for an institution to monitor and support the domestic career industry. This institution was envisioned to serve as a central entity that could address national issues related to career development, deemed important in both the public and private domains as well as within the community. The primary objective was to share and provide optimal practical models for addressing national career development issues. The initial discussions began during a conference of the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG), focusing on collaborative efforts and partnerships across Australia's career industry landscape. Various representatives from career-related associations united to establish the central entity, CICA. This collaborative effort commenced with the formation of the Career Industry Consortium Committee in 2000, and officially culminated in 2003 with the incorporation of CICA as a legal entity (Career Industry Council of Australia, 2023).

CICA maintains affiliation with 11 career-related associations. To become a Registered Professional Career Practitioner recognised by CICA, an individual must be a full professional member of at least one of these 11 CICA council member associations. Each association has distinct qualification criteria for full professional membership, aligned with its core specialisation areas. However, these criteria primarily adhere to the qualification standards corresponding to the recognised Professional Career Practitioner qualifications endorsed by CICA.

The Career Development Practitioner qualification system in Australia consists of two hierarchical tiers: Professional and Associate. Professional practitioners hold supervisory responsibilities over associate practitioners, who predominantly undertake supportive roles. Professional practitioners are required to meet the criteria for a graduate certificate (Australian Qualification Framework; AQF Level 8), while Associate Career Development Practitioners are obligated to successfully complete the Certificate IV (AQF Level 4) course endorsed by CICA to obtain the qualification. The AQF, representing the Australian Qualification Framework, serves as the nationwide framework governing regulated qualifications across Australian education and training, encompassing levels from 1 (Certificate I) to 10 (Doctoral Degree; Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013).

As of March 2023, there are a total of 11 courses offered by 8 institutions accredited by CICA. CICA validates qualifications based on their alignment with the Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners. The endorsement procedure mandates cyclic renewal over a span of a few years. Among the endorsed programmes, 7 institutions are in Australia, and 1 institution is situated in Singapore. In this study, I focused on analysing 6 courses out of the 11 accredited courses for several reasons. The analysis excluded courses from Singapore and three courses with different educational levels. It also excluded a Certificate IV course and specific university courses with expiring accreditation in 2023 due to limited information. Therefore, ultimately, 6 courses were included in the analysis, specifically focusing on graduate certificate courses that operate Professional Career Development Practitioner qualification programmes. The analysis summary is presented in Table 1, with the institutions indicated by alphabets.

In Australia, there were five universities and one specialised vocational education institution that offered professional career development practitioner training programmes.

Completing these programmes would lead to a graduate certificate qualification, making a bachelor's degree or higher (AQF level 7) a common prerequisite for admission. In cases where applicants did not hold a degree, an equivalent advanced diploma and a minimum of two years of work experience or five or more years of work experience were required. The training duration varied among institutions, with options including a six-month part-time programme, or a one-year part-time programme. The training costs ranged from AUD $8,950 to AUD $15,480. While the specific subjects exhibited variation across institutions, the curriculum consistently encompassed a spectrum of components, such as career development theories, career counselling, assessment methodologies, professional practices, and subjects related to policy considerations.

Upon successful completion of the programmes outlined in Table 1, graduates attain eligibility to obtain the qualification enabling them to become Registered Professional Career Development Practitioners, a recognition endorsed by CICA. Once registered as a Professional Career Development Practitioner by CICA, individuals must renew their qualification annually and complete 15 hours of continuing professional development each year to maintain their accreditation. Continuing professional development is furnished by CICA as well as pertinent professional associations affiliated with CICA, encompassing both complimentary and fee-based offering.

Table 1. Professional Career Development Practitioner Training Programmes in Australia (as of March 2023)

Educational Level	Institution	Admission Requirements	Cost	Duration (months)	Subjects Offered
University	A University	Degree or Associate diploma + 2 years of full-time work experience or 5 years of full-time work experience	AUD $11,300*	6 months full-time	Introductory Educational Counselling Career Deveopment Theory and Policy Career Development and Professional Practice Career Councelling
University	B University	Degree	AUD $9,804*	6 months full-time	Counselling for Career Development Educating for Lifelong Career Development Professional Prqactice and Development Career Assessment Theory and Job Search Advising Advanced Coaching for Change Advanced Assessment for Coaching

Educational Level	Institution	Admission Requirements	Cost	Duration (months)	Subjects Offered
University	C University	Degree or 4th level certificate in career development + work experience	Domestic AUD $11,620* International AUD $16,020	8 months full-time	Career Development Theories and Tools Career Development Professional Practice Labour Market and The Future of Work Career Counselling
University	D University	Degree or work experience in relevant areas	AUD $10,080	1 year part-time	Practices in Career Design Applied Professional Practice in Career and Life Design
University	E University	Degree + English proficiency test (IELTS 6.5)	Domestic AUD $11,400 International AUD $13,440	6 months part-time	Lifelong Career Development Career Development in Educational Settings Introduction to Counselling in Educational Contexts Consultation and Communication: Theory and Practice
Specialised institution for career education	F Institute	Associate diploma in career development or career counselling or work experience	AUD $8,950	1 year part-time	Legal & Ethical Practice Strategic Career Service Delivery Career Development and Counselling Professional Development 120 Hours of Essential Placement

* Commonwealth Supported Fee available, which reduces approximately 80% of the fee.

Discussion

This study seeks to improve South Korea's vocational counsellor qualification system through a comparative analysis with Australia's Professional Career Development Practitioner system. The study's findings lead to the proposal of four strategic avenues for enhancement.

Firstly, it is proposed to enhance the entry-level qualification prerequisites. Countries including Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada require a minimum level equivalent to bachelor's degree or higher for entry into the career development industry (McMahon et al., 2004). A substantial portion of counsellors-in-training, even

when undergoing formal education, often experience a notable lack of confidence in their ability to engage effectively in career counselling (Lara et al., 2011). This highlights the considerable challenge associated with executing career counselling duties without acquiring comprehensive and pertinent educational foundations in this domain. Given the ongoing connection between an individual's vocational well-being and their overall life dimensions (Chen, 2013), a minimum requirement of a bachelor's degree is essential for addressing clients' comprehensive psychological well-being effectively. Adequately trained professionals can elevate career services, assist in career development, and enhance overall well-being (Robertson, 2013; Tang et al., 2021).

Secondly, it calls for the enhancement of qualification systems aligned with international competency standards. Although South Korea introduced National Competency Standards in 2002, it is currently confined to domestic industrial contexts, which may evoke a sense of limitation. In instances where international standards are delineated, as exemplified by career practitioners, it becomes imperative to cultivate a qualification competency framework that harmonises both domestic realities and international benchmarks, thereby aligning with the global milieu. Just as Australia's qualification system operates in congruence with the fundamental competency standards posited by IAEVG in 2003, it is incumbent upon Korean society to prepare individuals to cultivate competencies that resonate harmoniously within the global community. Therefore, it is essential that the current qualification system not only evaluates knowledge but also evolves into a competency-centred, skills-based framework, contributing to the development of global talent.

Thirdly, it is essential to enhance the ongoing education of career counsellors and establish a system for maintaining and revoking qualifications. Specifically, the implementation of continuous supervision programmes, rooted in the establishment of a strong working alliance with a supervisor, holds the potential to markedly elevate the satisfaction levels and the overall quality of the learning experience for career counsellors (Parcover & Swanson, 2013). The commendable efforts undertaken by the National Institute for Lifelong Education at the Korea University of Technology and Education, particularly in offering professional development programmes such as career counselling courses for employment service practitioners, warrant further expansion into mandatory training. This expanded training should encompass aspects such as supervision and ethics education, aimed at safeguarding the interests and well-being of clients. Moreover, a system should be implemented to address unethical conduct through qualification suspension, probation, and revocation. The absence of a systematic qualification maintenance system in areas where continuous training and development are vital, such as labour market information and counselling, can undermine trust in the national vocational qualification system. Therefore, the government should either establish an organisation with corporate status, similar to CICA in Australia, or support existing relevant agencies to fulfill the role of mandatory continuing education and qualification management.

Fourthly, it is recommended to establish undergraduate and graduate programmes in universities and colleges specialising in career development and counselling to provide high-quality career services. The OECD pointed out in 2003 that there was a lack of appropriate training and qualification programmes for career development practitioners in several advanced countries (OECD, 2003). Subsequently, efforts have been made in countries like Australia to develop and implement graduate-level programmes for training

career development practitioners. These efforts have not been fully realised within the Korean context. Therefore, considering the increasing demand in the field of career industry, it is important to introduce new undergraduate and graduate programmes dedicated to career development and counselling, which will systematically train professionals in higher education and contribute significantly to the revitalisation of the career industry.

Lastly, there is a need for overall improvement in the compensation within the career services industry. While the average salary of career development practitioners in Australia exceeds the overall workforce average (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Indeed, 2023; Labour Market Insights, 2021), it has been observed that the remuneration for career practitioners in South Korea is more than 20% lower in comparison to the average earnings of Korean workers (Statistics Korea, 2021). In order to attract exemplary talent and augment the overall quality of the industry, the establishment of an equitable compensation system becomes imperative. This system should ideally transcend the average wage threshold, or at the very least, align comparably with the prevailing salary norms in South Korea. Such a framework is pivotal in facilitating the seamless integration of well-educated professionals into the career industry, thereby effectively catering to the escalating need for career services.

Conclusion

In summary, this study conducted a comparative analysis of South Korea's vocational counsellor qualification system with Australia's Registered Professional Career Development Practitioner qualification system. It underscores the necessity for enhancements within the Korean system while also addressing the broader trajectory of the career industry. By capitalising on the benefits of systems that align with international standards, the qualification system can be effectively elevated, thereby diminishing the necessity for trial and error. Executing the Korean vocational counsellor system with enhanced efficacy empowers vocational counsellors to effectively aid individuals in their pursuit of career counselling services. This, in turn, engenders a cascade of personal, societal, and economic advantages, thereby constituting a substantive contribution to the broader landscape of national development.

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Article

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Teachers in Danish upper secondary education's conceptualisation of career learning: A Koselleck inspired study

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Abstract

This study explores the translation and negotiation of career learning as a newly introduced concept in the context of academic Danish upper secondary education, shedding light on teachers' understanding of the concept and its connection to their teaching practice. In the study, we draw on observations and interviews with ten teachers. Using Koselleck's asymmetric counter concepts, the analysis shows that the negotiation of meaning is complex, and full of internal and external paradoxes. Last, the study argues that in practice, there is goodwill and a desire to occupy the concept by the teachers when it can be linked to meaningful teaching practice.

Key words: Denmark; career learning; career education; school

Introduction

Across many nations, schools and educational programmes are preoccupied with supporting students to develop life paths to benefit themselves and society. In Denmark, specifically, there is an overall desire to support students to gain insight into the world, develop democratic values, understand themselves in a societal context, and develop a foundation that supports them to progress in the education system, in the labour market and in life as a whole. In addition, there is also political attention to young people to make educational choices that address society's need for labour.

Recently career learning was implemented as an educational theme or concept across all academic upper secondary education programmes (approximately age 16-20). This was introduced during a comprehensive educational reform in 2017. In government policy papers related to the educational reform, different rationales and arguments were articulated concerning the integration of career learning (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet, 2022; Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet, 2016):

- to develop students' career competencies,
- to strengthen their academic and vocational development,
- to strengthen their formation and general education (the German term Bildung).

Prior to the educational reform in 2017, career learning was not articulated as an educational theme in any policy papers related to academic upper secondary education. However, after 2017, the different academic upper secondary education programmes were required to integrate career learning into the curriculum across all subject fields.

The success of such an educational reform lies largely in the teachers' knowledge and willingness to integrate it into their teaching practice. Here, the teachers' understanding, and narratives play a central role (Linné, 2015). The main research interest in this study is how teachers in academic upper secondary education understand the concept of career learning in a secondary school context. The study examines the following research questions:

- How do teachers in academic upper secondary education programmes understand and occupy the concept of career learning as a new educational concept?
- How does their understanding relate to a desire to maintain a meaningful teaching practice?

Concepts in the field of career guidance

In theory and practice, career studies refers to an interdisciplinary field 'which draws on a range of subject areas including education, psychology, sociology, business studies and labour market economics' (Hooley, 2022, p. 660). Across these disciplines, several concepts within career studies describe how people are trained in order to learn how to manage the lifelong interaction between education, work and life in general and linked to

this, the ability to make choices. Likewise, several concepts denote the efforts teachers and supervisors put in place to support people in this. Multiple concepts such as 'career learning', 'career development', 'career management skills', 'career management', 'career competencies', 'career education' and 'career counselling' are used. These concepts overlap and are used differently by different users (Hughes et al., 2016; Irving, 2015, p. 299). For example, Hooley argues that there can be variations across countries in how the concepts are understood and applied (Hooley, 2013).

Variations in the use and understanding of the concepts in other contexts may reflect different theoretical and philosophical understandings as well as political and ideological starting points within and external to the field of career guidance (Sultana, 2013; Hooley, 2022). Watts, points out that the inconsistency in term usage extends into policy and emphasises that 'the language used to describe career development in relation to public policy is varied and often confusing' (Watts, 2011, p. 3). He argues that more consistent use of concepts is essential for communication within the field of career guidance and between the field and parties outside the field and that 'some branding based on core concepts is needed to support consistency, coherence and continuity' (ibid).

As argued by Sultana (2022), there is a relationship between language, thought and action, 'reminding us that our thoughts and actions are intimately mediated by the words we use: we inhabit 'discursive ecologies' where words are connected, creating webs of meaning and signification that orient us to seeing and acting upon the world - as well as feeling - in particular ways' (Sultana, 2022, p. 3). A key argument here is that linguistic or semantic confusion matters because words and concepts shape the world and how we see and engage in it.

This relationship is especially evident when a contested concept without a single 'correct' definition (Hooley, 2022) crosses borders to new systems, organisations and users. This study reveals that this was the case when career learning was implemented in Denmark as a new educational concept in the academic upper secondary education programme.

Integrating different forms of career education is not unique to the Danish context (Poulsen & Buland, 2020). Teachers facilitating reflections on career competencies and focusing on career development is becoming more common, and an increased interest in the partnership between teachers and counsellors can be seen in different contexts and countries (e.g., The Careers and Enterprise Company, 2022; Haug et al., 2019, 2020; Poulsen, 2020; Poulsen & Buland, 2020; Røise, 2020). However, previous research and evaluations have indicated that a 'translation' of career education from counsellors to teachers is not without challenges (Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut & Rambøll, 2019; Felby, 2022).

Introduction to central concepts in Koselleck's conceptual history

The study's theoretical and analytical point of departure is Reinhart Koselleck's conceptual history (in German: Begriffsgeschichte). The focal point in Koselleck's anti-essentialist and constructivist theory is the conceptual historical analysis that gives insight into concepts

which are 'constantly changing spaces or horizons of possible meanings.' (Koselleck, 2007, p. 19. Authors' translation). Koselleck developed his theory to analyse the transition to modern times. As it is a historical theory, he does not discuss whether contemporary concepts can be analysed using the same method. However, Koselleck's theory is used in contemporary educational research and political analysis. For example, Linné analyses curriculum theory and didactics (Linné, 2015), and Tveit (2009) analyses how parents describe their role, the teachers' role and their conversations.

In this study, we use aspects of Koselleck's theory as analytical tools to analyse and discuss how teachers at upper secondary education position themselves to the concept of career learning. Below, we present key aspects of Koselleck's theory.

In Koselleck's theory, the definition of concepts becomes a battlefield, where concepts can be ascribed different meanings and thereby 'occupied' by actors in different contexts continuously. This is intensified as the understanding of a concept is defining for the future: 'When concepts start to reach into the future, the battle to define the future also becomes a battle to define the concepts' (Koselleck, 2007, p. 13. Authors' translation).

According to Koselleck concepts unite a wealth of meanings, and thus it is in the concepts' nature that the final meaning cannot be defined and that they are changeable across time and context. This means that when people ascribe meaning to a concept, it can be seen as 'positioning' and as part of creating collective identities. Koselleck thus shows that concepts describe social and political conditions (Ifversen, 2007).

In his theory, Koselleck distinguishes between three asymmetric counter concepts, which according to him, form metahistorical conditions for the constitution of history:

- The first oppositional pair is called 'space of experience' and 'horizon of expectation' (sooner or later), where Koselleck describes that 'past and future never coincide' (Koselleck, 2004, p. 260). The present exists in the tension between the space of experience and expectations.
- The second oppositional pair is called 'inside' and 'outside' (Koselleck, 1990) or 'friend' and 'foe' (Koselleck, 2004, p. 191). This pair indicates the difference between those inside and outside the community. The inside of the community stands together on their common welfare, while those on the outside threaten the welfare of the community (Åkerstrøm, 1999).
- The third oppositional pair is called 'above' and 'below' and concerns power relations (Koselleck, 2004, p. 187). It points out that inside communities of different kinds, there are different hierarchies and positions. In that sense, this oppositional pair indicates the internal pecking order.

These three oppositional pairs function as analytical tools and form the framework for the discussion later in the study. As a theoretical framework, Koselleck's conceptual history can be used to illuminate how concepts in careers – here career learning - are ascribed meaning and occupied in a particular setting. In addition, the theoretical framework can

be used to illuminate how social and political factors affect the attribution of meaning, and that this attribution becomes important for what may and can happen in future practice.

Context of the study and empirical design

The reported study focuses on the academic upper secondary education programme (STX) being Danish youth's most common upper secondary path (Gymnasieskolerne lærerforening, 2020). Teachers at STX are predominantly academically qualified through a master's degree. For instance, studying mathematics at university qualifies one to teach mathematics in STX. Once employed at STX, one can be offered a Postgraduate Diploma of Education (in Danish: 'pædagogikum').

Data in this paper draws on semi-structured interviews with ten teachers at three STX schools, with different catchment areas. One in the centre of a large city (urban), one in a big provincial town close to a larger city (county), and one in a smaller town situated in a rural area (rural). Through the case schools, an invitation letter was sent to the teachers asking them to participate in the research project. It was described that it was not expected or required that they knew precisely how they could, would, or should incorporate career learning in the subjects they teach. Each teacher was interviewed two times in a period of 18 months in 2018–2019.

Table 1 provides an overview of the teachers' teaching profiles.

Table 1: Overview of teachers' teaching profiles

Case School	Name	Subject Field
Urban	Henry	Mathematics, English
Urban	John	Social Studies, English
Urban	Sophie	Danish, Religious Studies
County	Andrew	History, Physical Education
County	Kate	Danish, Psychology
County	Bo	Mathematics, Chemistry
County	Michael	English, History
Rural	Vera	Mathematics, Danish
Rural	Peter	Danish, Art
Rural	Poul	Biology, Chemistry

The interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed by one of the authors, Felby. The research conducted in 2018-2019 at Aarhus University adhered to ethical research standards for studies involving minimal human interaction. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, all participants were anonymized in line with the Helsinki Declaration. Furthermore, all teachers at every stage of the research were informed about the research's purpose and the data's use, and they provided informed consent.

Coding

A deductive approach to data analysis was adopted. Both authors independently read the transcriptions several times and wrote codes in the margin. Reading and coding were both guided by Koselleck's three counter concepts and informed by the study's research questions. The authors compared the differences and similarities of the codes and discussed to gain a common understanding of the codes within each of the three counter concepts.

Analysis

Experience and expectation

Experience and expectation can be observed in two ways in the data; one dealing with the teachers' experiences with the political system – and, thereby, their expectations of the same, and one dealing with the teachers' own experience with their career path – and thereby their expectations of the students.

Teachers' experience and expectations of politicians

The most pervasive horizon of experience and expectations among the teachers is linked to their experiences and expectations with the political system and educational reforms, which create a fundamental scepticism towards the concept of career learning. Thus, across the empirical data, the teachers express that they distance themselves from the concept of the political motive or reasoning behind integrating career learning in STX to support early and more targeted career- and educational choices. For the teachers, this is based on their expectations of what the political ambition is to introduce career learning in STX, as supported by Poul (rural):

> 'I see it as a targeting towards making fewer wrong choices…I think, politically, career learning is a matter of resource management. We need to get the students through the educational system faster'.
>
> (Poul, rural)

The teachers refer to previous reforms in academic upper secondary education Programmes (specifically at STX) and other parts of the educational system. As an example, one teacher concludes that the focus on career learning should be seen 'as an extension of the study progress reform' (John, urban). Similarly, Sophie's experience with the political system means that she expects the politicians to use career learning as a tool to create 'soldiers of the competition state' (Sophie, urban).

Furthermore, the teachers' experience with an everyday linguistic understanding of what a 'career' is influences their expectations for working with the concept. Thus, they tend to

see careers as 'educational choices', 'job choices', 'targeting' and 'hierarchical progression', which John points out:

> 'When you think about the word "career", it is hierarchical, like a ladder you have to climb, an individual project of prestige. It is not because the word "career" is necessarily defined in that way, but these are some of the connotations that belong to the word.'
>
> (John, urban)

John elaborates that it is his experience that it can be experienced as 'transgressive to discuss careers with 1st year students' (approximately 16 years old). Thus, he links talks about careers with a focus on getting the students to make a fast educational choice and not for example widening their horizons on careers. He is sceptical towards an early targeting of the students and therefore he does not want to discuss careers with them during their first year.

These experiences and understanding of the concept of career generally challenge the teachers' experience with the meaningfulness of career learning in STX, especially when everyday linguistic understanding and expectations of the political system interact. In those cases, the teachers tend to rule out career learning as a meaningful concept for their (disciplinary and didactic) practice and students.

The teachers' career path

All the teachers were asked about their career path towards their current job as teachers at STX. Most teachers say they have become STX teachers more or less by chance.

Overall, the teachers' experience of their career path as unplanned and random plays into their expectations of the potential of career learning as a teaching concept. Their fundamental scepticism towards the concept of career, as they assume the Ministry understands it, combined with their own experience of 'making a career', has the consequence that they do not find it relevant (or realistic) that students already at STX should be 'pressured' into career planning.

In addition, there are teachers who – based on their own experiences – would like to convey to the students that there is value in taking more time over decisions concerning learning choices and completing their education. This can be seen in John's reflection below:

> 'I later regretted that I did not slow down during my studies because I had a fun time studying. I sometimes talk with the students about it. Then we will have a few talks about it, and I will offer some advice about student life from "an old man's perspective" – how it is also valuable and not just a means to get a career afterwards.'
>
> (John, urban)

Similarly, some teachers highlight the conflict between their understanding of the political concept of career learning, the value of taking sabbaticals and enjoying your time studying and the gaps that may come. As an example, this can be seen with Kate, who states:

> 'I usually tell them to take a sabbatical. But I say that it is off the record [laughs] I think that, as their teacher, my task is to see their needs, and not just push them through [the educational system]. And to reassure them, that it is okay to take a gap year.'
>
> (Kate, county)

Among the teachers time off from education are seen as valuable parts of one's career path and as something they want to convey to the students. The consequence is two-sided; some teachers, like John, talk directly to the students about it. In this way, he practices career learning, although without being aware of it. For other teachers such as Kate, the outcome is that she refuses to work with the 'political' concept of career learning as it does not harmonise with her understanding of the value of time and breaks. Thus, the teachers have two tracks in their actualisation of career learning, formulated in the tension between the space of experience and the horizon of expectations. In one track, career learning is formulated in connection with their experiences with, and expectations of, the political system and the everyday understanding of a career. In the other track, career learning is formulated in connection with their own experiences of embarking on and planning a career.

These interpretations draw on the teachers' space of experience and horizon of expectations. Although the interpretations occur in the present, they draw on what has already happened, said and done, thus influencing possibilities in the future. Therefore, the semantic battles to occupy and generalise the concept are expected to continue.

Inside and outside

Koselleck presents the opposition pair inside or outside – or more pointedly formulated as the distinction between friend and foe (Koselleck, 2004).

Inside

In the data, the teachers see themselves and their teaching colleagues as those who stand together on the 'inside' – of the educational system, the curriculum and the students. This is by ensuring that the students learn 'how it is to live as a human being' (Sophie, urban) through their work with the students' professional and vocational development, well-being, and agency development in their own lives. This can be seen in the following quote:

> 'We have to prepare the students to live their best life possible in which they do not let themselves be controlled by others, but instead are able to say "no" and ask themselves "what is important in my life today as a young person?" As teachers, we can illuminate and equip them for the good and bad in life.'
>
> (Sophie, urban)

Similarly, Andrew argues that the most important learning at STX is learning how to 'reflect on the world, on the life you live, to see that life can be lived in many ways and can be done in many ways around the world. You do not necessarily need huge means to have a good life.' (Andrew, county)

In conjunction with their horizon of experience and expectations, the teachers thus position themselves through a strong identity as STX teachers and through an understanding of what an STX education is, and what it can and should be used for. The teachers are thus in opposition to the outside, which for the teachers in this study is the Ministry of Children and Education.

Outside

When the teachers position themselves as 'insiders', it becomes clear that they perceive those standing outside are the Ministry of Children and Education. As mentioned earlier, there is an expectation that the Ministry wants to push the students towards early targeting and choice-making in relation to their future career paths and choice of further education.

At the same time, the teachers perceive the Ministry as an enemy that seeks to pressure not only their students, but also themselves as teachers in terms of finances, time and the opportunity to teach their subjects competently, among other things. One teacher, Michael (county), uses company visits and internships, (career learning activities required/ recommended by the Ministry), as an example of this external pressure on the teachers and their profession. Michael argues that company visits and internship collaborations can be meaningful, but they take large amounts of time away from other parts of the subject-specific curriculum which is a huge concern. Additionally, the student's subject and theoretical learning during the company visits or internships is not equal to the time 'away' from the subject-specific curriculum in class. Michael's argument emphasises that, although in theory, a teacher like Michael would like to take this kind of initiative, in practice it is difficult as it requires resources that are not available.

The Ministry's wish to introduce career learning as an educational concept also has the consequence of being positioned as an enemy of the teaching profession and professionalism. This is evident, for example, in the following excerpt from the interview with Poul:

> 'The fact that the Ministry tries to target young people means that we lose the curious, investigative, playful approach to the subject, which is disastrous for natural science...The breadth and depth, and the critical approach, the investigative approach, for which Danish students are praised all over the world, we risk losing it.'
>
> (Poul, Rural)

In the quote, Poul expects that through career learning, the Ministry has a utility perspective on subjects, disciplines, and education in general, i.e. is it useful? Based on that expectation, he points out that career learning – understood as what subjects can be used for in terms of education and career – potentially removes or destroys the interest in his subject. With reference to Koselleck, Åkerstrøm Andersen points out that 'Inside we stand together and protect our welfare. Outside someone or something threatens our welfare.' (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 1999, p. 82. Authors' translation). Poul argues that the outside (the Ministry) is threatening the welfare of his students (and his discipline).

The boundary between inside and outside is not stable in the data material. It is negotiated continuously, both under the impression of what the expectations are for the Ministry's

understanding of career learning and the impression of the everyday understanding of the concept of career held by the teachers.

Above and below

Koselleck describes the opposition pair 'above and below', which generally characterises the possible positioning within a community (Koselleck, 2004). It appears from the empirical material that the positions are fluid; there is a hierarchy between subjects, and there is a hierarchy between regions.

The hierarchy between different subjects

The data indicates that most teachers are under the assumption that while career learning can be integrated as a natural part of some subjects, career learning in other subjects is not considered meaningful or even possible. In this connection, most teachers view subjects other than their own as more suitable for integrating career learning as an educational concept. As an example, a math teacher, says:

> 'In a subject like Danish, you as a teacher can say that the students could become journalists. So, as a teacher in Danish, you definitely go in and practise some "journalistic teaching". You teach the students to write. Because almost regardless of what they get into jobwise, they have to write. After all, not everyone ends up being a mathematician.'
>
> (Vera, rural)

Overall, however, in several of the teachers' descriptions, career learning is something other than the subject itself – an add-on that can be difficult to integrate meaningfully into a busy day and a full curriculum.

The hierarchy between regions

Finally, the data indicate that the opposition pair 'up and down' is demonstrated through differences concerning the geographical and regional location of the schools in the study. The difference between the two larger cities (urban and county) and the smaller city (rural) is particularly noticeable. The teachers at the urban and county schools argue that the location of their schools in large cities provides better opportunities to visit companies and cultural institutions. They argue that it is easier for them to apply their subjects to the world outside of education and meet specific practices; i.e. a more classic external world orientation concerning career learning. Contrary to the teachers from the urban and county case schools, teachers at the Rural case school, emphasise that they find arranging company visits particular challenge due to having to travel longer distances and there being fewer companies with employees who have completed tertiary education.

Poul, who teaches biology and chemistry at the rural case school, mentions that in their regional area, there is only a smaller selection of companies which makes teachers very dependent on the parents of the students. The analysis thus shows that it is implicit in the teachers' assessment that the upper secondary schools in or close to the larger cities are 'up' in terms of the integration of career learning, while the upper secondary schools in the

peripheral or rural area are 'down'. This has to be understood in the sense that they have greater challenges in making use of the outside world in the career learning work.

Discussion

The teachers' efforts to attribute meaning to the concept of career learning is challenged by the fact that the concept needs to be clearly defined in government policy documents for academic upper secondary education programmes. In that sense, the concept of 'career learning' becomes an empty signifier which is in motion and continuously must be filled with new meaning. Koselleck emphasises that when an ambiguous concept (in this case, career learning) is uncertain, it can be directed to anything, and no content can be excluded. On the other hand, the concept can be given a specific quality with which boundaries are drawn but does not originate directly from the concept (Koselleck, 2004).

The teachers emphasise and criticise that the concept of career learning is so broad that, in practice, it can include anything, which makes it meaningless. Thus, the teachers describe career learning as what Irving refers to as a 'catch-all' term (Irving, 2015, p. 299). On the other hand, the teachers try to attribute a special quality to the concept; namely to support the students to develop agency and expand their horizons. In this way, the teachers draw boundaries for career learning based on a desire to occupy the concept with meaning they experience as appropriate for them, the subject they teach and their students.

The teachers assume that the meaning attributed to career learning by the Ministry of Children and Education is primarily related to targeting students' educational choices. In response to the boundary they draw concerning the concept, the teachers assess the meaning they attribute to career learning to differ from that of the Ministry of Children and Education. Furthermore, when prioritising that students develop agency in life and widen their horizons, the teachers do not meet the expectations expressed in the executive order.

The conflict experienced by the teachers between the meaning they ascribe to career learning and the meaning they expect the Ministry of Children and Education to ascribe to career learning is reinforced by the fact that the education system (of which the STX is a part) and the labour market are complex and highly politicised fields. The many possible meanings and tensions in negotiating the career learning concept illustrate that the concept is part of this complex and politicised field. In particular it is rooted in values, discourses and philosophical understandings of what education is for. What is the purpose of education? Who should we educate? For what should the students train? How do we maintain a welfare society? These questions to which the concept of career learning is linked are neither answered nor resolved by 'getting a handle on the concept'. Tensions in the field will remain. Interpretations of the concept career learning draw on the experiences and expectations of teachers, politicians, students and citizens. These interpretations occur in the present but draw on what has already happened (what has been said and done), thus influencing future possibilities. Hence, the semantic battles to occupy the concept of career learning are expected to continue.

Conclusion

The contribution of this study is twofold. Firstly, it contributes to the literature by providing insights into the translation and negotiation of career learning in a new context – namely STX. In addition, it illuminates how teachers' understanding of the concept of career learning is linked to their desire to maintain a meaningful teaching practice – for the sake of themselves, their subject and their students. Secondly, the study contributes to the literature by using – in an educational and career guidance theoretical perspective – a novel theoretical framework to illuminate the conceptualisation and occupation of new concepts within an educational setting.

In the study, we draw on observations and interviews with ten teachers from academic upper secondary education (STX). However, there are weaknesses to this data. One is that the study is based on empirical evidence from a limited period and collected shortly after introducing the concept of career learning in the Danish academic upper secondary educational programme. Another weakness is that the study explores the meaning and use of a concept at a specific (and short) time in contrast to Koselleck, who investigated longer complex historical time courses. However, although the empirical evidence was produced over a relatively short period of time, the selected parts of the conceptual framework expressly analyse and discuss the battles and negotiations around the semantic occupation with a complex concept, such as career learning.

Overall, the study provides insight into STX teachers' attribution of meaning concerning career learning as a newly introduced concept into their teaching practice. Furthermore, the study provides insight into the challenges that can and often will arise when concepts are not clearly defined and are formulated outside the specific context in which they are to be applied. In this case, when educational concepts are formulated at a political level and in government policy documents. This study shows, the STX teachers' translation of policy into practice creates an interpretive vacuum that makes it challenging to operationalise career learning in teaching practice. As Koselleck identifies, it is important to adhere to the fact that because a concept is characterised by its ambiguity – it will always demand an integration in to practice through the negotiation of meaning. As the study has shown, this negotiation of meaning is complex and full of internal and external paradoxes.

Despite this ongoing tension around the negotiation of the concept of career learning, the study also draws attention to the fact that there is goodwill and desire to operationalise the concept by the teachers – but only in a meaningful manner. Equally, clarification of meaning of the concept 'career learning' within government policy can impact on how the concept is applied by teachers and its future development.

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Article

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'Words Escape Me': How working women experience cognitive menopause symptoms

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Abstract

More women than ever before are working during the menopause transition, yet studying menopause from a career perspective is in its infancy. This study explored how women reporting cognitive menopause symptoms make sense of their experiences in the workplace by linking participants narratives, to the social construction of menopause. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to reveal how self-concept can be called into question thus impacting professional identity and career decisions.

Key words: Menopause, career identity, workplace, organisational careers

Introduction

Menopause is a biopsychosocial phenomenon starting at the median age of 51 marking the end of reproductive life for women (Hardy et al. 2018). It coincides with mid-to-late career stage, a time associated with technically competent leadership (Acker, 1990). This study focuses on cognitive menopause symptoms defined as declining 'attention, verbal learning, verbal memory, working memory' (Weber et al. 2013, p. 1), caused by chemical changes to the brain during early menopause (Mosconi et al. 2021). Depending on severity of symptoms, women may have difficulty in managing job demands, potentially leading to voluntary or forced exits from employment as highlighted in some recent UK employment

tribunals (Brewis et al. 2017; Atkinson et al. 2021a). The Women and Equalities Committee survey *Menopause in the Workplace* (2022), found cognitive symptoms were experienced by 73% of women and the second most difficult symptom to manage. Therefore, understanding the lived experiences of women transitioning through menopause is important to create a gender-inclusive and inter-generational workforce (Grandey et al. 2020).

The literature review conducted in 2022 found some women are subjected to workplace gendered ageism including sexist comments on appearance, creating pressure to appear more youthful (Krekula et al. 2018). Working menopausal women are surrounded by negative messages resulting in some women hiding their menopausal identity for fear of being overlooked for opportunities (Mavin and Grandy 2016). Hall and Mirvis (1995) describe the meanings women attach to identity whilst experiencing menopause at work, as contextual and influenced by gender-based norms expressed by co-workers leading to potentially adverse performance interpretations (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). Therefore, any negative perceptions of cognitive ability may weaken 'leader emergence' (Grandey et al. 2020, p. 20), for fear of negative performance management or redundancy (Jack et al. 2014). Overall, the review found meanings women give to menopause in the workplace is an interpretive, complex process based on self-concept and the work environment (Savickas et al., 2009).

Extant research has predominately been conducted through a positivist paradigm seeking to quantify menopausal symptoms (Atkinson et al. 2021a). However, positivism does not give meanings to 'feelings, perceptions, and attitudes' (Evely et al. 2008, p. 3). Uncertainty exists around how professional women in leadership positions make sense and attach meaning to cognitive symptoms associated with menopause. Weick's (1995) theory of sensemaking offers a conceptual framework to explain how women make sense and attach meaning to their menopause transition in the workplace. Weick's model, can be used to identity how professional women's lived experiences of menopause are influenced by their interactions with others through language and cues. Drawing on Louis's (1980) model for sensemaking in transitions, it is possible given the shock that may occur during menopause transition, women have no established network around them to test perceptions and end up using stereotypes existing in society. Potentially this puts their professional identity into question resulting in adverse interpretations of their capability to work (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). Therefore if menopause triggers a change in a woman's sense of self, it could influence her professional identity.

Methodology

Given the interest in sensemaking, an IPA framework (Table 1.) was used to explore participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2003). This study contributed to the understanding of this phenomena by asking: How do women experiencing cognitive symptoms associated with menopause make sense of their experiences in the workplace?

Table 1. An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith and Nizza 2022).

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4
Data familiarisation	Double Hermeneutic analysis	Idiographic inquiry	Five group experiential themes identified capturing thoughts & feelings
Each semi-structured, on-line interview transcribed in full and then anonymised in February 2022. Repeated words, changes of tense etc. fully captured	Multiple experimental statements created to make sense of the participants sense making	Curated repeated themes and subthemes to interpret sense making case by case, whilst examining environmental context (Cassidy et al. 2011)	Key phrases from participants collated to ensure each voice was heard for cross case analysis
Set of exploratory notes for each participant created using phenomenology to explore potential meanings. Deeply reflexive, iterative and cyclical process	Statements numbered, printed, then cut out to enable clustering of statements. 12-15 themes per participant identified	Merging similar themes into 25 themes for a final cross examination looking for patterns of connectivity and difference	Constant review of the text whilst writing to bring to life parallels and differences of personal meanings

This study was granted ethical approval from Birkbeck University in 2022. In accordance with Smith and Nizza (2022, p.16) five participants were recruited using snowball sampling via a professional women's network (Table 2.).

Table 2. Participants' demographics

Participants (pseudonym)	Carolyn	Debbie	Katie	Marina	Libby
Profession	HR Manager	Consultant	Operations Manager	Operations Manager	Solicitor
Age	54	50	49	52	57
Ethnicity	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British
Geographical location	UK	UK	UK	UK	UK
Working contract	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time
Symptoms as described by participant	Brain fog, intellectual fogginess	Lack of focus, loss of concentration, confusion	Loss of concentration, lack of recall	Memory loss, loss of concentration	Confusion, memory loss
Gender of Line Manager	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male
Disclosed symptoms to Line Manager	No	No	Yes	No	No
Organisation menopause policy/guidelines	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Workplace communications	Informally discussed in female network group	Awareness sessions headed up by Executive Committee. No policy/guidelines	Informal discussions with immediate female team	Menopause policy rollout. Health and safety briefings	None
Career change within 12 months of cognitive menopause symptoms starting	Resigned	Career stalled. Hesitant to apply for new role	Made redundant	Career stalled. Hesitant to apply for new role. Considering leaving	Resigned

Findings and discussion

How participants experienced and made sense of cognitive menopause symptoms in the workplace emerged as five interrelated themes (Figure 1.), providing an opportunity to understand the impact of menopause on careers. Menopause was an emotive word, holding a negative meaning for participants. To give meaning to their menopause transitions, participants often relied on how they were before the symptoms started, to make sense of the change in cognitive functioning. This had the added impact of highlighting the suddenness of change to their working lives which came as a shock. In common with other IPA studies examining transitions, participants expressed difficulties in integrating symptoms with their self-concept (Smith and Fieldsend, 2021), as 'not feeling myself'. Symptoms were described as 'not normal' making work experiences more challenging validating Louis' (1980) sensemaking theory. Findings are discussed with reference to existing literature and illustrated with germane quotations in italics from individual participants.

Figure 1.

Five Group Experiential Themes & Subthemes
A SENSE OF LOSS AND FEAR • Loss of cognitive ability • Fear of being identified
CONFIDENCE AND CONTROL • Confidence knock and invisible self • Keeping up appearances
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY • Reputation and self-consistency called into question • Consumed by perceptions of others
DISCLOSURE • Non-disclosure to Line Manager • Disclosure to Line Manager
IMPACT ON CAREER • Impacts daily job • Impacts career decisions

A sense of loss and fear

The language of burden around menopause is deeply embedded (Women and Equalities Committee, 2022). This was echoed in this study of seemingly successful and confident professionals who upon menopause transition became fearful of losing credibility, describing experiences using language of anguish such as 'terror' and 'panic':

> People look to me for direction, for answers, for advice, for guidance. I felt totally spaced out…which was really frightening. It just makes you feel vulnerable…It gives you that feeling of quite isolated, fearful, I thought I'm not going to be able to do my job…I was terrified at the point of it happening.
>
> (Katie)

Evidence was found suggesting systemic embedded negative stereotypes around menopause, the embodiment of which created concerns about being labelled or capability being questioned:

> You don't want to walk around with a big M on your forehead and labelled as a female going through menopause…Others will see me as less capable. I don't want to identify as menopausal as I don't think it identifies me.
>
> (Debbie)

Participants experienced liminality (Ibarra and Obodaru, 2016) during this time of adjustment, struggling let go of their premenopausal self and embrace their new menopause self:

> Vulnerable. It just makes you feel vulnerable…It gives you that feeling of being quite isolated, almost a little fearful…I am completely out of control. My body is controlling me…You're losing something aren't you?...that's how it feels anyway.
>
> (Carolyn)

Confidence and control

Participants felt menopause was a taboo subject: 'It's easier to say it's my age forgive me, than to say it's my menopause forgive me' (Libby). They concealed and controlled their cognitive symptoms attempting to conform to workplace norms, fearful of giving anyone 'ammunition':

> For women, where they have reached that level, where they are expected to be dynamic, to be attentive, to be switched on…A price comes with that, you don't want to give anybody ammunition to say: 'she's not performing quite right'.
>
> (Katie)

Their sensemaking indicated conflict between symptoms experienced and their work persona of 'intelligent' and 'articulate' further challenging self-concept. Fear of stigmatisation culminated in participants becoming withdrawn questioning their value and organisational fit:

> As a senior leader within the organisation, people expect you to be sharp...to be switched on. That self-confidence, that self-belief you've built up from years of experience, performing at a certain level, when that isn't there, that fundamentally calls into question…am I in the right place? Am I in the right role?
>
> (Katie)

Participants displayed strong role commitment yet when their confidence diminished, became disengaged and started to withdraw commitment to the organisation. Building on the study by Jack et al. (2019) of menopausal women feeling invisible, this study found invisibility was in part driven by participants' concealment strategies. The behaviours adopted meant the need for authenticate careers was not met, potentially explaining the desire to 'opt-out' (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005, p106):

> I felt lost, lost my confidence...lost motivation…I sat in silence the entire meeting. I didn't have the confidence to put my hand up…I tend to shrink into the corner. Never done that before, my insides are saying to me 'I just can't do this'.
>
> (Marina)

All participants expressed negative menopausal stereotypes which were incongruous with the ideal worker characteristics they held such as being 'switched on' and 'sharp'. Sensemaking is a social process in organisations (Weick, 1995) where ideal worker schemas are typically forceful and decisive. Women experiencing cognitive symptoms may feel their identity no longer fits that schema and choose to withdraw (Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015).

Professional identity

Professional and nonwork identities are connected dimensions of employability (Sullivan and Al Ariss, 2019). Therefore, if cognitive menopause symptoms trigger a change in an individual's sense of self, it could influence their professional identity. This study builds on Steffan's (2021) research exploring how menopausal women construct work identity. Participants put great value on consistency of performance and intellectual capacity which was tied to their image of a successful midlife career. Unpredictable symptoms created a fear of reputational damage ultimately challenging their self-concept.

> You don't want anyone feeling sorry for you or feeling pitiful. You don't want to be pitied… I don't want to feel like I am coming across as a menopausal mess because I'm very conscious how to portray myself in a professional setting.
>
> (Debbie)

Concerns about others' perceptions together with their own thoughts of being a 'professional mess,' cumulated in a sense of negative self-identity:

> They might treat you differently. They might think differently of you, especially males… You have to look a certain way, like you in control. Like you know what you're doing.
>
> (Carolyn)

Winterich and Umberson (1999) found how workplace colleagues define menopause is socio-culturally specific, shaping how women put meaning to menopause impacting their engagement and career choices (Rees et al. 2021):

> I want to be respected so the thought of people losing respect for you because you're not as sharp or as switched on as you've been previously, or your star has dimmed… that would have made me feel deeply, deeply unhappy, deeply unhappy.
>
> (Katie)

Negative socially constructed discourses of menopause seep into workplaces not only through the wider socio-economic context, but also through the psychosocial characteristic of organisational environments, where gender inequality is built into employment structures partly through workplace interactions (Acker,1990). Parallels can be made with maternity leave returners who think others will view them differently (Millward, 2006).

Struggles with menopausal identity became a barrier, inhibiting self-expression. Fear of stigmatisation sometimes culminated in participants becoming withdrawn questioning their value and organisational fit:

> It's what other people are thinking [that] worries [me] the most. I sat on this call listening, not once was I acknowledged, not once did I step forward like I normally would have…it's making me crawl back into my hole. I'm thinking, he's probably thinking, 'I'll get someone else to do it'.

Disclosure

The sensemaking process was seemingly environmentally contingent as participants acknowledged the competitiveness in 'pressured', 'vicious', and 'hostile' organisational environments. Direct reporting lines impeded disclosure decisions (Hirsh et al. 2001) with particular concern that revealing symptoms might lead to loss of reputation or stigmatisation. Managers were depicted as 'awkward' indicating disclosure decision-making was contextual and relational, dependent on how they felt others would judge them (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). Perceived unsupportive male dominated environments created disclosure barriers:

> I report to a male. There's absolutely no way on this earth I would have a conversation with him. He would look at me and run away. It's a bit dog-eat-dog… He's a classic male driver just bang, bang, bang. Wants to control everything…no time to hang around…bam, bam, bam, on to the next thing.
>
> (Debbie)

Some organisations had launched menopause policies, yet there was little faith in policies per se being a mechanism to improve the work environment. Participants felt that changing working patterns might reveal their midlife status and lead to negative career consequences: 'To work flexible hours in senior roles the reason becomes very blatant' (Carolyn). This study adds to the Fawcett (2021) survey, which found disclosure was lowest for women in senior leadership roles.

Where workplace menopause dialogue existed, language and symbols became integral to participants' sense-making. Participants felt patronised by younger women: 'it was like, oh, bless you'. The O'Neil & Bilimoria three phase model (2005) adds to this understanding by finding women's sense of self being driven by relationships. However, fear of disclosure went beyond environmental perception, mostly there was a sense nothing could be done to support them, thus reinforcing feelings of isolation (Jack et al. 2014):

> All it does is talk about reasonable adjustments. What reasonable adjustments do I want? What could my line manager do for me? What could he do? I can't say 'Could you boost my confidence daily, could you?' …He's awkward about everything, there is no way he'd talk to me.
>
> (Marina)

In contrast, where participants worked in a team of midlife women common identity made disclosure easier: 'There was a real familial feeling about it. I think the culture and environment meant you could talk to your colleagues about these things' (Katie).

Impact at work and on career

Participants described considerable challenges maintaining performance levels whilst experiencing symptoms that were often described as being incompatible with the organisations' leadership schema. Participants used assertive language: 'killer', 'ammunition', 'attack' signalling embodiment of the hyper-masculine norms of the organisation (Atkinson, 2021b). All participants had high work autonomy, yet feared cognitive changes being identified as a performance issue. Participants focused on working longer hours keeping up with job demands to minimise perceived underperformance and protect their reputation, yet there was little sense of work-life conflict in narratives:

> I would try and read the material in advance to try and get the words and their phraseology into my mind. Behind the scenes I was endlessly checking things...never confident what something was good enough which isn't really me, working longer days…taking more time in the evenings to prepare things than I would have done.
>
> (Libby)

This concurs with ideal worker theory where women 'privilege work' over homelife to fit in (Dumas and Sanchez-Burks 2015, p. 821). Participants often felt 'disarmed' by 'intellectual fogginess'. This sometimes lead to a reticence when taking on new projects:

> Almost a weariness, that's going to be difficult, a kind of fogginess, intellectual fogginess, needing to be able to do that quickly because you're forming judgements…not being as snappy, it was almost a weariness whereas normally it would be great, get in.
>
> (Carolyn)

As professional women their self-concept of intellectuals became threatened as 'words escaped' them leading to negative self-perception (Sullivan and Al-Ariss, 2019). High-stake psychosocial factors including client meetings and presentations were coupled with feelings of 'incompetence' creating inconsistent self-narratives (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010):

> I would regularly forget keywords in presentations, often even the subject of the presentation, the word would escape me. I started to lose confidence…it kept happening. The words would escape me. Topics I delivered regularly would dilute, just disappear…just swimming before my eyes…I seem to have lost some of my antennae.
>
> (Libby)

Associations with incompetence in the workplace signify a non-inclusive environment ultimately harming women's careers (Grandey, 2020). However, while not disclosing the cause, masking symptoms for fear of repercussions might have stopped managers offering support. Whilst the extent symptoms impacted participants' careers is not certain, it is worth noting all experienced a career transition to some degree during the first year of menopause (Table 2.). This study concurs with the Sullivan et al. (2003) review of Supers' (1957) career stage model which recognises that a personal difficulty leading to loss of

confidence could account for changing career direction, feelings of helplessness, and decisions to resign (Hall and Mirvis, 1995):

> Is it time for me to move on? Should I stand back and sit in the wings? Whereas before I would have been super focused and excited…Suddenly I feel risk averse, before I would have pushed myself forward…now I'm grappling, do I stay in my comfortable role?
>
> (Marina)

Factors driving career transitions come from multiple directions, are socially constructed, and alter over time (Lee et al. 2011). Therefore, menopause may have been a catalyst for change for participants, highlighting the importance of social construction in careers at a stage when women are often moving into senior positions (Grandey et al. 2020). Attempts to conceal symptoms through withdrawing from opportunities could become a barrier to progression (Schein, 1978), leading to indirect costs for women by not applying for a promotion or reducing hours.

Only one participant disclosed her menopause status to her manager and was later made redundant. Whilst she did not feel the two events were connected at the time, her sensemaking was ongoing as she reflected she was replaced by: 'Younger fresher meat…I do wonder if that could just be coincidental' (Katie).

Implications for organisations

Whilst formal menopause communications are useful to set the tone within organisations, building on the Hardy et al. (2018) study, women's openness about support needed, is unlikely to be tied to an organisation's menopause awareness rhetoric but influenced by the systemic culture. Making menopause a major focus of attention, might conversely result in disempowerment through marginalisation (Hardy et al. 2018), thus rendering workplace interventions ineffective. Given the relational nature of how women manage careers (Higgins and Kram, 2001), this study suggests encouraging informal mentoring to support psychosocial needs could lead to greater career satisfaction (Kidd, 2004).

Organisations have an opportunity to train managers on how to have supportive career discussions to promote self-insight throughout the employee life cycle. Through developing an understanding of women's changing needs it is possible to foster a culture of inclusion (Griffiths et al. 2013). In particular, understanding the change in cognitive functioning that some women experience as an early part of menopause may facilitate open ended career path planning ahead of symptoms occurring (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005), possibly increasing employee engagement (Kidd et al. 2003). Thus, the normalisation of menopause conversations in the workplace, in conjunction with educating managers on the internalised fears many women experience in order to create empathy and reduce barriers to disclosure, may support the retention of midlife talent (CIPD, 2021).

Implications for career practitioners

The findings have implications for career professionals when considering the intersection of age and gender in the workplace. Women with successful careers based on intellect, may find their self-esteem and confidence impacted when their professional identity is threatened. Using tools such as a family genogram (Yates, 2014) to analyse social influences, as well as Schein's (1990) model of organisational culture to explore workplace environments may support sensemaking around internalised menopause stigma (Brown & Brooks, 1991). Unpredictable cognitive menopause symptoms can be connected to decreased self-efficacy and confidence (Geukes et al., 2012). Therefore, using career construction theory to bring understanding of different life roles may enable clients to build confidence and understand their menopausal self (Savickas, 2012).

Career practitioners may consider using Nicolson's transition model (1990), to understand how symptoms impact confidence and professional identity throughout the menopause transition. This study's findings support Wright (2005) who found women with cognitive symptoms may experience performance issues where there is an expectation they will have immediate recall of data. Considering menopause often coincides with women taking on more responsibility as they transition into more senior roles (Grandey et al. 2020), identifying effective coping strategies is important e.g. job crafting (Nielsen, 2013) to ensure midlife women thrive at work. Attempts to conceal symptoms by withdrawing from opportunities could have unintended consequences and become a barrier to achieving career goals (Schein, 1978).

Limitations and future research

Whilst the researcher did not explore evidence of contextual factors occurring in participants' lives, menopause intersects with other life stage events potentially accounting for the participants' sensemaking (Van der Heijden et al. 2021). The experiential themes identified raise an opportunity for further research on different employment groups and ethnicities to further understand the impact of cognitive menopause symptoms on careers.

Conclusion

Change in cognitive functioning such as memory loss during menopause is under researched yet important to understand to reduce stigma surrounding menopause as part of creating an inclusive, multigenerational labour market. By adhering to IPA ideographical principles, the design of this study offers a deep understanding of how professional women experience and make sense of cognitive symptoms associated with menopause. Their sensemaking centred around a desire to maintain reputation and professional identity associated with intellectual capacity. A sense of loss pervaded the participants' language and went to the heart of sensemaking: 'Who am I?'

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Article

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Emerging insights from a peer-to-peer social justice careers education programme

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Abstract

The Inclusive Careers Education Ambassador (ICEA) programme at King's College London was designed to focus on the careers education experience of historically underrepresented groups in UK higher education. The project has been co-created and delivered by staff and students within the Faculty of Natural, Mathematical & Engineering Sciences (NMES). Student researchers took an active participant observation approach when reviewing the ICEA programme, drawing on social justice principles. This article explores the rationale for the programme and evaluates key outcomes from the first two years. It finds that by combining extensive training, flexibility in co-creating peer activities, and a department-focused approach, the programme has enthused and engaged stakeholders, and has enabled transformative learning experiences across the Faculty's staff and student body.

Keywords: Higher education; career education; career learning; social justice; peer-to-peer

Introduction

McGregor-Smith (2017, p. 3) states 'there is discrimination and bias at every stage of an individual's career, and even before it begins'. Careers education at university is increasingly a priority for higher education institutions (Long and Hubble, 2022), yet there are barriers in place that make it an unequal playing field.

In 2019 and 2020, the careers consultant for the Faculty of Natural, Mathematical & Engineering Sciences (NMES) at King's College London identified a divergence in data between communities with historic privilege in the higher education field and communities underrepresented in higher education. Within the NMES Faculty, the proportion of students identifying as White male who reported being in the 'taking action' phase of career planning in the annual 'careers registration' survey was significantly higher than the equivalent percentage for students identifying as Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnicity female. The careers consultant endeavoured to understand the reasons behind this phenomenon and explored possible ways to address the issues identified. Drawing together a team of key stakeholders including student representatives, members of the NMES Faculty Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and faculty education team members, they established the 'Inclusive Careers Education Ambassador' (ICEA) programme. NMES students and recent graduates with an understanding of the lived experience of marginalised communities were recruited into 10 paid part-time positions, supported by a project officer (also a student or recent graduate). The roles included paid training which aims to help ambassadors to feel confident providing peer-to-peer careers education within their departments and at faculty careers events.

This article reports on active participant evaluation research undertaken by student researchers each summer of the programme so far. This has included observations, surveys and interviews, with an iterative approach to data analysis. We reflect on the programme through a lens of critical pedagogy, informed by literature and insights from key stakeholders.

Careers education and critical pedagogy

Using data from the Longitudinal Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (LDLHE) survey, Bermingham et al. (2020, p. 19) found evidence that Black African and Black Caribbean graduates were less likely than their White peers to report being satisfied with their careers. This survey contacted graduates up to 3.5 years after course completion to follow up on the original Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, now replaced by the Graduate Outcomes Survey. In parallel, McGregor-Smith (2017, p. 57) noted that Black and Minoritised Ethnicity individuals are 'as ambitious, if not more so, than their White counterparts'. Where strong career ambitions do not translate into career satisfaction for individuals from minoritised communities, it is crucial to investigate potential reasons for this within the career journeys of diverse students, and particularly to listen to the voices of marginalised individuals.

In an interview for the *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK universities: Closing the gap* research (Universities UK, 2019), Aston University student Amna emphasised the importance of role models: 'If students don't see themselves reflected in certain roles… they automatically disregard those roles as a possible future career.' This sentiment is mirrored in a study by Ranavaya (2022), in which one participant discusses how she has not seen any diversity in senior roles, and how that makes her less confident that she can progress in her role. A study by Gregor et al. (2019, p. 212) suggested that 'students who felt more prepared to cope with barriers related to gender, race/ethnicity, relationship, and financial concerns reported higher aspirations'. As Hooley et al. (2021, p. 59) identify:

> 'Career guidance is not a magic cure-all that can wash away structural inequalities and oppression, but it can help people to become aware of these structures, navigate them and exercise agency on both an individual and collective basis.' (Hooley et al, 2021, p. 59)

Critical pedagogy provides a framework within which careers educators can work towards these aims, based in part upon Freire's (1970) concepts of conscientização (conscientisation), 'helping people to develop a critical awareness of their surroundings' (Hooley et al, 2021, p. 60) and praxis, 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (Freire, 1970, p. 36). Four key features of critical pedagogy are described by Johnson & Morris (2010):

1. a political or ideological focus couched within the understanding that education cannot be truly unbiased or 'neutral';
2. a subjective and context-driven focus, exploring one's own cultures and contexts and speaking with an authentic voice;
3. a social or collective focus, collaborative rather than competitive; and
4. a focus on reflective action (praxis) through which systemic change can be enacted.

In this article we analyse the Inclusive Careers Education Ambassador programme through a lens of critical pedagogy, drawing on the four aspects described above. The evaluation research, including surveys and interviews, was approved by the research ethics office at King's College London under the low-risk ethics application process.

The importance of representation in careers education

Students from underrepresented groups may have a more positive experience when encountering careers education from someone who has a clear understanding of the lived experiences of marginalised communities and the barriers that face underrepresented groups. A study by Frigerio et al. (2022, p. 14) highlighted a careers education practitioner's perspective on the importance of representation when coaching students:

> Participants spoke extensively about the impact on their client work of their ethnicity and how this contributes positively to client engagement from similar ethnic groups as well as rapport and empathy in one-to-one career coaching practice. (Frigerio et al, 2022, p. 14)

Recognising and addressing intersectional marginalisation is an important aspect of any programme seeking to identify and mitigate discriminatory barriers in education and careers. Crenshaw (2013, p. 167) describes how categorising struggles against discrimination as single issues 'imports a descriptive and normative view of society that reinforces the status quo'. Phoenix & Pattynama (2006, p. 187) identify how intersectionality can help us to perceive the 'multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it'. Females from minoritised communities

are likely to be affected by complex layers of barriers and discrimination due to the interaction of two or more dimensions of prejudice (Ranavaya, 2022, p. 40).

Women, trans, and non-binary individuals in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields also face structural challenges affecting their career paths. The WISE (Women into Science and Engineering) Campaign identified that the overall percentage of women in the core STEM UK workforce is currently 26.3%, and 'only 12.4% of Engineering Professionals are female' (WISE, 2023). Disability adds another layer: in a 2023 ICEA project evaluation survey, one respondent remarked that 'neurodivergence often feels like the complete opposite of what employers or academics are looking for'.

Embedding careers education in the curriculum

An increasing focus on in-curriculum provision can be observed within the global higher education sector, as explored by Bridgstock et al. (2019, p. 59). One of two approaches are typically undertaken by institutions wanting to improve their employability:

1. Embedding employability: integrating elements of employability into the curriculum, (Manoharan, 2020);

2. Extracting employability: drawing out the existing employability features within curricular provision (Daubney, 2022).

Manoharan (2020, p. 74) found that 'students juggle multifaceted priorities alongside their studies, including financial, familial, and/or caring responsibilities'. Offering careers education solely as an extra-curricular opportunity can disproportionately disadvantage students with work or caring responsibilities who may not be able to access activities outside their core curriculum. Thus, embedding employability-related content into the compulsory curriculum, for example through problem-based learning, can be viewed as an inclusive practice.

However, focusing entirely on in-curriculum provision could result in a stretching of careers practitioner resources, particularly for universities with huge numbers of programmes, all with different compulsory components. It could result in neglected courses, for example if undergraduate courses are prioritised. It could also produce a one-size-fits-all approach in which careers and employability is 'done' once a year and students who miss those elements of the course due to caring responsibilities or work may end up unable to access careers activities.

Daubney's (2022) approach involves analysing the existing curriculum for elements of employability (for example, knowledge, attributes, skills and experience gained in each programme or module) and working with teaching staff to make these more transparent and comprehensible for students. Employability therefore becomes 'structurally unavoidable' and a collective endeavour on the part of staff and students to realise the value of their learning experiences.

Considering the benefits of both approaches, we present a case study of a hybrid approach, combining 'extracting' and 'embedding' in a core third year chemistry module, facilitated by the ICEA programme.

Politics: Origins of the Inclusive Careers Education Ambassador Programme

Shury et al. (2017, p. 17) reported that 'those who had clearer plans were more likely to have reported positive outcomes two and a half years after graduation.' At King's College London, students are required to complete a series of career-related questions at each year's enrolment, which include exploring the extent to which they have career plans. In 2019 the careers consultant for the Faculty of Natural, Mathematical & Engineering Sciences (NMES) identified that over 22% of UK fee-paying white male students (n=407) in the Faculty were in the 'action' phase; whereas the equivalent percentage for UK fee-paying black and minoritised ethnicity females in the Faculty was around 12% (n=301). This difference was not evident to the same extent across the rest of King's College London.

Within the same academic year, computer science students at King's proposed the role of student 'careers representative' be established in their department. Two undergraduate students took on this role in summer 2020. They designed and ran an extensive programme of online workshops for their peers, trained and supported by the Careers and Employability team. Their sessions included tech-specific sector information; a panel event with students and recent graduates who had completed internships in high-profile organisations, and guides to technical CVs and interviews. Each of the latter workshops had around 70 attendees, and feedback from the programme was overwhelmingly positive.

The department agreed to pay the student careers representatives for their time delivering the workshops. Realising that funds might be available from the faculty education budget, a group of students, Careers and Employability staff, and NMES faculty staff proposed a new peer-to-peer programme which would aim to:

1. Address systemic inequalities in careers education by creating paid positions for students to co-create and deliver careers education activities to their peers based on an understanding of the lived experience of marginalisation; and

2. Tackle immediate disparities in 'career readiness' based on gender and ethnicity seen in NMES careers registration data by co-creating inclusive activities that help to increase students' and graduates' confidence in career planning.

In early 2021, the NMES Faculty education team approved the initial funding request of £9000 to cover 25 hours each of paid training and work for 10 inclusive careers education ambassadors (two per department), and 100 paid hours for an inclusive careers project officer (ICPO) to support the ambassadors (also a position for a student or recent graduate). The programme was featured in the 'students as co-creators' issue of *AGCAS Phoenix Journal* (Oxley et al, 2022) and the success of the programme in its first year allowed for a greater amount of funding to be allocated in 2022, increasing from £9000 to £21,000 per year and allowing for 50 hours per ambassador and 500 hours for the ICPO. The programme has also received confirmation of ongoing funding from the faculty team, demonstrating a strong commitment to the peer-to-peer careers education approach.

Paying the ambassadors a living wage was an important tenet of the programme. While studying and living in London, only a select few would be able to undertake unpaid roles and therefore by making these paid, part-time roles, students from all socio-economic backgrounds are able to participate, and they can feel confident to put the roles into their

CVs as work experience. Ambassadors are recruited in March-April, undertake paid training in June, July and September, co-create plans during the summer and carry out their activities in the Autumn term.

Self: Drawing from the experiences of marginalised communities

The application process was designed to be as inclusive and accessible as possible for students who have not had opportunities like this before. An anonymous survey of ambassadors' perspectives in July 2023 revealed three aspects that contributed to the recruitment of ICEAs from a diverse range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds: first, not requiring extensive prior experience; second, having a clear recruitment process that did not involve an interview; and third, making the essential criteria straightforward and diversity-focused. The criteria were:

1. Some experience of participating in or attending careers activities, such as applying for spring weeks, internships, part-time or full-time roles; entrepreneurship activities; attending careers appointments and/or events.

2. Enthusiasm for inclusive education and awareness of the experience of students who are traditionally under-represented in UK higher education such as disabled students, LGBTQ+ students, women in STEM, Black, Asian and Diverse Heritage students, mature students.

Recruitment was solely based on scoring an anonymised 300-word statement containing their motivations for applying for the role, a description of a career-related experience (such as attending a careers event or appointment), and an idea for how they might engage their fellow students in careers education activities with a focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Applications were scored by the department careers education liaisons (academics), members of the Careers and Employability team and former ambassadors.

Visible representation has been highlighted by the ICEAs and by participants as an important feature of the programme. One ambassador expressed their desire to be a role model for their peers, stating:

> There is a lack of representation of women, especially women of colour in my university course, and in the industry in general, so I wanted to represent my fellow students as an ICEA. (Survey response from ICEA, July 2023)

One of the greatest successes of the programme so far has been the 'See It to Be it' interview series, a project initiated in the Faculty of Life Sciences and Medicine at King's College the previous year, and adopted by the ICEAs. Ambassadors interviewed NMES alumni from underrepresented groups about their career journeys. One ambassador spoke about their favourite experience in the role:

> My highlight this year was the 'See it to Be It' interview I did with [name of alumna]. [She] spoke about her career experiences as a disabled person, and it was fascinating hearing about her experiences. As a disabled person myself I don't see enough disability representation, often not even in D&I [Diversity and Inclusion]

> initiatives. It is so important to see such empowering role models speak about their experiences. (ICEA speech at a project celebration event, January 2023).

A participant in a 'Discovering Careers In: Engineering' event chaired by the ICEAs provided the feedback: 'Vivid examples and experiences from people of different backgrounds and cultures are encouraging and inspiring.' In a July 2022 evaluation survey, a student stated:

> For students with low confidence, not seeing themselves represented in different industries can make them less ambitious, but having these kind of events where they can learn from the personal experiences of others like them is empowering.
>
> (Student survey response, July 2022)

These reflections illustrate how role models from marginalised communities can enhance confidence in career decision making (Ranavaya, 2022), benefiting both the ambassadors and their peers.

Collective: Co-creating and collaborating to achieve our goals

The programme has a strong focus on collaborative planning and co-creation. During the training period, ambassadors work together to come up with ideas for activities they feel will benefit their peers, and in early September they present their plans to key stakeholders for feedback and iterative improvements. Hooley & Sultana (2016) note that liberal individualism often dominates careers education and guidance. By encouraging students and recent graduates to work together on collaborative careers education activities, the programme allows elements of individual competition to be mitigated in favour of a peer-to-peer collaborative approach.

The programme enables ambassadors to gain knowledge of careers and employability-related topics, and they develop a wide range of skills and experiences that they can put on their CVs and future job applications. For example, they gain marketing experience through advertising the programme on social media platforms, teamwork skills through collaborative planning with colleagues, and confidence and communication skills through leading workshops and chairing panel interviews in front of an audience of peers. They also gain networking skills as they connect with different professionals through alumni video interviews ('See It to Be It'), as well as with other students and staff from across the departments, faculty, and Careers and Employability team. Staff members working with the ambassadors also learn a huge amount, including gaining a better understanding of students' lived experiences. The programme exemplifies a reciprocity of partnership (Mercer-Mapstone et al, 2017) which includes student-staff collaboration on the annual evaluation projects and co-authorship of blog posts and articles, including Oxley et al. (2022) and Blain (2023).

Praxis: taking action against oppression and discrimination

Praxis involves a cycle of action and reflection, which has been built into the programme in several ways. Events co-created and supported by the ICEAs have included panel events and workshops covering topics such as CVs, interviews, psychometric tests and career options for international students. The ICEAs also created an NMES Careers Guide, 'by students, for students'. This guide and other online resources created and curated by the ICEAs were accessed by 439 individual NMES students in Autumn term 2022. Overall engagement with Careers and Employability events by students in the NMES Faculty increased from 1268 in Autumn 2021 to 1511 in Autumn 2022.

Table 1: Summary of event numbers, attendees, and event ratings in the first 2 years of the ICEA programme.

Academic Year	Number of events run or supported by ICEAs	Number of total attendees	Overall event ratings (immediate feedback)
2021-2022	15	544	94% 'Good'; 6% 'OK', 0% 'Bad'
2022-2023	19	659	92% 'Good'; 8% 'OK', 0% 'Bad'

The opportunity to reflect on their co-created activities is built into the ICEA programme in several ways:

1. Ambassadors are invited to analyse attendance and feedback data as part of their preparation for their end of project presentation to senior faculty staff.
2. Several ambassadors have continued as ICEAs for a second year, and have brought valuable reflections from their experience of the previous year.
3. King's College London undergraduate research fellows have conducted annual evaluations of the programme, including surveys and stakeholder interviews, which has enabled the project team to receive extensive feedback and make evidence-based iterative improvements.

Another example of the action-reflection cycle was the development of an alternative CV workshop format by ICEAs. In the first year, ICEAs put on both CV information seminars and CV review workshops. An NMES student commented:

> ICEAs shouldn't just be putting on the same events the careers departments and faculty already do: there needs to be an emphasis on the student peer-to-peer experience. (Student survey response, July 2022)

In the programme's second year, ICEAs therefore focused entirely on the CV review workshops, based on a "roasting" model, in which ambassadors running the workshops gave constructive critiques of anonymous CVs sent in by the workshop participants. The ICEAs reviewed and improved a total of 24 CVs and these events proved to be popular, with a total of 54 attendees.

Case Study: An in-curriculum peer-to-peer chemistry careers activity

For four of the five departments participating in the programme, ICEAs have focused almost entirely on extra-curricular careers education. In project evaluations, stakeholders have expressed interest for ICEA interventions to be embedded in-curriculum. A senior lecturer in the Department of Chemistry has piloted an integrated approach to careers education within a core third-year research methods laboratory module. The sessions were co-created with two career consultants and co-delivered by ICEAs.

The careers education training sessions involved signposting careers resources and opportunities and an employability framework which 'extracts' knowledge, attributes, skills, and experience (KASE) from the chemistry curriculum. This draws on work by Daubney (2022), who conducted a textual analysis of UK Quality Assurance Agency Subject Benchmark Statements to create the 'KASE' framework. The chemistry third years were divided into small groups and allocated example scenarios of chemistry students from a range of underrepresented backgrounds and at different stages of career planning, as an empathy exercise. Supported by the ICEAs, they were tasked with using their research skills to analyse the careers resources and generate appropriate responses to support the 'example students' in their next steps. 85% of students (n=35) reflecting on the activities said they found them helpful and learned something new.

As this intervention took place within a compulsory module, it helped to provide access to careers education to students who may not have been aware of the Careers and Employability service or could not attend extra-curricular events due to scheduling conflicts or other responsibilities. Using the results from this pilot, the senior lecturer has been able to facilitate expansion of this pilot to all undergraduate year groups in chemistry. Such interventions also act as inspiration to other departments who may seek to emulate successful practice, as the higher education employability agenda gains momentum (Woodfield and McIntosh, 2022).

Conclusion: The benefits and challenges of peer-to-peer inclusive careers education

Elements of critical pedagogy have been woven through the ICEA programme. It has received positive feedback from all participants and stakeholders, and the continued funding and support from the faculty education team demonstrates its relevance and value to all stakeholders. However, the scalability of the project is uncertain. Evaluations have identified that its successes have been influenced by the personalised nature of the ICEA training and support, and the collegiality of having two ambassadors per department and ten in total supported by a project officer, elements which might be lost on a larger scale.

Programme evaluations have been somewhat hampered by issues with data availability. The project team is not currently able to connect engagement data with data on ethnicity, disability, and other protected characteristics, particularly at a granular level by event or by department. It is hoped that when this becomes available, a detailed analysis of the numbers of students from marginalised communities engaging in ICEA activities will enable the team to reflect on ways to make the programme more accessible and inclusive.

The wider King's College London community has recognised the programme as an example of good practice in inclusive education, inviting the project team to present to the King's College inclusive education network and at internal learning and teaching conferences. The ICEAs and their project team are taking action towards a more inclusive future by educating all students about career-related barriers faced by marginalised communities and how these can be dismantled, uplifting the voices of role models from marginalised communities, and taking an active and collaborative approach to addressing systemic inequalities in higher education.

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Book review

News

10.20856/jnicec.5110

Title: How to find a job: Common mistakes and how to correct them.

Author: Ralph Snider.

Publisher: Self-published in Melbourne, Australia (2022).

272 pages.

ISBN: 978-0-6455058-0-1 (paperback)

eISBN: 978-0-6455058-1-8 (e-book)

Reviewed by **Professor Peter Robertson**, Edinburgh Napier University.

The author/publisher is a qualified and established career counsellor, who is a member of the Career Development Association of Australia.

This is a self-help book aimed at adult job seekers. The writing style throughout consists of short factual statements and lists. Chapters are short. It is easy to read, and would be suitable for any literate adult. It does not 'hand hold' the reader or deal much with the psychology and emotions of job hunting. Rather it would appeal to a reader with a functional approach who needs information on how to approach their job search. It would be particularly relevant to those who have experienced difficulties in job search, and who need to change their approach. It might be less suitable for the most able professionals or 'high fliers', who might find it too basic.

The content gives the reader an insight into how employers select people, and also address a variety of specific audiences, e.g. overqualified, underqualified, disabled, or mature job seekers. Specific situations are also addressed, e.g. handling multiple job offers or finding work in the gig economy.

The content is not unusual or innovative, but this is a book that might support a struggling job seeker, or alternatively act as a good reference resource for a practitioner looking to develop handouts or information sheets for job seekers.

News

Call for papers

Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling

Spring 2024 Issue

Special Issue:

Disciplinary perspectivies on career development

Editors: Pete Robertson & Rosie Alexander

Scholars have approached the study of career and career development through a variety of academic disciplines. This issue will explore this phenomenon. It will identify promising new perspectives for future study. Submissions are invited that either:

- Explore the potential of a new or emerging discipline in the field of career development
- Critically review the contribution of an established discipline in the field
- Explore approaches that combine or integrate more than one disciplinary perspective

Submissions may focus on any aspect of career studies or career development interventions, (including career education and counselling). They may be focused on theory, research, policy, or practice.

First draft articles should be submitted by Monday, 18th December 2023.

Second draft revised articles will be required by 23rd February 2024.

To see author guidelines and to submit, visit **www.nicecjournal.co.uk** and select '**Make a Submission**'.

For advice and more information, please contact: journal@nicec.org

News

Forthcoming events | NICEC

NICEC offer a series of early evening seminars and longer network meetings during the year. Below you will see details of events in November 2023 – January 2024 and outline plans for events from March 2024 onwards. Most of the events are via Zoom but we will be hosting a face-to-face Conference in Birmingham in July 2024.

Further details are kept up-to-date on the website https://www.nicec.org/ and regular broadcasts are sent out with booking arrangements. Please send any queries to Claire.m.nix@gmail.com

Cost of Seminars and Network Meetings:

- Included in membership fees for NICEC Fellows and members.
- For non-members: £25 for seminars and £35 for network meetings
- For students: £4 for seminars and £7 for network meetings

NICEC also run 'Cutting-Edge' events that are free to CDI members and NICEC Fellows and members.

A Career Change Model in Practice (Seminar)

23 November 2023 5pm - 6:30pm

Richard Alderson outlines the ideas and structure that underlies the successful Careershifters Launch Pad programme, one of the world's longest established and biggest online career change programmes. Hosted by John Lees, career strategist, author, and NICEC Fellow.

A Watershed? - Helping People in their Mid-Careers (Seminar)

23 January 2024

Dr Cathy Brown and Dr Helen Cooper

We welcome two new Fellows leading an exploration of clients' presenting issues, practitioner challenges and theories, concepts, research, and tools that help. It is positioned with a practitioner-researcher perspective and will encourage discussion and debate amongst the participants.

Evaluating career coaching (Seminar)

1st March 2024

Alison Carter (Institute for Employment Studies) and Wendy Hirsh (IES/NICEC) will base this seminar on a large project for Health England exploring a range of methods to get feedback on a career coaching with staff in Primary Care in the English NHS. The seminar will cover the development of a theory of change model for based on desirable career outputs and outcomes.

Sustainability and Career Development Conference

2-3 July 2024

Other Forthcoming Dates

21 May 2024 (Network Meeting) – Topic to be confirmed
16 September 2024 (Network Meeting) – Topic to be confirmed
21 November 2024 (Seminar) – Topic to be confirmed

Forthcoming events | CDI

For the full training and events programme, including expert training sessions, conferences, webinars, CDI Academy courses and more, please visit thecdi.net/Skills-training-events

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CDI Summit 2023

Monday 4 December. The Studio, Birmingham.

The Summit brings together leaders and strategic thinkers from across career development to discuss the rapid changes impacting the world of work and what they mean for the future of career development. Exploring major topics such as skills shortages, changing demographics and the shift to an AI/digital and net zero economy, the Summit will use expert talks and panels to outline key issues for attendees to debate and identify implications for the career development profession.

For the latest programme and to book, please visit: thecdi.net/CDI-Summit

CDI Conference for Careers Professionals 2023

Wednesday 6 December. Online event.

The Conference is focused on supporting career development practice in all its forms – supporting young people and adults, in education settings, public and third sector services, the corporate environment and private practice. Alongside keynote talks and panel sessions, the Conference includes a series of workshops covering themes relevant to all areas of careers education, information, advice, and guidance. It is an ideal opportunity to gain valuable professional development and insight into new ideas, as well as discussing best practice with fellow practitioners.

The CDI Conference is being held as an online event to enable as many people as possible to attend by keeping the cost low during the cost of living crisis and minimising travel time.

For the latest programme and to book, please visit: thecdi.net/CDI-National-Conference

ABOUT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The Career Development Institute (CDI) is the UK-wide professional body for the career development sector. We have a growing membership of 4500 individual members and affiliate organisations and speak with one voice for a lively and diverse sector.

We have a key role to play in influencing UK skills policy as it affects those with whom career development practitioners work and a clear purpose to improve and assure the quality and availability of career development services for all throughout the UK.

All CDI members subscribe to a Code of Ethics, which is supported by a strong disciplinary process, and subscribe to the principles of CPD.

Importantly the CDI is responsible for the UK Register of Career Development Professionals; the National Occupational Standards (NOS: CD); the first Career Progression Pathway for the sector; UK Career Development Awards; QCD and QCG/D qualifications; the CDI Academy; the Careers Framework and a UK-wide CPD programme.

Below are a few of our major achievements:

- A powerful brand supported by an evolving website **www.thecdi.net**; social media (Twitter and LinkedIn) presence; and quarterly magazine *Career Matters*;
- A schedule of CPD, skills training, webinars and conferences based on market analysis and members' training needs;
- A growing media and lobbying presence with the CDI recognised as the *expert voice* in the field; advising politicians, speaking at conferences and commenting on policy;
- The establishment of the UK Career Development Awards – ten sponsored awards including *Careers Adviser/Coach of the Year* and *Careers Leader of the Year and Lifetime Achievement Award*;
- Clear focus on professional identity and increasing the professionalism of the sector through our influence, ownership and development of the QCD and QCG/D and the CDI Academy including the new *CDI Certificate in Careers Leadership*.

ASSURING QUALITY

The CDI has a critical role to play in setting standards and articulating what quality looks like for the sector. Importantly we are an awarding body, managing the Qualification in Career Development (previously the QCG/D) and the UK Register for Career Development Professionals, which is pivotal to our ongoing quality agenda and is fast becoming recognised as the sector's equivalent to chartered status.

We are delighted to be working in partnership with NICEC on the Journal and the NICEC/CDI research-focused events which take place twice a year across the UK.

The Journal is made available to all CDI members via our website.

Contents

EDITORIAL

ARTICLES