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Contents

Overview of this issue

Welcome to the October 2021 issue of the NICEC journal. Following an open call for papers, we received a number of innovative and useful submissions from both experienced and newer writers. We are delighted to open the issue with the winner of the 2021 Bill Law Memorial Award.

Sarah Snape explores women's identity work in career choices and transitions, and discusses implications for coaching practice.

Marina Milosheva and colleagues evaluate the role of information in career development work. Based on a critical review of the literature, they argue for the importance of career information competencies in the career development profession.

Marcus Allen and **Anne Chant** explore the key facilitating factors to achieving the eight Gatsby Benchmarks for careers work in secondary schools in Kent, UK. They argue for stronger linkages between the benchmarks and the achievement of learning outcomes for career education.

Liz Painter reports on her recent fieldwork exploring the role of Enterprise Coordinator. Taking a phenomenographical approach, four categories of understanding are developed: critical friend, matchmaker, collaborator, and reflective practitioner.

Laura Reid Marks and colleagues analyse the intersection of career development and mental health through the lens of Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) theory. They review key components of CIP theory, provide case studies highlighting the integration of career and mental health, and propose CIP-based interventions.

Gillian Yamin uses interpretivist research to understand how female university computing students perceive technology careers. It is argued that societal influences, both prior to university and once employed in technology, are significant factors, and suggestions are made to inform the practice of career development work.

Peter Plant argues that our societies need new visions of a just and sustainable future for all. Green Guidance is proposed as a contribution towards this.

Tristram Hooley and colleagues argue that we need to draw together the various approaches to social justice to offer a framework for practice. Consequently, they propose five signposts for an emancipatory career guidance.

Brittany Shields and **Charles Chen** examine the relationship between work-life conflict and career burnout in a general adult working population. They identify a moderate, statistically significant, positive relationship between work-life conflict and burnout, and proceed to discuss workplace and personal implications.

We are also grateful to Lyn Barham and Michelle Stewart for a topical and thorough book review of the *Oxford Handbook of Career Development* edited by Peter J. Robertson, Tristram Hooley, and Phil McCash.

Phil McCash, Editor

Five signposts to a socially just approach to career guidance

Tristram Hooley, Ronald G. Sultana & Rie Thomsen

'Social justice' can mean different things to different people. Such ambiguity does not have to be a weakness as there is value to a diversity of analyses, approaches and suggested remedies to injustice. Interest is growing as to whether career guidance can be one of these remedies by actively taking a stance in support of social justice.

A social justice approach to career guidance is built on three main tenets: *firstly*, that individual's careers are shaped by the contexts and communities within which they live, study and work; *secondly*, that we live in an unequal world which means that the opportunities that individuals have to develop their careers are unequal. Any theory that purports to explain how career works needs to recognise this inequality; and *thirdly*, that career guidance has the capacity to intervene in this unequal world and support people to flourish.

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. We have defined it as follows, highlighting features of career beyond paid work, collective dimensions to careering and the need to recognise power structures.

> Career guidance supports individuals and groups to discover more about work, leisure and learning and to consider their place in the world and plan for their futures. Key to this is developing individual and community capacity to analyse and problematise assumptions and power relations, to network and build solidarity and to create new and shared opportunities. It empowers individuals and groups to struggle within the world as it and to imagine the world

as it could be. Career guidance can take a wide range of forms and draws on diverse theoretical traditions. But at its heart it is a purposeful learning opportunity which supports individuals and groups to consider and reconsider work, leisure and learning in the light of new information and experiences and to take both individual and collective action as a result of this. (Hooley et al., 2017a, p.20).

But it is easier to build critiques than it is to create practices that foster social justice. In the final chapter of our second book on career guidance and social justice we asked Lenin's famous question; 'what is to be done?' (Hooley et al., 2018a). One part of our answer was that we needed to try and draw together the various approaches to social justice to offer a framework for practice. This led us to 'propose five signposts to lead us towards an emancipatory career guidance' (Hooley et al, 2018a, p. 255).

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A growing movement for change

There are many examples of social justice informed career guidance theory and practice throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. We see this tradition in critical psychology (Thomsen, 2014), sociology (Roberts, 2004) and education research (Law, 1981) and in traditions of practice concerned with marginalised groups and which help people to navigate unequal social structures and find their way to the good life.

Watts (1996/2015) recognised this when he wrote about 'socio-political ideologies of guidance' and identified the 'progressive' and 'radical' traditions

within career guidance that both have a commitment to social justice. In 2004, Irving and Malik published *Critical reflections on career education and guidance* and intensified the argument that a social justice approach to practice, allied with a critical theory informed theoretical perspective, should be key to career guidance.

Since the great recession of 2008, the political economy of the world has been in flux with a wide range of alternate possibilities opening. The Covid-19 crisis has exacerbated this dynamic situation throwing out additional challenges for people's career development and possibilities for society (Hooley et al. 2020). Against this background of social and political change the level of interest in social justice in career guidance practice has been growing.

Our recent books assembled a wide range of scholars and practitioners exploring these issues (Hooley et al. 2017b, 2018b). Since the publication of these books, interest in the area has continued to intensify with many other writers, researchers and practitioners exploring similar issues (e.g. Chadderton; 2020; Skovhus & Poulsen, 2021; Staunton & Rogosic, 2021) including an increasing number of voices addressing these issues from the global south (see Sultana, 2020) as well as a growing interest in social justice within the field's heartland of vocational psychology (Blustein et al., 2019; McWhirter & McWha-Hermann, 2021).

We have tried to capture examples of ways in which people are using social justice within practice on the *Career Guidance for Social Justice* website (https://careerguidancesocialjustice.wordpress.com/) and we have developed the five signposts to offer a framework to support practitioners to engage with social justice.

The five signposts towards a social just career guidance

The signposts point in five directions that summarise the theories, practices and thinking about career guidance and social justice. The five signposts suggest that a socially just form of career guidance will:

- build critical consciousness;
- name oppression;
- question what is normal;

- encourage people to work together; and
- work at a range of levels.

The signposts are not comprehensive and there are likely to be other uncharted paths to a socially just career guidance.

Building critical consciousness

Our first signpost draws on one of the central ideas of critical pedagogy, Freire's (1970/2005) concept of *conscientização* ('concientisation' or the development of critical consciousness). It is about helping people to develop a critical awareness of their surroundings, not just seeing what is happening in their lives and in the world, but also considering why these things are happening and in whose interest.

Critical consciousness is both learning about the world and it is learning by doing. Developing critical consciousness is about supporting people to intervene in their own lives and exercise agency both individually and collectively. Freire argues that the development of critical consciousness cannot be a hierarchical process through which people are instructed, rather it must be a participatory process owned by the learners through which they become producers of knowledge and ultimately of a new social reality.

These ideas resonate with many ideas that have informed career theory and practice. The idea of the individual as producer of their own solutions and the author of their own story resonates with both humanistic counselling (Rogers, 1961/1995) and life design (Savickas et al., 2009). The importance of analysing the world as it is also aligns with the field's interest in labour market information and the role that it can play in informing career decisions (Bimrose, 2021). But, the concept of *critical* consciousness adds new insights, reminding us that the individual and their consciousness are embedded in structures of power and inequality and that these structures can and need to be interrogated through questions like; in whose interest is this and how has this solution come about? The answers are likely to remind the participants in career guidance that the external world (the labour market) is not fixed and rational, but contested and contingent, it is where power is exercised and where it can be challenged.

Delazon's (2020) 'I want to make a difference' workshop provides an example of the kind of intervention that this signpost is pointing towards. The workshop presented labour market data and analysis of the gig economy and the gender pay gap. It used this information to encourage participants to engage in a collaborative learning opportunity looking at how to both 'play the game' and 'change the game' and asked them to consider how they could promote social justice through their career. Other examples are the recognition of the way in which career education can be framed as an anti-oppressive practice (Irving 2010) and the work of the Precarious Workers Brigade (2017) who explore how the discourse of 'employability' can be removed from its neoliberal roots.

Naming oppression

The second signpost argues that career guidance has an important role in helping people to recognise injustice when they experience it and to organise in solidarity with others who are also experiencing oppression. It positions career guidance on the side of the marginalised and disadvantaged and highlights the importance of our services being available to all.

This signpost highlights that our careers are not played out on a level terrain and that many people experience individuals and institutions actively seeking to frustrate their attempt to build a positive career and access the good life. It draws on Young's (1990, p. 42) comment that 'for every oppressed group there is a group that benefits from that oppression and is privileged in relation to that group'. Oppression and inequality are not accidental, nor the result of a deficit within the individual, but are rather the outcome of structures and the enactment of power from which some benefit at the expense of others.

We have used Young's (1990) five faces of oppression to help clients and students to explore oppression (Hooley & Sultana, 2016). This highlights exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence as the main ways in which oppression manifests. Exploring individuals' and groups' experiences of these five faces helps them to put a name to their experience and recognise that they are not to blame for much of what they may perceive as personal failures. The discourse of 'career management' and maximising 'employability' often serves to

responsibilise failure, potentially leading people to blame themselves and ignore the inequalities and structural factors stacked against them. A recognition of oppression provides a corrective to this that, when combined with the other signposts, can be empowering.

The response from careers professionals to the Black Lives Matters movement provides a good example of how naming oppression can be brought into careers practice (Majothi, 2020). In the face of systemic racism, it is not possible for careers professionals to take a 'colour-blind' approach to career conversations with black students and clients. It is important to discuss discrimination and micro-aggressions and empower students to challenge this oppression through the provision of advice on employment rights, discussions about how to manage and combat racism and the willingness to provide advocacy and support, for example by challenging employers on discriminatory practices. All of this begins with the willingness to name oppression, discuss it, shine a light on it, and refuse to tolerate it.

Questioning what is normal

The third signpost invites us to exercise critical consciousness by looking at social structures and social interaction and asking 'in whose interests does this work?' One of the insidious ways in which power, domination, and exploitation work is by making socially constructed institutions, relationships, and behaviours appear as if they were 'social facts', and therefore 'natural' and immutable. History is full of examples of how this happens: throughout centuries, having slaves was considered 'normal'; that only those who had property could vote was considered 'obvious'; and that women were subordinate to men was 'common sense'. The list of what was at one time considered to be the norm, but which was in time questioned and challenged, is a long one. It is encouraging that humanity has the capacity to aspire for more equality, more justice, and more fairness. And yet we must not think of history as being linear, or as having reached its apotheosis. There is much about contemporary social arrangements and behaviours that also need to be questioned, even if they appear 'normal' to us.

Since we are born into the world as it is, it can prove difficult to realise that what feels and appears

'right' might in fact be quite 'wrong'. Comparing and contrasting present social arrangements across time and space, that is, developing a historical and anthropological imagination, helps burst the experiential bubble we live in, opening up possibilities for critique.

Problematising the words we use is another way of way of becoming aware of what passes as 'normal', when in fact it is problematic. The everyday terms we use tend to trap us in ways of thinking about things such that these become the 'norm'. Words like 'employability' (as noted earlier), as well as reference to the 'NEET', the 'vulnerable' or the 'at risk' or to 'drop-outs' implicitly trace problems and deficits back to individuals, removing the spotlight from causes that originate in unjust systems. Our well-intentioned efforts to help may end up reinforcing the same injustices rather than challenging or changing them.

As Wikstrand (2019) has argued, questioning the norm can have important implications for the way we deliver career guidance services. Learning, for instance, that there are successful companies based on worker democracy, profit sharing, and co-operative principles challenges many of the assumptions built into career development theories, many of which implicitly take neoliberal ways of producing and distributing wealth and life chances as givens. Becoming aware of systemic responses to inequalities through such initiatives as flexicurity, universal basic income, and global wealth tax is more likely to combat blame-the-victim approaches, and can help us refashion career guidance in quite significant ways. A good example of this can be found in the career education initiative reported by Midttun and McCash (2019) which emphasises the need to help participants to critically understand how work is structured in ways that perpetuate injustice. In contrast, many career management skills programmes are more preoccupied by encouraging individuals to 'fit in', 'to compete', and to 'cope' with arrangements that only work in favour of a few.

Encouraging people to work together

Our fourth signpost encourages people to work together in career guidance activities. The goal is to encourage and facilitate social interaction, collaboration and collective action as part of the career guidance process. Such a goal recognises and responds to the fact that there are many dilemmas that we experience in our careers that cannot be addressed solely through individual action. Many problems are group, community and societal problems, faced by people in similar circumstances which require common solutions, often facilitated by collective action. The process of encouraging people to work together can take place at several intertwined levels. It might include collaboration between career guidance practitioners, fostering co-operation and solidarity between participants in career guidance and forms of collective action involving practitioners and participants together.

Working together as a part of learning and development is at the core of critical pedagogy and critical psychology. Among the methods used to bring this about are action learning, learning circles and practice research. These are characterised by the exchange of personal perspectives and experience, shared identification of new possibilities for action and experimentation. In the article 'cultural action and conscientization' Freire (1970) explains that through the sharing of plurality and heterogeneity of realities the process of liberation will be a process of becoming aware of the different opportunities to live your life that are 'pressed'/presented upon you. That identification and subsequent deliberation on norms and normative presentations of the good life, becomes visible and made concrete through social interaction facilitated as part of career guidance process (Hyslop-Margison & Naseem, 2007). When the pictures and norms about the good life, that are presented through social media (see Buchanan 2018), political communication (Bergmo-Prvulovic 2018), the education system (Rawlinson & Rooney 2019), and even career education and guidance itself (Irving 2010, 2018) are objectified through social interaction and collaboration the participants are given the opportunity to develop their own stances, personally, as a group or a community (Freire, 1970).

As an example, when young people in career education work together to explore their different realities in relation to their future the goal (perhaps described as employability) is not to identify the best, most important or 'normal' way to go about developing a career rather the goal is to include heterogenic and plural standpoints into a 'diverse way' and thereby widen the picture of what is normal or employable. The

exchange of perspectives will also allow for a shared identification of action points for the future that stem from participants lived experience rather than from a predefined model. The role of the career guidance professional is to collaborate with the participants in the exploration of problems experienced in their lives, and to offer different perspectives on these problems.

This shared exploration takes place in groups or communities and can be organised and facilitated by the career guidance professional or by the participants themselves. Inspiration for how this can draw on a range of resources for guidance and counselling in groups (Rogers, 1971; Westergaard 2010), practice research (and research circles) (Poulsen, Skovhus, & Thomsen, 2018) and especially from career guidance in communities (Thomsen 2012; Thomsen 2017). Within such approaches the practitioner is viewed as one that facilitates exploration, problematisation and learning processes through shared exploration and exchange of personal perspectives and experience among the participants, in contrast to models that view the career practitioner as the expert with the answers which will fall short even if the group is seen as the base for delivering the answers.

There are many forms that encouraging students to work together might take. It could be as simple as linking clients and students with similar problems together on the basis that 'a problem shared is a problem halved'. In this situation the practitioner is decentring themselves and helping students to build networks that provide them with resources. In other possibilities a link is made more explicit between individual career management and community or collective organising. Career guidance works with individuals and groups to help them to see what is possible through taking individual action (e.g., getting promoted or finding a new job) and what might be possible through collective action (e.g., engaging in collective bargaining to increase pay and conditions for all workers or in mobilising people around an issue of education politics). Both individual and collective strategies are recognised as legitimate areas to be explored in career guidance.

Working at a range of levels

What we have referred to as 'emancipatory career guidance' requires us to work at different levels.

Much of our professional training has prepared us to work with individuals and groups, and our field has developed impressive funds of knowledge that help us connect with others, relate to them with empathy and understanding, helping them work through challenges that present themselves at different stages of their life. There is no doubt that there is nobility in this work, and there is surely a multitude of persons out there who have benefited from such skilled support.

Career guidance is more likely to be emancipatory when we become more aware of the intimate, often complex relationship between internal psychological states, and the external structures that give rise to them. Understanding, for instance, the frustrations of a person with disability, or with a migrant background, in finding work does not merely entail building up 'resilience' and more effective 'career management skills.' It also entails acknowledging that such frustrations are caused by workplaces that are far from being inclusive, and by labour laws that do not take difference and diversity into account.

Being an emancipatory career guidance practitioner is not about choosing whether to work at the micro (individual and group), meso (institutional and organisational), or macro (social and political system) level (Thomsen, 2012). It is about keeping all three levels in mind, even if one might feel more ready or more able to work at one level rather than another at a particular point in time. Awareness and analyses of the larger picture will inevitably affect the way we work with individuals and groups, just as meaningful interaction with individuals and groups gives us a much better feel for systemic injustices.

Emancipatory guidance is also about understanding professionalism as a commitment to addressing structures and systems that are the source of the problems that individuals often experience as self-induced. Such a commitment speaks to our role as active citizens, when we work to the best of our ability to advocate for change, to mobilise support for worthwhile causes, and to speak truth to power. Such activism understands that social justice is not attained via one route: rather, it is by constantly fighting battles on many fronts and at many levels, and by making alliances with other, related professions, that we are most likely to be successful in making a positive difference for the people we serve.

Several more recent career guidance approaches suggest how all three levels can come together to articulate a more powerful way of working with individuals and groups. Blustein et al.'s (2005) *Emancipatory Communitarian Approach*, for instance, makes it a point to take social and economic forces into account, and not just internal psychological states and resources, when trying to understand the positions that people occupy inside, at the edge of, and outside the labour market this. Advocacy here becomes part and parcel of the design of services purporting to support vulnerable and vulnerabilised groups, acknowledging the many contextual barriers that constrain career development in and through work, while highlighting the resources that individuals and groups bring to the complex and multi-faceted transitions they need to affect.

Where next?

Next up is a wide scale sharing of practices and research related to the five signposts. It can be new developments, but we also hope that the five signposts can serve as a lens through which theories, models and methods can be re-interpreted, re-developed and related to the social justice agenda in career guidance.

It is important to emphasise that the mounting concern with social justice issues in the career guidance field, as much as in other related professions, is not just another passing fad nor the latest in a long line of career theories to be taught as part of a menu of approaches for practitioners during their initial training. It is a genuine response to well-documented increases in the gaps between the haves and the have nots.

The signposts point towards a better world in which career could be an expression of individuals' creativity and imagination, rather than one in which people's careers are characterised by struggle against a system that is stacked against them. We hope that you will be interested in exploring where they lead.

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