

Career guidance in communities - The collective turn

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Career guidance in communities

A model for reflexive practice

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The book *Career Guidance in Communities* can be ordered here: <http://en.unipress.dk/udgivelser/c/career-guidance-in-communities/>

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to inspire practitioners and professionals to leave their offices to bring career guidance into communities that might not identify with career guidance in the first instance. By making the effort to engage with communities, practitioners may bring about a critical change in career guidance practices as well as in the lives of the people in the communities.

This paper falls into two parts: The first part considers the collective as the starting point for the development of meaningful career guidance activities. Based on previous research on career guidance in communities from a critical psychological standpoint the paper introduces a social practice theory of career guidance. The social practice theory of career guidance argues that career guidance can be seen as a collective practice in which people can join forces with career guidance practitioners to analyse their situation and based on these insights create new opportunities in relation to their future educational or vocational participation in society (Thomsen 2012). From this idea, the second part of the paper the paper moves on to consider the practical implications of taking the collective as the starting point for the development of a critically reflexive career guidance practice. The considerations are organised around seven elements.

1. Creating opportunity, structure and access
2. Entering a community and increasing visibility
3. Providing guidance in communities
4. Exploring potentials in guidance situations
5. Deciding on guidance activities
6. Developing, planning and implementing
7. Documenting and evaluating.

These elements are joined together and presented as a model for reflexive practice. Each element is introduced, illustrated and examined noting important areas for reflection and action.

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Introduction

Lives are lived in communities: small or large, supportive or antagonistic, personal or professional. For each and every one of us, it is a fact of life that every decision we make in our attempts to shape our futures is entangled in multiple communities.

In this paper, I explore how career guidance interacts with the everyday lives of people and their communities. The paper is presented in two parts: part one in which I introduce a research project on career guidance in communities and its results as used in the development of a model for reflexive practice and its implications for career guidance in communities which is introduced in part two.

The paper builds on research and ideas previously published in books. In *Career Guidance in Communities* (2012), I discussed the possibility of practising guidance within a community framework rather than regarding it as an individualised activity often taking place in an office. Career guidance in communities can be considered a social practice theory which advocates shifting perspective from the individual to the collective as the starting point for the development of guidance activities. As guidance services in many countries suffer cutbacks, discussions of how resources should be invested become increasingly important. Engaging in existing communities and creating flexible forms of delivery that allow for adaptation to the diverse and changing needs of different communities presents a promising way forward. The goal is to allow for people to influence the design of guidance delivery so that they, together with the guidance professional, establish new collaborative modes of delivery.

The second book that underpins this paper is *At Vejlede i Fællesskaber og Grupper* (Guidance Provision in Communities and Groups) (2013). In this book, alongside my colleagues Rita Buhl and Randi Skovhus, I developed a model for reflecting on the practical processes involved in organising career guidance in communities. Further impetus for this paper was provided by two invitational lectures I gave in 2016: The Annual Lecture 2016 at the International Centre for Guidance Studies at Derby University and a guest lecture at the University of Lower Silesia in Poland.

What is a community and reflexive practice?

In this paper community:

- is characterised by people conducting their daily lives (or parts of them) together in the same physical or virtual place;
- sustained and created through individuals' joint actions; and
- comprised of people who have different reasons for being there and for taking part in different ways which are changing over time.

Within the literature on career guidance the concept of community has been re-surfacing but has not made it to the centre of the literature. Important contributions has been made by Law (1981, 2009), Hyslop-Margison and Naseem, (2007), Niles and Harris-Bowlsby (2009), Thomsen (2012) and Hooley (2015). Based on Willis (1977) and Roberts (1977) among others Law suggest community-interaction as... 'a 'mid-range' account of career management - it does not ignore big-picture social structures, neither does it dismiss inner-life, but it focuses on how the two interact (1981). Hyslop-Margison and Naseem, (2007) is taking a Freirean perspective to career education and lifelong learning and addresses students in plural. They point to career education as community based large-scale meetings and small-scale study groups that meet regularly to discuss and problematise challenges faced by the community and develop community based ways forward. Niles and Harris-Bowlsby

(2009) discuss how community settings are often not recognised as relevant settings for the delivery of career development interventions. Niles and Harris-Bowlsby consider communities as being outside of institutions'. This understanding of community is somewhat different from the understanding used in this paper where communities can be within institutions as well as outside of them. The important point is that communities are created and sustained in their own right and for their own purpose and not with the purpose of career guidance. This is distinctive from the delivery of career guidance in groups where the group is established for career guidance activities). This means that people in communities are together in different ways based on geography, race, gender, age, civil status, sharing of specific struggles and many more factors. Consequently, career guidance practitioners will be approaching communities that already exist.

Finally Hooley (2015) suggest a radical career education framework where the aims of career guidance are to help people to: 1) explore ourselves and the world where we live, learn and work; 2) examine how our experience connects to broader historical, political and social systems; 3) develop strategies that allow us individually to make the most of our current situation; (4) develop strategies that allow us collectively to make the most of our current situations; and (5) consider how the current situation and structures should be changed. Further he argues that this shifts the focus of career guidance towards the collective and foregrounds the need to highlight structural issues as they intersect within individual's career building (Hooley 2015).

A model for reflexive practice

This paper speaks about reflexive practice. In her important article 'On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner' Cunliffe (2004) draws on the work of Freire and suggest that critical reflexivity is more than just a technique but rather it is a 'philosophy-driven' practice (p.408) emphasising a critical stance where practitioners question their own assumptions about reality, their actions and their ethics and how this together with other participants constantly transform ongoing practices. According to Cunliffe: "Critically reflexive practitioners therefore question the ways in which they act and develop knowledge about their actions. This means highlighting ideologies and tacit assumptions – exploring how our own actions, conversational practices, and ways of making sense create our sense of reality." (Cunliffe 2004:414). Further the critically reflexive practitioner recognises a moral requirement to make available opportunities for others to communicate and being aware of how our use of words, concepts, theories orients ways of relating and engaging (Cunliffe 2004). In this paper I speak about reflexive practice rather than the reflexive practitioner I do so to emphasise the middle range level of action - 'people in communities' of which this model is directed as well as the social embeddedness of career guidance practice.

1. Career guidance in communities – the research

(Interview with employee at a factory)

Poul: I've helped loads of my colleagues to apply for new jobs, and it's been very rewarding to talk about it with them. We talk about it a lot. Flemming went to an interview the day before yesterday, for instance. I had a chat with him yesterday. We talk a lot about who will get a new job and who we think will fail to do so. We spend a good part of the day on that.

Rie: I see ... Do you help each other with ideas about where to look?

Poul: To some extent. For instance, if we spot something in the newspaper. Yesterday I told Flemming that he ought to look for a job at the driving centre – I know they're often looking for new staff. He could try at least. He likes gardening and mowing the lawn, and that's how we help each other. It must be pretty sad to work somewhere where you can't talk to anyone. I wouldn't like to work at a place like that.

(Interview with folk high school student)

Tine: We're all walking around thinking: what are we going to do next and what's the best way of moving forward? We're all in the same boat at the moment. And some people have tried – they applied last year and had a few interviews, and some people have done a few courses at university. So we can all help each other somehow and get plenty of different perspectives on our situation. I actually think it's been great because otherwise you just hang out with the people you normally hang out with, discussing a few things occasionally, and you never really get anywhere. We talk about it all the time (laughs). There is a lot to say about the different subjects too, and we talk about it during the lessons. When you say something, ask a question, and they present you with a concrete issue: try doing X, Y or Z when you leave. I was very unsure about whether I should apply this year or not. I talked it over with some of the other students and some of the teachers. You must have heard us too – we even talk about it at breakfast. So actually I think it's great. There's a really relaxed attitude about it.

The book *Career Guidance in Communities* comprises a qualitative study of two different institutional arrangements for career guidance: one at a Danish folk high school¹ and another at a large manufacturing company. The aim of this study was to

¹ Folk high schools are residential schools providing general and non-formal education based on the ideas of Danish philosopher, poet, educational thinker and clergyman, N.F.S. Grundtvig. Courses vary in length – from one week to up to almost a year – and are attended by adults of all ages, but mostly young people in their gap year between upper secondary and higher education. The topics vary from politics to sports. The overall aim is to increase the individual's general and academic insight and skills

understand how career guidance interacts with the everyday lives of people and the communities they participate in? This cooperation took place over a two-year period. 15 participants (folk high school students, teachers, employees and career guidance practitioners) were followed for two days each using participatory observation, ending in semi-structured interviews.

In the extracts above, Poul talks about his thoughts in relation to applying for a new job after a round of layoffs, and Tine talks about applying for higher education. We gain insight into how they both orient themselves towards other people to help deal with their situation, using expressions such as: *“We talk about it a lot. It must be pretty sad to work somewhere where you can’t talk to anyone. We can all help each other somehow.”* This is what everyday life looks like for Tine and Poul. The sense of community they enjoy with their colleagues and fellow students is a resource they draw upon as they head towards new jobs or educational paths. Their thoughts about choosing a course or finding a new job take up a lot of space in their everyday lives: *“We spend a good part of the day on that. We talk about it all the time.”*

In many countries, both in Europe and beyond, we have witnessed the development of special *institutional arrangements*, referred to generically as *career guidance* (see Cedefop, 2010; Watts, Sultana & McCarthy, 2010), aimed at supporting citizens involved in processes like the ones referred to by Tine and Poul. This reflects a political expectation; namely that career guidance can make a difference in people’s lives and in relation to a variety of societal challenges.

Career guidance as an institutional arrangement

When career guidance is studied as an institutional arrangement (Dreier, 2008, pp. 76 ff.), this involves focusing analytically on the fact that career guidance is a response to societal issues; an institutional practice that has been established to help remedy and solve particular problems. When career guidance is described as an institutional arrangement, two particular characteristics of career guidance are brought into focus: (1) career guidance as a practice has institutional links that establishes and regulates career guidance practices; and (2) career guidance must be *arranged* in the sense that someone must act in relation to practice in order to make career guidance work and ascribe meaning to it (or not). An arrangement has participants who each contribute to the performance of the arrangement. Conceptualising career guidance as an institutional arrangement draws attention to practice as a societal institution which is arranged with specific purposes, as well as to the fact that concrete meetings and activities need to be arranged by the participants to ensure that career guidance takes place and works. In the study that underpins the development of the reflection model, the aim was to study, analyse and understand career guidance from a participant perspective.

The participant perspective

The participant perspective is a particular way of understanding how people are in the world. Within the fields of practice research and critical psychology, which formed the theoretical foundation of the aforementioned study, participation is described as an ontological concept: we are in the world due to our participation in it (Dreier, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Further Dreier argues that structure is to be perceived as something practical: the arrangement of multiple practices in social practice structures (Dreier, 2008). The foundation in critical psychology and practice research

and enhance the ability and desire to take responsibility for their own life, as well as taking an active and engaged part in society Folk high schools receive economic support from the Danish state.

is there for a dialectic concept of structure, which means that people act together, in and with social structures. "In this way, we seek to underline that structures are things which we create together in various types of human community in which we structure our possibilities for doing things when we act together" (Højholt, 2005, p. 31). In order to avoid abstraction, structure is not analysed at an overall social level. Instead, the meaning of structure is analysed by considering the concrete and practical ways in which people conduct their lives and their encounters with career guidance in concrete institutional arrangements. The analysis was therefore decentralised in relation to the actual career guidance practice (Dreier, 2008).

Centred analysis focuses on the practice of career guidance and the encounter between guidance practitioner and participant, asking questions such as: What happens in a career guidance session? How do career guidance practitioners interact with the participants in career guidance interventions? By contrast, decentred analysis is interested in placing career guidance within the context of how participants lead their lives: What is the impact of career guidance on participants' lives, and vice versa? Decentred analysis examines how career guidance interacts with the many different ways in which people tackle vocational and educational challenges, decisions and development, as well as the many contexts outside career guidance practice in which such challenges are addressed (in the workplace, with friends and family or anywhere else where people join forces to consider work, livelihood, family, education, career and their past, present and future). With this introduction to the two central concepts which will be used in the analysis presented in this paper, I will now turn to the practical setting².

Vignette – welcome to the company

Work starts at six in the morning. The building complex is big and old: a jumble of yellow plaster facades, red brick, plastic sheeting, tiles, asbestos, cement and tall brick chimneys. Erik walks through the gate to the factory area, passing large pallets of blue plastic tanks containing the raw materials used in production and sacks containing various substances which are always hot, even when there are sub-zero temperatures outside like today. He registers his arrival by waving to the foreman, who is sitting behind his window. He does not need to be told what to do today; he was pouring paint into cans yesterday and he simply has to continue doing that now. He smiles as he passes the office and pushes his way through the plastic strips that reduce the draught in the factory a little – although you can still drive through them with a fork-lift truck. He turns left through the door to the lunch room and is met by the smell of a mixture of coffee, sandwiches, hot chocolate and cigarette smoke. He recognises the smell – it hasn't changed for the past 28 years.

Erik walks into the factory and over to what is known as the pouring line, where he works next to Jim. The factory is a confused jungle of pipes, huge mixing machines, taps and conveyor belts. They take turns having their breaks so the production process is not interrupted.

² Readers, who would like to read the full analyses, including the case of young people enrolling in higher education, are referred to Career Guidance in Communities, R. Thomsen, 2012.

They each get more breaks if they can manage this, they say.

During their breaks, they sit in the lunch room drinking coffee or hot chocolate, smoking, chatting and “teasing each other”. They eat their sandwiches and read the newspaper. Erik has been working here for 28 years. “We’re part of the furniture,” he says.

“Then we occupied the wall”

Ulla is a career guidance practitioner who is contracted to deliver career guidance and support as part of a redundancy agreement with 15 workers who were laid off due to the relocation of the production unit in which they were employed. The following description is, as with the Vignette, based on the empirical material from the study.

Ulla arrived at the company and was shown a room in which a ‘career guidance corner’³ was to be set up. She was given a bookcase, a table, two chairs, a notice board and a computer. The bookcase was stocked with brochures about various supplementary training courses, and various job advertisements (“vacancies”) were posted on the notice board. The computer was on the table and there were two chairs: one for the career guidance practitioner and one for the employee. The career guidance corner was located on the ground floor in a building separate from the production hall and administration offices. The production hall was located about ten metres away from this building and, apart from the production facilities, also contained the foreman’s office, the lunch room and showers and changing facilities.

Ulla: The career guidance corner was placed in the corner of this office and we were given a desk and chair. The staff sat over there. I’d already been round and introduced myself. We had a meeting and a couple of employees came over when Tonny sent them over. This was not the best idea, so I started to find job adverts and hang them up on the wall in here. People started coming in to have a look at them. So Tonny and I agreed – or else it was Tonny who said, “You’d be better off coming over here, wouldn’t you?” So I moved over there and started using the wall in the lunch room, and started basing myself over there and got a desk and chair. They stared at me at first ... I was a stranger, after all. And then ... it suddenly became obvious that this was a situation they weren’t very keen on ... They could see me on the premises, so they started thinking they were going to be fired any minute now, or the place was going to be closed down, and they knew that redundancies had already been mentioned. So it was a sensitive situation.

Rie: I see. How did you cope with that situation?

Ulla: Well, at first I sort of tried to ... I wouldn’t say I tried to be invisible, but I tried to sort of approach them without forcing myself on them. We’d sort of occupied the wall in the lunch room, where I

³ The actual concept of “career guidance corners” was introduced by the Danish women’s trade union (KAD) in the 1990s to provide a special form of career guidance in the workplace. These corners were introduced because the union’s members did not use the guidance services provided by the union, and they represented a new way of organising career guidance (Plant, 2002).

could put up some job adverts so we had something to talk about at least.

In the passage quoted above, Ulla uses the image “visible/invisible”. Ulla uses the phrase “tried to be invisible” to describe the way in which she functioned in the production premises. But the terms “visible/invisible” also reveal something about the interaction between career guidance and everyday practice at the company. When career guidance practice was located at some distance from the production premises, any employee deciding to look for career guidance became visible to all his workmates when he went to talk to Ulla. But when Ulla moved over into the production premises, she describes how she is aware of not forcing career guidance on the employees and almost had to make herself invisible in order to talk to them. The intention of the career guidance corner seems clear, but its location and arrangement in practice seems to prevent the intention from being fulfilled. Ulla decided to change both the location and the arrangement in order to get closer to the intention, with the arrangement being a career guidance corner and the intention being the provision of career guidance for the employees who had been made redundant. The physical movement influenced the career guidance practice: instead of consisting of individual, private dialogues it became a more shared and collective practice, largely centred on a career guidance wall featuring job advertisements in the lunch room. The function of the lunch room as a place for informal interaction influenced the career guidance, which could no longer insist on the establishment of a private sphere in this new location.

The result of this relocation was that career guidance became more collective, with several people listening in and asking questions at the same time.

There is a dialectic element at play here between the influence of the location on practice and the influence of practice on the location – influences that also have an impact on the way the employees perceived the contribution made by Ulla. As a consequence of the fact that practice is influenced by the location in which it is embedded (Casey 1996) and designed (Sørensen 2006), career guidance now took place in a different way. Ulla described what happened when she put up job advertisements in the lunch room:

Rie: I've noticed that something happens when you put up job adverts. What is it that happens?

Ulla: They all come running (laughs).

Rie: Yes (laughs). But not actually to look at the adverts?

Ulla: No ... no. But the reason is the same. It's not a threatening situation.

Rie: And what can happen in an unthreatening situation?

Ulla: Well, for one thing, they can have an informal chat with me even though it's about something formal. Because they're going to be out of work soon. It's an informal situation so they feel comfortable and unthreatened. If I go too far and say, "Have you sent off that application?" and push them a bit, they can pretend that I'm talking to someone else. This (situation) is not threatening. And then they've got each other – I think that's important too. I think they need to hear what the others have to say. And then sometimes I wonder whether they're actually in competition with

each other for the same jobs. Although, at the same time, they say things like “What about that? Don’t you fancy applying for that one?”

In this excerpt, Ulla uses a different form of dualism to describe the movement in practice: the movement between formal and informal career guidance. Instead of accepting that some types of career guidance are described as formal and other types as informal, it is interesting to consider what the career guidance practitioner uses the terms formal/informal to explain. Ulla describes the informal situation as unthreatening, thereby identifying the employees as people who might be afraid. For Ulla, the terms formal/informal provide an explanation of the type of arrangement in which the employees are willing take part in career guidance activities and the type in which they are not.

A social practice theory of career guidance in communities

The extracts from the analyses of *Career Guidance in Communities* (Thomsen, 2012) presented in part one of this paper indicate that the actions of the employees move career guidance from the private towards the public sphere; from being organised in the form of individual sessions towards organisational forms rooted in the collective; and that collective forms of organisation interact with the concrete places, communities and participants to create a path leading to new possibilities for participation (Thomsen, 2014).

These include the possibility to:

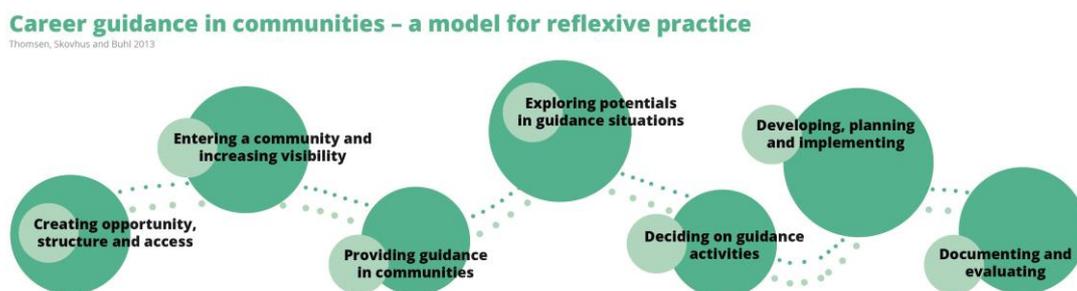
- listen;
- hear and see the responses to other people;
- get ideas for one’s own questions;
- receive suggestions about concrete solutions to problems one faces from other people;
- have one’s questions problematised by others;
- get other people’s perspectives on one’s perception of the situation based on their own experiences;
- relate to each other based on the questions and dialogues one has heard;
- discuss previous questions and dialogues with others who have also heard what has been said; and
- gain a new understanding of obstacles and one’s options of manoeuvring around, with and changing them.

When career guidance is studied from a participant perspective, its partiality also becomes clear meaning that taking part in career guidance activities is just a small part in peoples live and there is no guarantee that it makes sense instantly. This raises the question of what could be done in order for career guidance can become a relevant activity in the lives of individuals in different places and communities, since the experience of relevance has an influence on whether and how people seek to participate in career guidance or not. My findings indicate that career guidance may be experienced as relevant if it provides a context for action in which participants can join forces with career guidance practitioners to analyse, problematise and create new and shared opportunities in relation to their future educational or vocational participation in society. As such, career guidance has the potential to be a context for action in which people deal with problems and the conditions associated with these problems collectively. Against this backdrop of a social practice theory of career guidance in communities (Thomsen, 2012) I will now introduce career guidance in communities as a model for critical reflexive practice that I have developed with my colleagues, Buhl and Skovhus (2013).

2. How to practise career guidance in communities – a model for reflexive practice

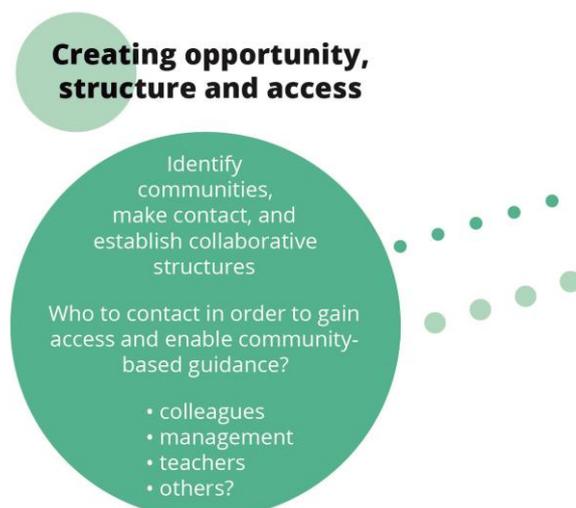
In response to positive feedback and dialogues with career guidance professionals, career education teachers and their managers on the insights presented in the book *Career Guidance in Communities* (Thomsen 2012), we developed a model for reflexive practice to support career practitioners in their critical analyses and the development of collective and context-sensitive activities in their career guidance practice (Thomsen, Skovhus and Buhl; 2013). The model consists of seven elements, as illustrated in the figure below. We have previously explored these seven elements in detail (Thomsen, Skovhus and Buhl 2013); in the following I will therefore focus on the particular aspect of community-based guidance provision, only briefly touching on the other elements.

Figure 1: Career guidance in communities – a model for reflexive practice



Although the model might suggest a linear process, this is merely a cognitive construct; in reality, it is difficult, if not entirely impossible, to progress through a sequence of neatly separated and completed "phases". The elements of career guidance in communities are entangled and reflections on them occur simultaneously. The hope is that the model can support the development of reflexive practices, and 'problematizing' (Freire, 1976) about career guidance practice and enable the career practitioner to use the model as a basis for both thinking about the ways in which they act and develop knowledge about their actions and as inspiration to action in practice as 'Theory does not dictate practice; rather, it serves to hold practice at arm's length in order to mediate and critically comprehend the type of praxis needed within a specific setting at a particular time in history' (Freire, 1985: xxiii).

Figure 2: Creating opportunity structure and access



The first element is: **Creating opportunity, structure and access**. As stated in the first part of the paper the idea of the critically reflexive practitioner emphasises a moral requirement to make available opportunities for others to communicate there for the first element is meant to support career guidance practitioner in identifying communities with which to engage for the purpose of making meaningful and relevant career guidance activities available to the participants in those communities. While many career guidance practitioners might rightly feel that the opportunity to step out of their offices is not available to them my hope with this paper is to inspire and support them in doing so by providing arguments as to why it is important, ideas to how this could be done and indications of the benefits there are to be had. Career guidance practitioners might be likely to think of classes and workshops held at schools, vocational education and training, within workplaces, in canteens at universities and other educational institutions, organised by trade unions or maybe involving local libraries. But groups of young parents, street communities, living areas, shelters, sports clubs and youth clubs, for example, are also potential sites of community-based career guidance. Practitioners must reflect on questions such as: What characterises the community in question? Where is this community located? What does this place look like? How is it organised on a daily basis? Next comes reflection as to how the practitioner can approach the community and gain access. Who to contact? What kind of collaboration is needed? And which structural arrangement needs to be agreed? As we saw in the analyses above, career guidance in communities needs to be sensitive towards the everyday life in and of the communities. The purpose of the first element is to consider the specific context and place in which to interact with people in order to gain detailed knowledge about they and the challenges they face, their experiences and feelings.

The second element in the model is: **Entering a community and increasing visibility**.

Figure 3: Entering a community and increasing visibility



Here, career guidance practitioners should reflect on the following questions: How should s/he make his/her presence known to the community? How can the practitioner create opportunities for informal interaction with community members? There are a number of ways for practitioners to increase their visibility within a community: using social media, exploring the place of the community and interacting or staying in a certain place. However, practitioners do not only need to be visible to potential participants in career guidance activities, but also to other professionals such as teachers, social workers or community workers. Niles and Harris-Bowlsby (2009, p. 416) point to a need for career guidance professionals to be able to connect with and access resources from other professionals working in a community. They describe this as a three-step process:

1. Identification of other services / professionals.
2. Establishment and maintenance of personal contact with support services inside and outside the community in order to get detailed information about who can access this service and how. What are the criteria? How long does it take? What does it cost and is there a process for referral?
3. Creation of an informed link between the person's needs and the criteria that allow access to the service.

Figure 4: Providing guidance in communities



The third element in the reflection model on career guidance in communities concerns **Providing guidance in communities**. Doing career guidance in communities involves encouraging and engaging in dialogues in existing⁴ communities, which most career guidance practitioners have the opportunity to do in the many different institutional arrangements for career guidance in which they participate on a daily basis. Many also have the opportunity to look beyond their institutional basis to identify needs for dialogue around career guidance questions. In these dialogues, the career practitioner exercises the standard virtues of professional career guidance, such as active listening, unconditioned positive attention, congruence and empathy (see Rogers 1971, Amundson 2006 and Westergaard 2010). In addition, the practitioner acknowledges that community-based dialogue serves several purposes: as a continuation of the efforts to increase visibility, to democratise the utilisation of available resources and to maximise relevancy for all citizens. It is a reoccurring theme in the literature on career guidance that not everyone finds it easy to relate to the word career and that those who are least likely to seek out career guidance on their own initiative are often those who might benefit the most from such services (Westergaard 2010, Roberts 1977).

By engaging in and encouraging dialogues in communities, the career practitioner makes additional participant positions available to the people in the community; for instance, the 'listening' position from which participants can gain insight into different possibilities, listening to questions other people ask and the answers they receive which, in turn, can help them form questions they feel are relevant and meaningful for them. To invite the participants' engagement in such dialogues, the model encourages the career practitioner to reflect on the relationship between answering participants' questions and inviting others to take part in the dialogue, while at the same time acknowledging certain participants' need to engage from a listening position. Often, career practitioners feel obliged to give immediate answers to the questions they are asked, but by simply waiting to see if other participants have something to share on the matter, maybe an answer or a new question, maybe the

⁴ A reoccurring question is whether it is possible for career guidance practitioners to create communities for the explicit purpose of practicing career guidance. Over the years, we have witnessed this done with success. Career practitioners have created cooking classes, intensive learning classes, personal development activities.

sharing of an experience or feeling the career practitioner can invite more participants to engage. This engagement can even be encouraged through questions such as: What do you think about this question, feeling or experience? Do you share the same thoughts? Can I invite you to join this dialogue? (see Christensen 1991 for inspiration on 'The questioning teacher in action'). By reflecting upon the relationship between waiting, taking initiative and answering in concrete community-based dialogues, the career practitioner seeks to stimulate the activation and exchange of the participants' own resources, their shared experience of problems, barriers and opportunities for action, and thus the opportunity to support each other.

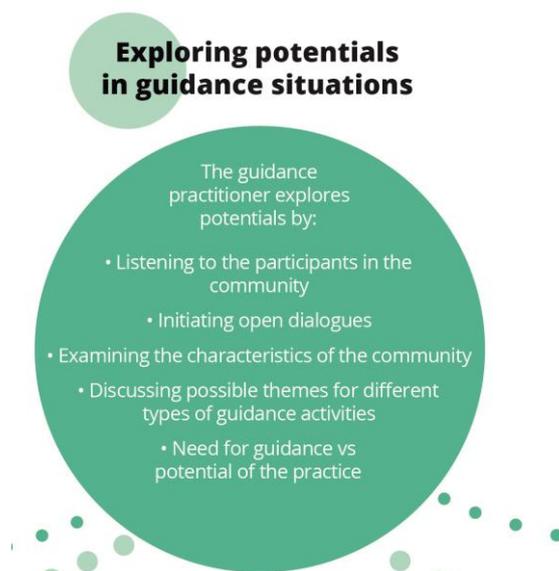
The acknowledgement of the resources that the community members can offer in support of one another can be revisited through group guidance activities on themes and problems that, in the view of both the career practitioner and the participants, could benefit from more structured dialogues. I will return to this in the next section. In an existing community, the participants are together; a fact which also allows the career guidance practitioner to engage from a listening position because people in communities are already engaged in their daily activities in that place. From this position the practitioner listens to struggles and success stories, as well as problems, obstacles and barriers that hinder the participants' career development, and to reflect upon how problems could be addressed and where. Especially the question of where to address problems is meant to draw attention to the opportunity for career practitioners to exercise advocacy with community and through other societal arrangements. This can be done by problem-posing (Freire 1970); by putting pressure on different parties to improve the resources available to tackle the problems; by joining protests of various kinds; by engaging in development projects to lower barriers and build springboards; or by presenting the issues to those who have an influence on the problems encountered by the community (Niles and Harris-Bowlsby, 2009: 418).

The social practice theory on career guidance in communities (Thomsen, 2012) states that career guidance has the potential to be a context for action in which people can join forces to deal with problems and the conditions associated with these problems. To stimulate this, career guidance practitioners are encouraged to reflect upon their possibilities for connecting people who could benefit from speaking to each other. This must, of course, be done with ethical awareness and with respect for confidentiality. With that being said, ethical awareness and confidentiality should not be given as reasons for NOT connecting people per se, but must be considered in each specific case (Thomsen, 2012). To give a concrete example: During a dialogue in a school canteen, a career practitioner encounters a student that seems to want to engage in the dialogues, but who, at the same time, stops himself from doing so. The career practitioner has spotted a quiet, more private location not far from the canteen and invites the student to accompany him/her. During their dialogue, a challenge comes to the attention of the practitioner: this student finds it challenging to be in college while at the same time being a parent, since the majority of students do not have parenting responsibilities. The career practitioner knows of another student on a different course with the same challenge. The career practitioner says: "I think you might benefit from talking to another student I know who shares this challenge with you. Would it be OK if I contact this student to see if he is willing to meet you for lunch? If you like, I could participate?" In this way, no confidentiality is broken, but the opportunity to join forces and enjoy mutual support is established. Another way of moving career guidance from an individual approach to collective support is to explore if there is an interest in group activities. In the example above, the practitioner could have responded: I think what you are telling me is very important and I know that other students with parenting responsibilities encounter different challenges during their studies. I would be interested in finding

out how I could support you in the best possible way and if some changes to the structure of the programme is needed. If I were to gather 4-5 students in similar situations to explore this further, can I then contact you with an invitation to join? Would you find this relevant?

Finally, addressing the criticism levelled at several career guidance models and research for overlooking the importance of context (Leung, 2007, Valach & Young, 2009), engaging in the community also serves to emphasise context sensitivity. This engagement with communities in their everyday context serves to explore which career guidance activities could be seen as relevant and meaningful in the specific community. Many policy definitions of career guidance are broad for instance the OECD (2004) provides a very broad and inclusive definition of career guidance as a process that consists of a range of different activities; a definition that allows for creativity and flexibility in terms of adapting and even inventing modes of delivery. The third element in the reflection model is devoted to exploring the potential of career guidance activities.

Figure 5: Exploring potentials in guidance situations

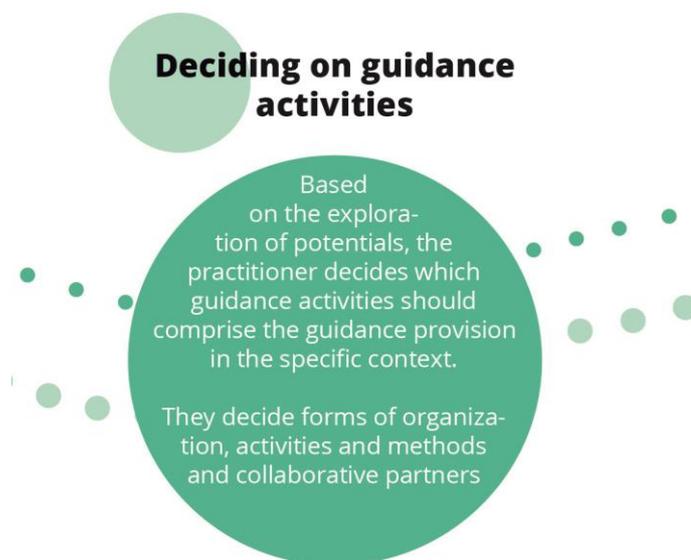


The fourth element places an emphasis on basing the development of career guidance activities, programmes, services and practices on the community and its needs, and resources by encouraging the **exploring of potentials in guidance situations**. Specific activities will often be based on individuals' needs as identified prior to and outside the guidance processes (Westergaard 2009). These identified needs for career guidance then guide the allocation of available resources, sometimes specifically targeting specific groups, leaving the career practitioner with little room for context-sensitive prioritisation. When Buhl, Skovhus and I choose to speak about exploring the potential for career guidance rather than identifying needs, there are a number of reasons: Firstly, the career practitioner has professional insight into the purpose and potential meaning and effect of different career guidance activities, theories and models and is therefore able to say something about *potential* benefits for the participants. However, that does not mean that people necessarily experience a need for these activities, especially in communities with little or no prior experience with career guidance activities. Therefore, this potential could only be realised if the activities connect with the people in the community in a way that they consider meaningful. Thus, the exploration of the potential for career guidance takes place while the practitioner explores the community together with the participants, talking with and listening them. It is based on this exploration that s/he becomes

aware of possible themes that can guide the design of guidance provision and various types of guidance and advocacy activities.

Reflections about the peculiarities of a community might easily come into view when it is a community that is new to the career practitioner. If a career practitioner wants to use the reflection model in a community that is well known to him or her, a community the practitioner might even consider herself a part of, an exploration of guidance potential requires that the practitioner can distance herself and arrive anew. The concept of arriving anew and insisting on productive curiosity is not new to career guidance practice and is related to life-space mapping (Lewin 1943, Peavy 2004) where the mapping of life spaces supports the practitioner to enter into the life space of the other in order to understand meaningful experiences where life space include all the influences on a person including their communities. Further positions from within critical ethnography (Lave 2011) and institutional ethnography (Smith 2006) can provide inspiration as to how to keep arriving anew both critical and institutional ethnography starts from everyday lives of people and explore social relations, organisations and institutions as people take part in them and from their perspectives (Smith 2006:225). Questions to stimulate reflexive practice include: How can I find out what characterises this group of people in relation to possibilities for education and work, family situations, self-image, etc.? How can I understand their concerns? What questions and issues are shared by many and by few? Which issues, questions and problems could be remedied by community activities, by career guidance activities, or by activities with other professionals either within or outside this community? Where can I listen to success stories? What are their ideas of a good life? Do the participants have ideas for activities? How do such activities relate to (or not) overall goals for career guidance in this institutional arrangement? At a societal level?

Figure 6: Deciding on guidance activities



The next element concerns reflection on how **to choose and decide on guidance activities**. The aim is to encourage the career practitioner and their management to challenge the idea that practices can be recycled or 'taken off of the shelf' for all clients and contexts (Mørch 2006). The aim of reflexive practice regarding career

guidance in communities is to stimulate context sensitivity, to build on the resources of a community and to establish exchange and collective support in finding, sharing and enhancing new possibilities for action in relation to education and work. Based on participation and dialogue in a given community, the explicit or implicit expression of ideas for activities and the exploration of the potential for guidance, the career practitioner decides which guidance activities should be on offer. This decision must consider themes and activities suggested by participants as well as activities the career practitioner finds potentially relevant based on professional judgement. Activities proposed by participants or by the career practitioner might not initially be perceived as meaningful or relevant by other participants in the community. This draws attention to the fine line between explaining, illustrating and negotiating activities and the need for all participants to see that there is an opportunity for debate and discussion of ideas. The model for reflexive practice seeks to be inclusive of other theories and models of career guidance as basis for activities long as the activities included respect the overall purpose of career guidance in communities.

Figure 7: Developing, planning and implementing



After the considerations above on how to decide upon guidance activities, we now turn to thinking about how **to develop, plan and implement** these career guidance activities. The two elements; deciding on guidance activities and developing, planning and implementing them overlap in practice, but, here they are presented each element separately. This is done to increase transparency, and to emphasises that the analytical and explorative phases that establish context sensitivity and the basis for taking the collective as the starting point for the development of career guidance activities should be given equally as much attention as the planning and performance of the actual activities. This is an analytical and reflexive separation of phases that are dynamic and entangled in practice.

The development, planning and implementation of career guidance activities are inspired by didactics and support critical reflexive practice regarding who decide about::

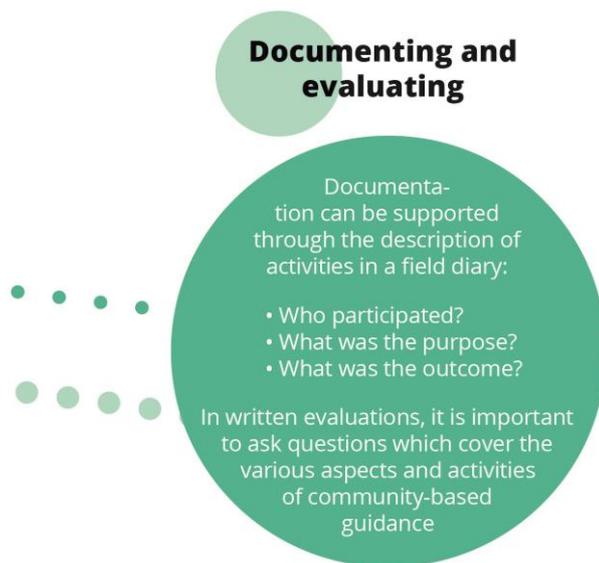
- communication about the activities (To whom are they address? How? Why?);
- how participants become aware of or enrol in an activity;
- the sequence in which activities should take place;
- the content of the activities;

- the timing and location of the activities;
- the materials required to deliver the activities; and
- the necessary agreements with other professionals or (internal/external) parties involved.

As such, the model for reflexive practice encourages concurrent activities which, in turn, place a responsibility on the career guidance practitioner and the management to plan, coordinate and manage resources in relation to the different initiatives and collaborating parties.

Being present in a community, engaging in dialogues, exploring potential, seeking to establish connections and answering specific questions is demanding for the career practitioner. Therefore the career practitioner is encouraged to keep a field diary. Inspired by ethnographic approaches to social research, a field diary can contain observations regarding the practitioners engagement with the community as well as ideas for activities and thoughts on why these activities would likely be perceived as relevant by the members of the community. The field diary can also be used to note specific questions that the career practitioner might not have an answer to in situ, but will respond to via email, phone, another activity or by sharing information with the larger community. A field diary can be analogue or digital using a tablet. In the final element of the reflection model, **to document and evaluate**, I return to the use of the field diary.

Figure 8: Documenting and evaluating



To document and evaluate guidance activities is equally important when practising career guidance in communities as in one-to-one sessions. However, it is also important to find ways of documenting and evaluating activities that are able to capture this specific mode of delivery. For documentation purposes, the field diary can be used to capture and register encounters in the community with a focus on noting: Who did I speak to? Who did I listen to? Where? What was said? What ideas for activities/important themes/problems/barriers came out of this encounter? These notes can function as the basis for documenting the activities at a later stage. When changes are made in the mode of delivery, considerations about whether the current form of evaluation is able to capture this change are needed. For example, an

evaluation of the element **providing guidance in communities** could include the following questions.

- (Name) The career guidance practitioner has been seeking to engage in dialogues in the community; did you notice?
- Have you posed a question to the career practitioner while meeting her in the neighbourhood, library, canteen, workshop, lunch room or other places outside of her office?
- Have you been listening to others who have had conversations with the (Name) career practitioner?
- Is it important to you that the career practitioner is available for questions and conversations in your neighbourhood, the canteen, workshop, lunch room or other places outside of her office?

Evaluation can also be aimed at the relevance, benefit and meaningfulness of the various activities that the career practitioner and the participants have chosen to establish in order to identify needs for adjustment. Suggested questions to support reflection on the documentation and evaluation of career guidance in communities are.

- What is the purpose of the documentation and evaluation? Control, proof of service delivery, learning, change, measurement, legitimacy, efficiency, evidence?
- Does career guidance in communities call for other ways of organising documentation and evaluation than the methods currently in use?
- How can evaluation capture both meaningfulness and effect?
- What new types of evaluation practice and questions can be developed?
- Who will carry out the documentation and the evaluation? Who must be included and heard?

Final remarks - Career guidance as a collective phenomenon

The places in which career guidance takes place and where communities live their daily lives shape and limit some career guidance interactions and open up others. By viewing career guidance as an institutional arrangement in the first part of the paper we could bring the concrete arrangement of practice and the place of delivery into focus. We also saw how the participant's way of (not) engaging facilitated change in practice from an individual mode of delivery towards taken the collective of workers as the starting point. This was shown through an analysis from the perspective of the participants. The second part of the paper aimed then to introduce career guidance in communities as a model for the development of a critical reflexive and democratic career guidance practice. Overall the paper has argued that engaging with communities for career guidance purposes enables the development of career guidance activities that can acknowledge and activate the resources of the communities. This builds on the idea of career guidance as a collective practice in which people can join forces with career guidance practitioners to analyse their situation and based on these insights create new opportunities in relation to their future educational or vocational participation in society (Thomsen 2012).

I am in many ways optimistic about the project. I have already met many career practitioners, professionals, teachers and researchers that have will and take actions towards changes in career guidance practice for the benefit of the participants. It might seem to be a small effort that they leave their offices for some hours or one day a week to bring career guidance into communities that might not identify with career guidance at a first instance. But for the communities they engage with this small effort may bring about critical change. This community is given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences of education and work with other people in that community. It might not be positive and it might not be easy depending on those experiences. But the hope and optimism that I share with many within the field of career guidance research and practice is that the exchanges of experience, struggles, losses and gains will result in positive and desired development for the people, their community and our society as a whole.

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