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Janelle Schloss

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A Conference Special

This issue of the *Australian Journal of Career Development (AJCD)* features a selection of papers that were presented within the research stream of the 2011 International Career Conference held by the Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA) in connection with the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG). A companion issue featuring papers by other conference presenters will appear in the *International Journal of Educational and Vocational Guidance (IJEVG)*. Papers were submitted to the guest editors, Dr Mary McMahon and Mr Col McCowan OAM, and then followed the usual editorial course with the two journals’ respective editors, Dr Peter McIlveen (*AJCD*) and Dr Jerome Rossier (*IJEVG*).

The conference was truly an international event with a host of outstanding contributors from a diverse range of nations from every continent. Convened in the city of Cairns, set in the magnificent tropical forests of northern Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef, conference delegates were treated to some of the latest scholarship and research in the field of career development. In addition to luminaries in the field who unfailingly give one cause to reflect and generate new perspectives, it was pleasing to hear from new researchers bringing ideas and advancing the scope of research, theory and practice.

The case study by Janelle Schloss presents an overview of a professional development short-course in career development that was provided to a selection of schoolteachers in Queensland. In addition to describing participants’ reactions to the short course, this case study touches on a fundamentally important matter: the preparedness of teachers and schools to implement career development programs. Dale Furbish echoes the key issues of professionals’ capacity to practise through an analysis of career development practitioners’ views on the professional standards promulgated in New Zealand and Australia. Fellow New Zealander Margaret Elley-Brown documents the career development of a high-achieving woman. This article demonstrates the centrality of narrative in career development per se and its value as a qualitative biographical research method. To consolidate New Zealand’s contribution, Barry A. Irving presents an incisive critique of career development and career education and continues to advance his scholarship on the relations among social justice, power and discourse. Within the European policy and practice context, Lucy Hearne from the Republic of Ireland provides a constructivist framework for the evaluation of career interventions. This new approach promises to expand the scope of evaluation as an addition to existing quantitative models of evaluation. From both sides of the Atlantic, Raino Vuorinen, James P. Sampson and Jaana Kettunen overview the nexus of career development and ICT and explore how the ability to use technology is an important mediating influence upon its uptake and application.

The issue also contains two papers from the 2010 Annual Conference of the National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (NAGCAS). Shruti R. Sardeshmukh and Ronda M. Smith-Nelson present a model of entrepreneurship education. Their work recognises the relevance of this career development competency and how it might be developed through the curricula of higher education. Erin Doyle summarises the literature on social justice, equity and career development in the higher education sector.

In conclusion, we are delighted to present this issue of the journal as it showcases international research that brings theory and practice together.

Dr Mary McMahon and Col McCowan OAM, 
Guest Editors 
Dr Peter McIlveen and Dr Jerome Rossier, 
Journal Editors
In 2006, Education Queensland introduced the senior phase of learning to provide options, flexibility and support for young people to engage them in learning or earning so that all students would have the opportunity to finish Year 10 and then go on to gain at least a Queensland Certificate of Education (or Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement) or Certificate III vocational qualification. Year 10 is a foundation year for the senior phase of learning to consolidate the knowledge, skills and capabilities that are necessary for successful learning in Years 11 and 12. To assist in building this foundation, all Year 10 students have the opportunity to develop senior education and training (SET) plans with their school and parents or carers. The SET plans are a student’s plan of action for their education and training through the senior phase of learning. School principals are charged with the responsibility of ensuring integration of career education and advice into learning programs so
students in Year 10 develop a SET plan, in partnership with their parents. Principals are also responsible for ensuring that career education and advice is undertaken throughout all phases of learning, but with a particular focus in years preceding the transition to and laying the foundation for the senior phase of learning.

The Australian Blueprint for Career Development (MCEETYA, 2009) is a framework that can be used to design, implement and evaluate career development interventions for young people and adults. The blueprint identifies the skills, attitudes and knowledge that individuals need to effectively manage their life, learning and work roles in the 21st century.

People develop these career management skills in a variety of settings: at home, in classrooms, in the playground, in the workplace and on the sporting field. But career development programs mean more people have stronger intentions to develop these competencies (MCEETYA, 2009).

The blueprint provides teachers, parents, career development practitioners, employment service providers, employers or others who are in a position to support people’s careers and transitions with a nationally consistent framework that identifies 11 career management competencies and outlines processes for designing, implementing and evaluating career development programs or redesigning and enhancing existing programs (MCEETYA, 2009; MCEEDYA, 2010).

In 2008 the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council received endorsement of their Community Services Training Package. The Certificate IV in Career Development (CHC42108) is a qualification from that training package covering workers who provide a range of programs and services to individuals and groups of clients to support them in planning their career or locating, securing and maintaining suitable employment or both. The qualification consists of 16 units of competency, 13 of which are core, plus three electives. The approved nominal hours of training are 330 hours for core units and up to 600 hours for electives, depending on electives selected.

All of the documents relating to career development and transitions from school to work emphasise the importance of these services being delivered by staff who are professionally trained in and committed to career development but it appears that the education and training of teachers in Queensland has changed little to meet these emerging expectations. Indeed, many teachers find themselves in positions as VET coordinators, careers teachers and industry placement officers with little or no additional training, few additional resources and little or no extra time to complete these duties. Traditionally, career services in schools were delivered by school guidance officers who were specifically trained for and held postgraduate qualifications in career counselling. The changing nature of career development means that one career counsellor cannot possibly provide all of the services required today in a modern school and most schools have only one career counsellor per 1000 or so students. Thus many teachers are cast into roles for which they are ill prepared.

Australian Trade Training College has developed two programs to allow participants to gain the Certificate IV in Career Development qualification. One of the programs targets school personnel and the other those who work in employment and related services. This paper relates specifically to the program targeting school personnel.

**Method**

**Course Participants**

Forty participants enrolled in the course: 8 male and 32 female. Three of the women dropped out before the course commenced because they believed they could obtain recognised prior learning (RPL) for the qualification in only three days with another provider. Another three participants dropped out during the course: 1 due to ill health and the other two due to work pressure. Thirty-four candidates completed the course: 8 males and 26 females.

**Student Qualifications and Experience**

Of the 34 participants who completed the program, 32 were registered teachers. Their years of teaching experience ranged from a minimum of three years to a maximum of 27 years. Eighty per cent of the teachers...
Case Study

had more than 10 years’ teaching experience but many of them were relatively new in their current roles.

Course Delivery
The program delivered by the Australian Trade Training College consisted of three blocks of training as shown in Table 1.

Stage 1 consisted of four days of face-to-face training; Stage 2 consisted of two days of face-to-face training and Stage 3 also consisted of two days of face-to-face training. These blocks of training were developed holistically with the units of competency in each block delivered and assessed in an integrated manner. This allowed the program to be delivered in a format that made sense to the participants and that related to the ways in which they delivered career development services in their schools. One of the drawbacks of this type of training and assessment is that it makes it difficult when applying RPL because it is difficult to separate individual units of competency from each block.

There was approximately three months’ break between each stage, during which students engaged in significant flexible learning and completed assessment tasks. All learning materials and assessment tasks, as well as resources, reading and learning activities were available to students via a web-based learning management system (Quia). Students were also encouraged to contact the trainer via telephone and email for further support and guidance.

During face-to-face training, students were provided with essential knowledge components from the units of competency and were then provided with time to develop and demonstrate their skills from the essential skills component of the units of competency. The whole program was contextualised to meet the needs and working environment of the students in the context of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and career development in schools. Learner activities and assessments included tailored practical activities and development of resources that participants could use with the students in their career development work in schools. This was particularly appreciated by the participants, who felt that the training was directly related to their work in schools.

Table 1: Training Blocks for the Australian Trade Training College Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage/Block</th>
<th>Unit code</th>
<th>Units of competency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CHCCOM403C</td>
<td>Use targeted communication skills to build relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHCCS400A</td>
<td>Work within a relevant legal and ethical framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHCNET404A</td>
<td>Facilitate links with other services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHCORG405C</td>
<td>Maintain an effective work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHCES411A</td>
<td>Collect, analyse and apply labour market information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHCCDP401B</td>
<td>Deliver service consistent with a career development framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HLTHIR403B</td>
<td>Work effectively with culturally diverse clients and co-workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CHCCAR501B</td>
<td>Conduct career guidance interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHCCDP402B</td>
<td>Assist clients to plan and access career pathways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHCCDP403B</td>
<td>Analyse and apply education and training information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHCCS407B</td>
<td>Operate referral services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CHCCS411A</td>
<td>Work effectively in the community sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HLTOHS300A</td>
<td>Contribute to OHS processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHCES416A</td>
<td>Provide job search support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHCES404B</td>
<td>Promote clients to employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHCYTH301D</td>
<td>Work effectively with young people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EVALUATION

Student Perceptions and Motivation

At the conclusion of the program students were asked to complete a voluntary survey about the program. Eighteen students responded to the survey.

Results from the survey indicate that before commencing the program, 66.6% of respondents perceived that the Certificate IV in Career Development was a qualification that they felt they needed for their work. Seventy-seven per cent of respondents gave their reason for attending the program as ‘because I felt I needed the knowledge for my work’. Regarding their level of satisfaction with the program, 77.7% of respondents reported that they were ‘very satisfied’ and 22.2% ‘satisfied’. On the question of ‘how likely are you to recommend the program to others?’, 88.8% responded ‘very likely’ and 11.1% ‘likely’.

Anecdotal evidence gathered during the delivery of the program also indicated the following points:

• Of the 34 course participants, only four were aware of the existence of the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (MCEETYA, 2009). None of the participants had an understanding of the why, what or how of the blueprint and none had used it in the development and delivery of career development in their schools.

• None of the participants was aware of the Career Industry Council of Australia’s phasing in of mandatory minimum qualifications for those delivering career development services.

• Participants had a general lack of awareness of the ‘lifelong learning’ aspect of career development. Many saw career development as something that might commence in Year 8, but definitely by Year 10, with the main aim of preparing students to select the ‘right’ subjects for university entry or as preparation for employment post-Year 12.

• All of the participants were extremely committed to their career development work (even those who had fallen into the role almost by default). All participants had endeavoured to inform themselves of the skills and knowledge required to perform their various roles. Most of this knowledge was gained by personal research during their own time and attendance at workshops and seminars provided through their VET networks.

• All participants were extremely adept networkers and, through necessity, had developed contacts with employers, industry, apprenticeship centres and other resources that would benefit their students.

• All participants were enthusiastic about sharing knowledge and resources with each other during the program.

The following comments were provided by participants through feedback after the program:

• ‘A worthwhile course relevant to our core business.’

• ‘Essential knowledge and tools for future admin of our VET program.’

• ‘There is a lot more to it than I had envisaged but it is relevant and will be useful in my role as Head of VET.’

• ‘Very helpful, thank-you, can apply many things I have learned.’

• ‘Firstly, thanks so much for your effort over the past few days. I learnt so much and had a lot reinforced, not the least that I have made the right decision in getting into this area! I’m looking forward to putting much of my newly acquired knowledge into action.’

• ‘Efficient, enjoyable and informative.’

DISCUSSION

There is evidence that the teachers who undertook the Certificate IV in Career Development program that formed the basis of this study believed that they needed to enhance their skills in order to perform their career development roles in their schools. While these teachers were experienced and apparently proficient in their roles as classroom teachers, they still valued the gaining of the Certificate IV in Career Development qualification as an addition to their teaching qualification.

It appears that, since 2001, the proponents of career development in Australia have acknowledged and promoted the necessity for career development services and activities to be delivered by appropriately qualified practitioners. There is no doubt that a significant proportion of career development services and activities are delivered in schools, particularly secondary schools. There is anecdotal evidence that those delivering these services in schools, despite the utmost commitment and will, may feel ill-prepared for their roles. At the least, they value the opportunity to have their knowledge and skills reinforced through the acquisition of a formal qualification.
Despite the development and implementation of a Career Development Framework and the increased focus on career development in general in Australia during the past 10 years, it appears that education systems have yet to realise that career development is a specialised field requiring professionally trained personnel. The implementation of SET plans for Year 10 students in Queensland is one such example.

This initiative is one that fits well within the Career Development Framework, providing students and their parents with the opportunity to engage in intentional planning and mapping of their educational and training activities and experiences through their senior stages of schooling and on to post-school education, training and employment options. As part of the lifelong career development process, SET planning could be seen as a critical stage for young people, providing a sound basis for future lifelong learning, goal setting and career development. Thus it would be reasonable to expect that those facilitating the development of SET plans with young people would be fully conversant with the career development process and would be equipped with the knowledge and skills to assist students throughout this critical stage. Further, it would be reasonable to expect that those facilitating the process would have an established relationship and good rapport with the student, allowing the student to feel comfortable with and in control of the process. These expectations are based on the minimum standards for those delivering career development services required by the Career Industry Council of Australia (2007).

The reality of SET planning in most schools appears to be in stark contrast to these expectations.

There is anecdotal evidence that in many schools SET planning is viewed as just another mandatory administrative task to be completed. Because of the sheer numbers of students involved and time constraints on staff, the true value of SET planning appears to have become lost and may be viewed by many teachers as just another impost on their teaching duties. Discussions with those undertaking the Certificate IV in Career Development and with other staff involved in Senior Schooling have revealed the following issues:

- SET planning is often viewed by students and staff as an isolated activity not related to lifelong career development.
- Students and parents often have little concept of SET planning as a critical aspect of lifelong career development and view it as just another task to be completed.
- Teachers facilitating the SET plans often have little or no training and no understanding of the career development framework and career development processes.
- Teachers facilitating the SET plans often have no relationship with the student involved and in many cases meet the student for the first time at the SET planning meeting (this is especially the case in larger secondary schools).
- Many teachers feel ill-prepared to undertake SET planning with students and parents and fear legal implications if a student’s SET plan does not meet the student’s needs further down the track.
- Many teachers who are required to undertake SET planning have no choice in the matter and often no professional interest in career development.
- Many teachers see SET planning as something that is outside their area of expertise.
- SET plans are frequently developed during one meeting with the student and parents as there is insufficient time to fully explore the process.
- ‘At risk’ students are often viewed as problematic during the SET planning process with many teachers feeling especially vulnerable when dealing with these students.

SET planning is just one example of career development activities currently being implemented by secondary schools in Queensland. It seems a great disservice to students that these activities are often undertaken by personnel who have no interest in career development, and who feel they lack the skills and knowledge to deliver such services.

‘It seems a great disservice to students that these activities are often undertaken by personnel who have no interest in career development, and who feel they lack the skills and knowledge to deliver such services.’

This is not to say that teachers could not or should not deliver career development activities in schools. Indeed many teachers who find themselves cast into...
the role undertake significant personal learning in order to gain the knowledge and skills to enable them to perform these activities. Many find new direction in their own careers and relish the opportunity to be involved in VET coordination, career teaching, school-to-work transition and other career development activities. The question remains whether teachers are now required to deliver career development activities as part of their professional duties and, if so, what training is available to provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary to carry out those duties.

A recent scan of undergraduate teacher training programs in Queensland reveals scant reference to career development as a topic of learning for future teachers. It appears that one university is offering an elective (Introduction to Career Development: Assisting Students Build Careers) for aspiring teachers as part of the Bachelor of Education (Sec) qualification for the first time this year. For those teachers who are already in the system the only training on career development appears to be one-off professional development workshops offered on topics such as SET planning, VET in schools, school-based apprenticeships and similar topics. These workshops are offered by the three major systems of Education Queensland, Catholic Education Queensland and Independent Schools Queensland but are not mandatory for teachers delivering career development activities in schools.

**Conclusion**

While some teachers do have the skills and knowledge required to deliver career development in schools, there are others who either do not have the skills and knowledge or who believe that they don’t have the skills and knowledge. Either way, it is unfair to the latter group of teachers and certainly a disservice to their students to expect those teachers to deliver the services without the opportunity to undertake further training and/or gain a professional qualification in career development. In terms of the career development framework, the use of unqualified staff to deliver career development services is clearly not the intention of the framework or of the Career Industry Council of Australia. As the field moves closer to the 2012 phasing-in of minimum Certificate IV qualification for those carrying out career practitioner work, now may be the time to review the career development activities delivered in schools. Such a review should focus on ensuring that those delivering the career development activities are equipped with the knowledge and skills to do so.

**References**


**Author**

Janelle Schloss is the Learning and Development Team Leader at the Australian Trade College—North Brisbane. Janelle has extensive experience in school-to-work transition, career pathways planning, employment services and RTO operations. In her current diverse role she delivers training and assessment of CHC42108 Certificate IV in Career Development to teachers and others wanting to work as career development practitioners.

Email: Janelle.schloss@tradecollege.com.au
The Influence of Professional Standards on New Zealand Career Development Practice

Dale Furbish
Auckland University of Technology

This study used professional standards developed by the Career Industry Council of Australia and the Career Development Association of New Zealand to create a questionnaire that was distributed to New Zealand career practitioners. The questionnaire asked respondents to rate the relevance of each standard to their career practice and also to rate their ability to apply the standard in their practice. Results indicated that the relevance of most standards was accepted, but that respondents felt less able to apply the standards. Practice setting was identified as an influence on the ratings. The findings have implications for the use of standards by career practitioners and career industry stakeholders.

Professional standards provide important guidelines for the career development industry. Professional standards have existed for a number of years and have been developed by a number of career development professional associations. Widely used standards for career practice have originated with the Canadian Career Development Foundation (2004), the National Career Development Association (1997) and the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (2003).

Until recently, standards for career development practice in New Zealand and Australia did not exist. However, the creation of the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) and changes to the membership criteria for the Career Development Association of New Zealand (CDANZ) in 2008 resulted in the introduction of standards for career development practice in both countries.

Creation of professional standards for career practitioners in Australia followed a two-stage process. McMahon (2004) wrote a scoping paper that set out the case for the establishment of professional standards for Australian career practitioners. This was followed by a second phase conducted by Miles Morgan Australia (2005). Phase two included a survey of key stakeholders about their opinions concerning issues around establishing professional standards. After phase two, the standards were developed by CICA’s National Standards and Accreditation of Career Practitioners Project.

CICA requires that, by 2012, members of any of its affiliated career professional associations will hold
Articles

a qualification in career development that is endorsed by CICA. To be endorsed, a provider’s qualification must undergo a rigorous review by CICA and provide evidence that each of the CICA standards is met in the curriculum.

In New Zealand, the CDANZ executive board established standards that must be met by new applicants for professional level CDANZ membership from May 2008. Standards attainment is evidenced by possessing a career specific qualification at New Zealand Qualifications Authority Level 6 (diploma) or above. Current CDANZ professional members have until 2013 to attain an acceptable qualification or to demonstrate competency in the CDANZ standards through a CDANZ-approved assessment-of-prior-learning process.

Standards for career development practice are important for many reasons. Foremost among justifications for standards is the protection of clients. Standards are intended to ensure (as far as possible) that those who deliver career development services possess professionally recognised knowledge and competency. Standards provide a template of the abilities that career practitioners are expected to possess. In this way, standards outline the distinct practices and qualifications of career development practitioners and provide accountability (Arthur, 2008).

Professional standards are integral to establishing a professional identity. Professions Australia (2005) defined a profession, in part, as a ‘… group of disciplined individuals who … define and demand high standards of behaviour in respect to the services provided to the public and in dealing with professional colleagues’. Professional standards establish the expectations that the public has of a profession. Without standards, career practice cannot promote itself as a profession (Furbish, 2004).

Standards also establish the basis of a reciprocal relationship between professional associations and providers of career qualifications. Standards provide a benchmark for qualification providers to assess the content of their qualifications against the expectations of professional associations. In Australia, the relationship has been formally developed as CICA endorses only those qualifications from providers that are able to demonstrate that their curricula meet the rigour established by CICA. CDANZ does not endorse or review career qualifications but accepts that career qualifications of diploma level or above meet its standards.

Beyond benchmarking the content of career development qualifications, standards also provide a guide for career practitioners to evaluate their own career practice knowledge and skills. Career development practitioners can use standards to self-assess professional development needs. Since annual professional development is required to retain membership in most career development professional associations, standards provide a gauge for identifying which professional development topics are in need of improvement. Arthur (2008) noted that using professional standards as criteria for identifying professional development needs is valuable for practitioners who are new to the field as well as for those who have been in practice for a number of years.

Lastly, standards establish credibility for career development practitioners to their employers, the public and third-party purchasers of career development services. Standards provide evidence that services provided by career development practitioners are based on professionally recognised principles. Standards communicate to employers of career practitioners and to third-party purchasers of career services that career development practitioners offer valuable services. Standards can be used by the career profession to educate policy-makers about how career development services make a positive difference and are therefore worthy of funding (Arthur, 2008).

Well-articulated professional standards support the advancement of career development services across the many practice settings in which career practitioners work. Repetto (2008) noted that standards can be used to accredit, certify and provide credentials for career practitioners and that each of these functions has different purposes and philosophies. Moreover, although professional standards are intended to direct the work of career practitioners in all settings, the practice setting itself can serve to influence how well the standards are applied and are supported. Vaughan and Gardiner (2007) identified the variability of career programs in New Zealand secondary schools. Vaughan and Gardiner found that New Zealand school career advisers—despite having responsibility for providing career development and guidance services—varied in their understanding of necessary goals and services. For example, some career advisers perceived career guidance and counselling programs to be primarily
information based, while others adopted a holistic and developmental definition of career to direct their services. This variation of program philosophy and practitioner background contribute to the scope of career services offered and also to the level of staff and resource allocation.

Creation of professional standards for career practitioners tends to be a top-down process. Although broad consultation with relevant stakeholders is often part of the development of the standards (Miles Morgan Australia, 2005; Repetto, 2008), the standards themselves are usually constructed by a small team commissioned by a professional association or in some cases by a governmental body. Therefore, career practitioners themselves may differ in their perception of the relevance of the standards for their career practice. Perceptions of relevance may also be associated with the work setting in which career practitioners are employed, as well as their level of qualifications. As there can be a range of career practitioners’ level of formal qualifications and training, variation in career practitioners’ self-perceived ability to apply the standards in practice is also likely.

For standards to be accepted and embraced by career practitioners who are expected to deliver services consistent with the standards, more needs to be known about how practitioners view the relevancy of the standards for their practice and how able they believe themselves to be to apply the standards. These issues are the focus of the current study.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Members of the two largest career associations in New Zealand, the Career Development Association of New Zealand (CDANZ) and the Career and Transition Educators (CATE), were sent an email invitation to participate in this study. CDANZ is a professional association and its members practise in a variety of settings such as secondary and tertiary education institutions, private practice, government agencies and not-for-profit agencies. CATE is an organisation that offers membership to those working in secondary school career programs and to others who have an interest in school-based career programs. Only professional and associate level members of CDANZ were invited to participate. Similarly, invitations were sent to only those CATE members who had professional level career development responsibilities in schools (administrative and support career staff were not included although they are members of CATE). The invitation to participate was sent by the respective association so that no direct contact was made by the researcher. The email provided a Participant Information Sheet and a link to the internet survey site. The use of an internet survey site allowed for anonymous participant responses as the survey site does not collect the email addresses of respondents or other identifying information.

The number of CDANZ and CATE members invited to participate was approximately 800. A total of 89 (11%) responses were received within three weeks after the invitations to participate were sent out.

**Materials**

A total of 21 unique standards were identified from the professional standards of CICA and CDANZ. Although the specific standards of CICA and CDANZ were used, the standards overlap with the standards of other professional career associations such as the National Career Development Association and the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance. Using the standards as statements, a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire listed each standard twice. The first presentation of a standard instructed respondents to indicate how relevant the standard was for their career practice on a 10-point scale, with 10 indicating ‘highly relevant to my practice’ and 1 indicating ‘not relevant at all to my practice’. The second presentation of a standard instructed respondents to indicate how able the respondent was to apply the standard, with 10 indicating ‘fully able’ and 1 indicating ‘not able to apply’. Each presentation of a standard also included a text section where respondents could add additional comments.

As one of the rationales for the existence of professional standards is to guide professional development activities, the questionnaire also sought preferences for professional development...
strategies. Eleven formats for engaging in professional development were presented with the instruction to rank order the options. Thus, a score of 11 was given to the most preferred professional development strategy and a score of 1 was given to the least preferred professional development strategy. A rank was required for each of the 11 strategies.

**Results**

Means were calculated on the ratings of relevance of the standards and ability to apply the standards. The mean scores on items about the relevance of standards ranged from a low of 7.80 (‘Demonstrates knowledge of a range of career development theories’) to 9.73 (‘Uses effective communication skills’) on the 10-point scales. The mean scores on items about the ability to apply the standard in practice ranged from 7.42 (‘Demonstrates knowledge of a range of career development theories’) to 9.10 (‘Uses effective communication skills’ and ‘Uses effective listening skills’), again on the 10-point scales.

The relatively high means on all scales suggest that the participants generally felt that the professional standards are both relevant for their practice and that they are able to apply the standards. But, for each standard, the mean rating for the ability to apply the standard was lower than the mean for the relevancy of the standard.

The standard with the highest mean score for relevance to practice was ‘Using effective communication skills’ with a mean of 9.73. The ability to apply this standard was also rated highly as indicated by a mean of 9.10. The relevance of the standard ‘Uses effective listening skills’ was rated highly with a mean of 9.69 and the mean for the ability to apply this standard 9.10.

These results suggest that participants in this study acknowledge the key skills of listening and communicating as most relevant to their practice as well as standards that they believe that they are most able to apply in their practices.

Other standards that achieved relatively high mean scores for relevance were ‘Works effectively, appropriately, and ethically with diverse client/student groups’ (9.39), ‘Applies relevant Code of Ethics and legal requirements’ (9.38) and ‘Maintains accurate and appropriate client/student records’ (9.34). Respondents rated their ability to apply these standards to their practices somewhat lower (8.68, 8.89 and 8.72 respectively).

Standards that received the lowest mean ratings for both relevance and ability to apply were those associated with theory and career information. Respondents assigned the relevance of ‘Demonstrates knowledge of a range of career development theories’ a mean of 7.80 and their ability to apply the standard at 7.42. The standard ‘Applies career theory in practice’ yielded a mean score of 7.94 for relevance and 7.55 for ability to apply in practice. ‘Provides quality career information resources’ generated a mean of 7.48 for relevance and 7.40 for ability to apply.

The written text comments suggested that practice setting may have influenced the ratings provided by the respondents. A number of comments implied that those who were employed as career advisers in secondary schools perceived the standards differently from career practitioners who were employed in other practice settings. In order to pursue this idea, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated between the responses made by those who identified themselves as working in schools and those who were employed in other career practice settings.

The results revealed that school career practitioners rated the relevance of ‘Provides quality career information resources’ higher than those who worked in other practice settings (F = 5.99, p <0.01) and also that school career practitioners rated the relevance of ‘Develops a network of contacts through relevant professional associations’ higher than their non-school colleagues (F = 5.26, p <0.05). School-based career practitioners rated themselves lower in the ability to apply a number of professional standards than career practitioners who worked in other settings. The standards rated lower by school career practitioners in their ability to apply them were ‘Demonstrates knowledge of a range of career development theories’ (F = 3.60, p <0.05), ‘Identifies how life roles and values impact career development’ (F = 4.36, p <0.05), ‘Uses a range of assessment tools and techniques appropriate for clients/students’ (F = 19.23, p <0.001), ‘Demonstrates knowledge of local and national labour market trends’ (F = 4.39, p <0.05), ‘Uses effective communication skills’ (F = 4.03, p <0.05), ‘Uses effective listening skills’ (F = 4.19, p <0.05), ‘Applies relevant Code of Ethics and
Table 1: Mean Relevance and Mean Ability to Apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Not school</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Not school</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates knowledge of a range of career development theories</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td>7.66*</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>7.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applies career theory in practice</td>
<td>7.88</td>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>7.94</td>
<td>7.64</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>7.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifies how life roles and values impact career development</td>
<td>8.88</td>
<td>8.68</td>
<td>8.84</td>
<td>8.76*</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>8.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fosters career management strategies in clients/students</td>
<td>8.79</td>
<td>9.20</td>
<td>8.89</td>
<td>8.26</td>
<td>7.60</td>
<td>8.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates knowledge of career information resources</td>
<td>9.15</td>
<td>9.50</td>
<td>9.23</td>
<td>8.59</td>
<td>8.50</td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluates career information resources</td>
<td>8.29</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>7.74</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>7.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produces quality career information resources</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>8.60**</td>
<td>7.48</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>7.65</td>
<td>7.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops career development programs appropriate for clients/students</td>
<td>8.40</td>
<td>9.15</td>
<td>8.57</td>
<td>8.28</td>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>8.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses a range of assessment tools and techniques appropriate for clients/</td>
<td>8.49</td>
<td>8.32</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>8.35***</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>7.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates knowledge of local and national labour market trends</td>
<td>8.97</td>
<td>8.53</td>
<td>8.87</td>
<td>8.00*</td>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>7.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uses effective communication skills</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>9.85</td>
<td>9.73</td>
<td>9.24*</td>
<td>8.65</td>
<td>9.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses effective listening skills</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>9.70</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>9.22*</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>9.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applies helping skills based on accepted theory</td>
<td>8.52</td>
<td>8.60</td>
<td>8.53</td>
<td>7.99</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>7.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develops a network of contacts through relevant professional associations</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>9.26*</td>
<td>8.53</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>8.60</td>
<td>7.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applies relevant Code of Ethics and legal requirements</td>
<td>9.44</td>
<td>9.15</td>
<td>9.38</td>
<td>9.10*</td>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>8.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintains accurate and appropriate client/student records</td>
<td>9.32</td>
<td>9.40</td>
<td>9.34</td>
<td>8.94**</td>
<td>7.95</td>
<td>8.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works effectively, appropriately and ethically with diverse client/student groups</td>
<td>9.41</td>
<td>9.32</td>
<td>9.39</td>
<td>8.68</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>8.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in professional development for career practice</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>9.50</td>
<td>9.31</td>
<td>8.62</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>8.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refers clients/students to other sources of help as appropriate</td>
<td>8.99</td>
<td>9.40</td>
<td>9.08</td>
<td>8.93</td>
<td>8.95</td>
<td>8.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeps up with and applies technology</td>
<td>8.50</td>
<td>9.10</td>
<td>8.64</td>
<td>8.06</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluates services to clients/students</td>
<td>8.50</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>8.56</td>
<td>7.93</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.72</td>
</tr>
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</table>

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.
The complete list of standards and the mean scores on the relevance and ability to apply scales is provided in Table 1.

Means were also calculated on the rankings of preferred professional development strategies. The format listed 11 professional development activities and requested respondents to order the strategies using 11 to indicate the most preferred and 1 to indicate the least preferred. The format required all 11 items to be ranked. Results revealed the highest mean rank was assigned to ‘Local workshops (within 1 hour travel) presented by international trainers’ (7.76). This was closely followed by ‘Local workshops presented by New Zealand trainers’ (7.59). The least preferred professional development strategies were ‘International workshops/conferences requiring overseas travel’ (4.38), ‘Video conferencing online training’ (3.71) and ‘Text-based online training’ (3.68).

The complete list of professional development strategies and mean rankings is presented in Table 2.

**DISCUSSION**

The results suggest that the current sample of New Zealand career practitioners, for the most part, accept the relevance of professional standards. The standards that are viewed as most relevant are those that relate to client interaction: that is, communication and listening skills. This finding is heartening given that these standards relate to fundamental activities in career guidance and counselling.

Of some concern is the finding that New Zealand career practitioners hold standards dealing with knowledge and application of career theories as being less relevant. This finding does not support a strong notion of professionalisation that is built upon ‘research, education and training at a high level’ (Professions Australia, 2005). Without acknowledging a theoretical base for practice, career practitioners cannot promote themselves as professionals, and enjoy the status and benefits accorded to a profession.

The other major finding was that the participants rate their ability to apply professional standards to their practice somewhat lower than their perception of standard relevance. This finding is ambivalent. On one level, it can be suggested that the finding reflects iconic New Zealand self-deprecation and humility. On another level, it suggests less self-confidence in professional knowledge and skills. Support for the latter explanation is provided by considering the relatively low-level minimum academic qualification required for professional career association membership in New Zealand. CDANZ requires a minimum diploma (sub-degree) academic qualification for professional membership. The minimum academic qualification level for professional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional development strategy</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local workshops (within 1 hour travel) presented by international trainers</td>
<td>7.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local workshops (within 1 hour travel) presented by New Zealand trainers</td>
<td>7.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring/supervision</td>
<td>7.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National workshops/conferences presented by New Zealand trainers</td>
<td>6.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National workshops/conferences presented by international trainers</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualification study</td>
<td>6.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-site training at place of employment</td>
<td>6.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-study</td>
<td>5.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International workshops/conferences (requiring overseas travel)</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video conferencing online training</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text-based online training</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Mean Ranking for Professional Development Activities*
association membership in New Zealand contrasts with the postgraduate level required in Australia and many other countries. Professional associations in Australia and other countries have also developed mechanisms for endorsing academic qualifications that meet their standards and require that professional association members hold an endorsed qualification. New Zealand has no such ‘quality assurance’ procedure for career qualifications. CATE, the New Zealand association for secondary school career advisers, currently has no career-specific academic qualification required for membership. Moreover, the New Zealand Ministry of Education does not require a career-specific academic qualification for appointment as a school career adviser.

The current research also suggests differences between those who work as secondary school career advisers and those who work in other practice settings. The results reveal that greater emphasis is placed on career information services by school-based career practitioners when compared to the rating of this standard by their colleagues in non-school settings. Information services are indeed important for students who are making work and educational decisions. However, the emphasis on career information by school career practitioners may reflect the limited scope of career programs in schools (Vaughan & Gardiner, 2007). Vaughan and Gardiner commented that information is the primary career service in many New Zealand secondary schools, often displacing career programs grounded on developing lifelong career competencies.

The current study affirms the importance of ongoing professional development for career practitioners. Survey results clearly identify standards that New Zealand career practitioners believe that they are less able to apply, most prominently ones that deal with career development and helping skills theories, use of technology and service evaluation strategies. The rankings of professional development format preferences should prove useful to professional associations and other providers of professional development activities. The respondents indicated a clear preference for local workshops. Although international conferences and online delivery of training have advantages and appeal, they were the least preferred professional development activities.

The results of this research have implications for career practitioners and other stakeholders of the career industry. For career practitioners, professional standards should be regularly used as a template for reflecting upon practice. Findings indicate that New Zealand career practitioners may not incorporate the full range of professional standards suggest that practitioners should review their practices and consider how their services and programs could be improved by using professional standards. Where specific professional standards are perceived as less relevant, the standard should be used to review services and programs for compliance with the standards. Standards also serve as useful references for reflecting upon career practice competencies and professional development needs to improve skills related to standards.

Implications for professional associations include ensuring that academic qualifications accepted for membership in the association comply with the standards at an appropriate academic level and that graduates can be reasonably expected to possess competencies to implement the standards. Further, professional associations have an obligation to promote and provide professional development that is attractive, accessible and deals with topics derived from standards. Professional associations also have a role to publicise standards to employers of career practitioners so that employers are aware of the competencies possessed by practitioners. Promotion of career services informed by standards to the general public is also a role for professional associations.

Professional standards can guide employers and policy-makers about the types of services that can be expected of career practice. The current research suggests that career practice may be limited in some settings due to inadequate employer understanding about career services. Professional standards provide an outline of the essentials of career practice and should be used to assist employers to better support professional career practice.

Lastly, standards should be used by academic institutions and other trainers of career practitioners to guide curriculum content. Standards should be used to guide the curriculum for career qualifications and suggest professional development topics offered by other trainers.

References


A U T H O R

Dale Furbish is a Senior Lecturer and Program Leader for the Graduate Diploma in Career Development and the Master of Career Development at Auckland University of Technology. He served two terms as President of the Career Development Association of New Zealand (CDANZ). He is interested in the professionalisation of career practice in New Zealand and has written a number of articles on this topic.

E-mail: dale.furbish@aut.ac.nz
Women’s need for meaningful and satisfying work opportunities has received considerable interest and focus in the career development literature over past decades. Erikson (as cited in Betz, 2002), in reference to Freud in 1950, commented that women, like men, needed an array of sources of satisfaction and that the well-adjusted human being is able to ‘love and to work’ successfully. Both sexes need to be satisfied not just through relationships with friends and family, but also through achieving in the world of work.

Until recently, understandings of career were separate for men and women with the assumption that men choose a career subsequent to adolescence, whereas women’s careers were chosen as a temporary measure. This notion has been said by to be a hindrance to the formulation of a theory of women’s career development (Poole & Langan-Fox, 1997). Smart and Peterson (1997) stated that the career issues women face are distinctive, and differ from those of men. Pringle and McCulloch Dixon (2003) suggested women’s careers are broader than men’s careers, referencing Bateson: ‘men build careers while women compose lives’ (1989, p. 3). They consider a more holistic view of career as ‘one that has the capacity to embody the emotional, spiritual, physical, psychological as well as the outer achievement of an “objective” career’ (Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003, p. 291). Unlike men’s careers, women’s careers...
are not exclusively defined by involvement in paid work, and can be considered an amalgam of personal development.

Feminist analyses of women’s careers suggest that a new phase of feminism is taking another look at the traditional roles into which women have been socialised—in particular, family and relationship roles—and reframing and reclaiming the positive aspects of these roles, rather than seeing them through a patriarchal lens as being of low social worth (Marshall, 1989, p. 277). Marshall referred to the work of Bakan (1966) where he distinguished between two fundamental principles of human performance. Bakan called these ‘agency’ and ‘communion’ and defined them as basic coping strategies of ‘dealing with the uncertainties and anxieties of being alive’ (Bakan, 1996, p. 279). Agency is an expression of independence through self-protection, self-assertion and control of the environment. The agentic strategy reduces tension by changing the world about it and manifests itself in focus, closedness and separation. Communion is the sense of being ‘at one’ with other organisms—its basis is integration—and it seeks union and cooperation as its way of coming to terms with uncertainty. Communion is characterised by contact, openness and fusion (Marshall, 1989, p. 279).

Marshall drew parallels between Bakan’s work on agency and employment, and concepts of career, stating that there are clear associations between its principles of doing and wanting to be judged by achievement. In contrast communion is associated with ‘being’, with manifestations of trust and acceptance.

Bakan (1966) was one of the first to link agency with maleness and femaleness with communion; Marshall (1989) further linked them with Jung’s concepts of anima and animus, individuation and self-actualisation, stating that Bakan’s work implies that women’s journey of development is more inwardly oriented than men’s. Marshall reversed Bakan’s assertion of the need for ‘agency mitigated by communion’, giving her suggestion of the path of ‘communion enhanced by agency’ and stated that this model revalues traditional female characteristics, removes them of stereotypes and sets them alongside male characteristics as equals (Marshall, 1989, p. 280). Further, Marshall observed that integrating communion with agency would require a radical revision of the value systems against which we judge good performance. Betz (2002, 2005) commented that a combination of agency and communion can be considered desirable for both sexes and that these together make up an androgynous personality style. The struggle for balance between agency and communion has been suggested to be central to women’s careers (Arthur, Inkson & Pringle, 1999; Marshall, 1989; Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003).

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) suggested that a new career definition may more accurately capture the career experiences of women and may provide them with more and better avenues for career success. They suggested that their Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) fits the worker’s needs for three parameters that influence career decisions: authenticity, balance and challenge, in particular explaining women’s desire to operate relationally in their lives. They further maintained that this model has been used inherently by women for many decades due to multiple needs of caring, coping and discrimination and that the KCM answers these questions: How do women’s careers unfold? What meaning does career have?

Studies exploring the KCM (Cabrera, 2007; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) revealed that women and men defined their careers differently. Women examined opportunities and blocks and then forged their own approach rejecting linear career progression, creating ‘non-traditional’, self-crafted careers. Women indicated they were more likely to have non-traditional careers, characterised by various career interruptions that required attention to non-work needs: not only needs such as child-care concerns, but also needs such as the quest for spiritual fulfillment and to be true to or to care for oneself. In sharp contrast to men, the career histories of women are relational. Mainiero and Sullivan postulated that men tend to follow an Alpha Kaleidoscope career pattern of challenge followed by authenticity and balance and that women follow a Beta Kaleidoscope career pattern of challenge followed by balance then authenticity.

Constructivist techniques and career narratives are emerging as a transformative research tool (Bujold, 2004). Savickas’s theory of career construction (2002,
2005) defined career—that is, subjective career from a constructionist viewpoint—as denoting a moving perspective that imposes personal meaning on past memories, present experiences and future aspirations by weaving them into a pattern that portrays a life theme. Savickas (2002) posited that it is the theme that matters in a person's life story, because it describes what is at stake in a person's life, and that it is the theme that matters to a person because it gives meaning and purpose to their work. As a person tells their life story, there can be the identification of their own personal paradigm for turning essence into interest, tension into intention, and obsession into profession.

The intention of this research was to use narrative methods to study in depth a contemporary woman's career journey. Bujold (2004) commented that constructivist techniques and career narratives are emerging as a transformative research tool, that narrative is transformative, since it can enable the clarification of meaning of the past and the creation of meaning for the present, and even give freedom to a person's destiny as it can make decoding possible. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stated that, by virtue of being interviewed, people could develop new insights and understanding of their experiences. They may not have thought about or reflected on events about which they were being interviewed. During the interview they were encouraged to articulate things they have not previously articulated. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) proposed that, as with other forms of social interaction, interviews sometimes have to fill in the meanings that people are not able to express themselves.

**Method**

**Participant**

The participant in this study was a 51-year-old, New Zealand European woman, a biographer and life-writing teacher, self-employed and working in a freelance capacity. She has a PhD degree, attained at age 42, and has written four books. She has taught for several years as a tertiary life-writing teacher and is currently developing a life-writing program within the community and is consultant biographer for a hospice. She is married to a medical specialist and has two adult children.

**Interview Method**

The participant (P) was selected by a purposive process. Three interviews were conducted of approximately an hour in duration. After the first two sessions, the participant was asked and agreed to have a further interview to clarify and extend the transcript data. A third meeting was arranged, and in the interval the tapes were transcribed from the first two interviews. The transcripts were sent to the participant for review and comment to ensure that they represented her intent. The participant reviewed the transcripts and made amendments to several sections, which involved the telling of significant stories from her childhood. Conducting a third interview meant that emerging themes and unresolved questions from the first two interviews could be considered. This interview was then transcribed and also sent to the participant for review.

The majority of the questions were answered during the first two sessions. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stated that qualitative data analysis and data collection go hand in hand, and the analysis is a dynamic and creative process as researchers are constantly theorising and trying to make sense of their data and keep track of emerging themes and patterns. These notions propelled and directed the interview process.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature. Eighteen open-ended questions focusing on early years, career pathway, education, mentoring relationships and influences were asked. Sample interview questions included items such as these: When you think about your career, what unexpected or ‘chance’ events led to new prospects or possibilities? What has driven you to achieve all that you have? Has there been a need for frequent change and self-invention? If so, what do you think has propelled you? What influences have been strongest in attributing to your success? Do you see yourself as different from other women? Probes related to each question were asked as appropriate.

**Results and Discussion**

**The Power of Narrative**

One of the most interesting findings from this case study is the power of narrative in giving voice to the participant's story, examining the dynamics by which life themes impose meaning on vocational behaviour.
life themes impose meaning on vocational behaviour (Savickas, 2002, 2005).

Referencing De Vault (1990), Taylor and Bogdan (1998) proposed that, as with other forms of social interaction, interviews sometimes have to fill in the meanings which people are not able to express for themselves. These viewpoints were confirmed in this research, with the participant indicating on numerous occasions that she was gaining further self-understanding or gaining new insights about herself, that she found the process meaningful and that some ideas and thoughts were new. She confirmed the transformative nature of the narrative process and indicated she was making meaning of her life in new ways as a result (Bujold, 2004).

In the series of interviews with P it became apparent through her answers to questions such as ‘Tell me about your early years and your family’ and ‘How much have these people (mentors) affected you and shaped you and your career?’ that she had suffered considerable loss and subsequent grief in her early years, losing both her father and her brother while she was a very small child. Her mother’s grief and how P describes her as ‘being overwhelming and causing me to panic’ became a pervasive theme in her stories. In the retelling of her life story there was an apparent sense of pain, isolation and of being left out with phrases used such as ‘a feeling of being stuck’ and ‘made me feel excluded’ and ‘yearned for my father to return and rescue me from the sadness’.

P knows little about her father and has no written letter from him. She describes her early emotion: ‘Yearning was the emotion I carried through much of my childhood’ and she acknowledges her motivation for her work:

I think it is absolutely right about the motivation for gathering and recording stories. It's making up for the loss of my father's stories, in his own words. Yes my mother and grandmothers told stories but there is no record, for me, of his voice. He never left a record, a letter, a gift for me to have. His only gift was to say to my mother, 'Please make sure that P has a good education'. When I write that down I realise for the first time, that perhaps I have been trying all my life to gain that good education and do the best I can with it.

There is a strong sense here of what Savickas would call ‘Our torments also may, in length of time, become our elements’ quoting Milton in Paradise Lost (Savickas, 1997, p. 11).

There is a progression, an early loss and sense of grief and isolation, a lifelong preoccupation for P with enabling others to tell their stories, with giving them voice, which has its roots in an early ‘torment’ of wishing she had a record of her father’s voice. Getting a good education and using it has become a life quest for P as she has turned the tension and pain of her early loss into the intention of enabling others to make a record of their lives, and her obsession with story and writing into her profession of life-writing teacher and biographer.

She describes her current work: ‘That’s the soul work—the deeper work—spiritually’ exemplifying what Savickas described as using ‘work as a context for self-development and manifestation of spirit’ (1997, p. 3). Her work has provided a context for her needs for advancing herself and the world.

Movement towards Authenticity and Wholeness

Research to explore Mainiero and Sullivan’s (2005) KCM revealed that women tended to investigate opportunities and barriers and then to craft an individual pathway rather than a linear career progression, constructing non-traditional, unique careers with interruptions due to non-work needs being common. Such is the career path of P who said ‘What else could I have done? I’ve had to support and be available when needed. Always my work has had to fit in.’

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) also posited that women’s careers take into account the quest for spiritual fulfilment and to be true to or to care for oneself. This is evidenced in P’s career when she says, ‘Time melts away and I don’t notice time passing. I think writing is what I will take through life with me’ and ‘It’s more altruistic—the teaching—this is very personal. Somehow it sits with my philosophy …’ For P there is a very real sense of career as vocation or calling.

Now, as a mature woman, P says she is evidencing a new vitality, a fresh sense of purpose aligned with many women involved in Mainiero and Sullivan’s research (2005): a move towards greater authenticity and wholeness in her fifties. She talks about being in a new phase of her life:

I decided that this is my opportunity, this is my time, because L’s [P’s husband’s] career is so firmly
established and the children are older and I'm just jolly well going to be quite single-minded to do what I have to do as a teacher and as a writer, instead of being split to try to be the perfect wife.

She talks about feeling ready to be in this next phase:

Was this the right moment to become a teacher? Yes, I think it was the right moment, because of maturity and all the things I’d learnt along the way that I bring to teaching … It’s just the amalgam of all the different experiences, the things you’ve had, that you bring into teaching.

The Struggle between Agentic and Communal Perspectives

Bakan’s (1966) notions of agency and communion have application in understanding the way P has forged and crafted her career. She has, throughout, espoused a feminist position, been committed to achieving an egalitarian rather than subordinate dichotomy in her marriage and to seeking a framework that has facilitated the agentic and the communal parts of herself. On acknowledging these two parts, she comments that they are well integrated now, but that ‘this has taken a long time.’

Being a good mother and homemaker and evidencing the communal attributes described above are important to P:

Not to say that I don’t still love the homemaking and the occasional baking and I really do like turning out a nice meal and having people saying it was delicious. I’m very committed to my children and being an advocate for them.

But it could be argued that part of P’s personal development has been in the melding together and the struggle for balance of these two parts, seeking at various times to be empowered with feminine traits like her maternal grandmother, whom she describes as gracious and gentle, and at other times with more masculine traits like her paternal grandmother: strong, efficient and empowering. Reference can be made of the importance of role models in establishing a person’s goals and interests (Savickas, 1997, 2002, 2005). This ongoing struggle for balance between agency and communion, which has been suggested as being possibly central to women’s career development, is evident in this context (Arthur, Inkson & Pringle, 1999; Marshall, 1989; Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003).

The participant’s career pathway and pattern have been seen to be both constrained and contained by her multiple roles. Her pathway has been complex and individual (rather than linear), non-traditional and above all unique. Recently, as a mature woman, she can be seen to be emerging into a new phase of increased agency and confidence as she experiences the shifting and changing of life roles and a move towards greater authenticity and wholeness (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

A struggle for the concurrent fulfilment of the communal and the agentic was evident throughout her career pathway (Marshall, 1989). Whether or not women are choosing a pathway of ‘communion enhanced by agency’ as Marshall (1989) suggested, the integration of the two and the ongoing tension between them is a notion that requires further investigation. I concur with Marshall (1989) and Arthur, Inkson and Pringle (1999) in their proposition that this struggle may indeed be central to women’s career success.

CONCLUSION

This research project sought to investigate the career of a high-achieving New Zealand woman using qualitative data obtained during semi-structured interviews.

The participant’s career can be seen to have been effectively analysed using career construction theory (Savickas, 2002, 2005), which has been shown to be a useful tool in providing a framework for illuminating her life pathway, choices and motivations. Her life theme of wanting to enable people to tell and write their life story can be seen to have been borne out of her own early grief and subsequent yearning that manifested itself firstly in a preoccupation for learning and then in an occupation of writing and teaching others to write. Her life story provides evidence that ‘Occupations can allow people to resolve unfinished business from childhood to create meaning, advance life projects and increase personal agency’ (Savickas, 1997, p. 6).

By telling her life story, the participant has gained insight into her life theme and she has been able to ‘comprehend how she has actively mastered what she has passively suffered’ (Savickas, 1997, p. 11). For her, work has become an inner journey and of self-actualisation (Marshall, 1989) and she demonstrates how self-completion can be fostered through work (Savickas, 1997, 2002).
There are inherent limitations to this research, in that it was a narrative case study undertaken with one woman and, with this in mind, no attempt will be made to generalise or to overstate the findings. Other limitations include the fact that the participant was a high-achieving highly educated European upper-middle-class woman, working predominantly in a freelance or portfolio capacity. The choices that she has by virtue of her position and context are therefore much greater than those of many women in New Zealand today.

This study will be enhanced by the further undertaking of qualitative research with other high-achieving women so that a fuller analysis of emerging themes can be achieved. Research into other women’s careers in New Zealand as a counterbalance needs to be considered to offset the biased nature of undertaking a study of a high-achieving upper-middle-class woman.

References


Author

Margaret Elley-Brown is an Auckland-based career and leadership consultant. She is a PhD candidate at the Auckland University of Technology, investigating ways in which women contend with needs for self-fulfilment and connectedness throughout their career journey.
Email: margieeb@gmail.com
In recent years, concerns with social justice have become more visible in the career literature (Blustein, McWhirter & Perry, 2005; Irving & Malik, 2005; McMahon, Arthur & Collins, 2008a). Particular attention is being paid to where, or whether, social justice concerns should be positioned and how social justice concerns might inform the training of career professionals (Arthur, 2005) and be incorporated into practice (McMahon, Arthur & Collins, 2008b). Often the concept of social justice is loosely theorised, thus limiting discussion about the impact different perspectives might have (Irving, 2010a). As Reisch (2002) observed, ‘the concept of social justice is now used as a rationale for maintaining the status quo, promoting far-reaching social reforms, and justifying revolutionary action’ (p. 83). It is also important to note that there are divisions within the career profession itself. The contested terrain of social justice was highlighted by Metz and Guichard (2009), who reported that, at an international symposium of career professionals and vocational psychologists, there was a lack of consensus about whether a social justice framework was desirable because of its inherently political nature.

Conceptualising Oppression and Domination: A Foundation for Social Justice

My understanding of social justice has been informed by the political philosopher Iris Marion Young who argued that there is a need to comprehend and
recognise injustice for the concept of social justice to be meaningful. Young (1990) was concerned with the ways in which social processes, practices and representations served to contribute to the perpetuation of structural group and, concomitantly, individual injustice(s). She identified five interconnected and overlapping faces of oppression, summarised by Irving (2010b) in this way:

- exploitation: the inequitable transfer of labour benefits from one group to another
- marginalisation: the exclusion of particular groups of people from useful participation in social life
- powerlessness: a lack of authority status, autonomy, sense of worth and voice
- cultural imperialism: the imposition of dominant values through stereotyping of behaviours, which not only devalues the cultural expressions and experiences of oppressed groups but also imposes a dominant view of how the world, and cultural life, should be seen
- violence: the fear of real or implied violence that is prompted by a desire to inflict harm on group members (p. 16).

Whereas a traditional understanding of oppression occurs as a top-down process, whereby one powerful group imposes its desires or demands on members of less powerful groups, Young (1990) applied this concept in a post-structural sense. Here it is recognised that oppressive acts can become internalised and normalised, accepted as ‘common-sense’ explanations of social life. For example, there is a popular stereotype that teenage pregnancy results in young mothers leading unfulfilled lives, having meaningless careers and ending up in poverty (Vincent & Thomson, 2010). This acts in an oppressive way to marginalise and render powerless not only teenage mothers (although they are particularly affected) but all young women, who are also subject to domination, as attempts are made to regulate their sexuality, present restricted choices and impose a universal code of behaviour.

The concept of domination is more far-reaching, as indicated above. While usually accompanied by oppression(s) it can affect all sections of society. An example of this can be seen in the way(s) in which, in New Zealand, the Ministry of Education (MoE) policy guidelines for career education and guidance (CEG) (MoE, 2009) establish discursive boundaries around this particular curriculum area, thus attempting to shape, and delimit, what can be said or thought. As Young (1990) explained, ‘domination consists in institutional conditions which inhibit or prevent people from participating in determining their actions or the condition of their actions’ (p. 38), hence the voice of the dominated group goes unheard and/or their actions are not acknowledged.

It is important to note that Young was not advocating for a homogenous society but a pluralist form in which group difference is acknowledged, accepted, respected and encompassed. She argued for equality in terms of social recognition and fairness in the distribution of material goods.

**Method**

**Participants**

My research is looking at how social justice is positioned within the CEG policy guidelines, and how it is conceptualised and understood by school-based career advisers. As a qualitative study, the data collection has encompassed an analysis of the MoE policy guidelines, and semi-structured interviews with 12 careers staff in 11 secondary schools, nine in a major cosmopolitan city with a multicultural population, and two in a provincial city where the students are predominantly of European descent. The schools reflect a range of deciles (the socio-economic make-up of their cohort), population mix and size. Of the 12 participants (pseudonyms applied), two are non-qualified teachers with formal career qualifications (Lara and Louise); four are qualified teachers with formal career qualifications (Patricia, Joanne, Jenna, Marjorie); five are qualified teachers without any career qualifications (Belinda, Gaynor, Bella, Ken and Rosemary); one has no formal qualifications (Kate).

**Data Analysis**

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been used to ‘make sense’ of the data. CDA seeks to uncover the historical, political and socially informed meanings that are embedded within text and talk, and to interrogate the unevenness of power (Luke, 1998). The intention is to identify the dominant discourses within the CEG policy guidelines and to identify how the
participants in my study are positioned, and position themselves, in relation to ‘common-sense’ explanations, taken-for granted ‘truths’ and the dominant discursive formations that inform their work.

RESULTS

Navigating Contested Terrain: Complex Challenges and Contradictory Messages

What is the essence and whom do we serve?
In New Zealand the essence of career education can be found in the 2009 MoE policy guidelines where career is defined in this way:

The sequence and variety of work roles, paid and unpaid, that a person undertakes throughout a lifetime. More broadly, ‘career’ embraces life roles in the home and the community, leisure activities, learning and work. Work, learning and life are closely intertwined. Everyone has a career. (p. 6)

This essence is clearly evident in the MoE’s definition of career education, which ‘consists of planned, progressive learning experiences that help students develop career management competencies that will assist them to manage their lives’ (p. 6). Three broad competencies are identified to facilitate this: developing self-awareness; exploring opportunities; and deciding and acting. Hence whatever we are doing in, and with, our lives, we can be understood to be enacting our ‘career(s)’. This has influenced the thinking of most of my participants:

looking at [the CEG policy guidelines] I did use it for my planning … which started off with looking at the individual and personal qualities, leading on to personal skills, leading on to what decision making and decision taking and all that stuff, and finally transitioning out of there, so I did use that as a framework. (Marjorie)

I think [the key message in the policy guidelines is that] it’s looking at people as a whole person … and that it starts really young … where the kids should be thinking about themselves and getting a self-concept of who they are, and their interests, and their skills in exploring new things … so I think the key thing for me was that it’s a holistic thing, and it’s a personal thing. (Lara)

[The policy guidelines] talk about the key competencies, the link with the new national curriculum … [the] way in which career education is integrated into the whole school system … also students, contacts with the wider world, the family, community, things like that … and a lot of it is also … previous things like developing self-awareness, awareness of opportunities, thinking and acting, things like that. (Patricia)

The centrality of the individual and the importance attached to the acquisition of competencies reflects a well-intentioned desire for their students to acquire the skills that, they believe, will enable them to make ‘good’ choices and ‘good’ decisions. Implicit within this is a liberal-humanist discourse where the development of a rational and autonomous known self is regarded as both personally enlightening and individually empowering (Sinclair & Monk, 2005).

The individual is seen to exist prior to, and outside, the collective, situated as atomistic rather than as a social subject (Young, 1990). From a social justice perspective, the oppressive ways in which social groups may be positioned on the basis of their gender, ethnicity, socio-economic class and such like are thus rendered invisible, subsumed into a homogenised mass of ‘free-floating’ individuals. Here a person is ‘evaluated only according to her or his individual efforts and achievements’ (Young, 1990, p. 166). This reflects a meritocratic discourse, where the credentials gained act as signifiers of an individual’s skill and knowledge levels, which facilitate progression, enhances opportunities and contributes to mobility (Brown & Tannock, 2009), resulting in a minority of winners and majority of losers.

In the following excerpt, Louise registered some unease with the policy guidelines. While embracing career as a holistic concept, she is less convinced that this philosophy is, in practice, reflected throughout this document.

Well, firstly I debate whether career is holistic in that document … I would probably need convincing ‘cos I think career is about more than just work and occupation, it’s about a person’s life, the different roles we play in our lives … if you take students from this school it’s about the fact that they are somebody’s child, it’s about the role they play there, about the role of religion, culture, all of those other things as well which dictates in some ways what their career, as in
job, education, further education, higher education, may or may not look like. So you have to take into account those factors … before you deal with the traditional notion of career. (Louise)

Complex and contradictory social and cultural factors are identified. These are often in tension with individualised explanations and psychological theories that pay only passing attention to non-Western worldviews, where choice may be mediated by a collective and interdependent sense of belonging and responsibility (Watson, 2006). Furthermore, promoting a competencies discourse, in isolation of broader knowledge and understanding (Sultana, 2009) deflects attention away from a deeper, and more critical, approach to career education that uncovers and interrogates multiple meanings (Irving, 2010b) and disrupts dominant discursive formations (Denzin, 2009).

When we look more deeply beneath the surface, this holistic (and humanistic) view of personal development is entangled with a range of discursive formations that are focused on more specific economic rationalist objectives. As highlighted in the excerpt above, the policy guidelines privilege employment and/or continuing education.

Patricia also drew attention to the priority given to economic rhetoric in the policy guidelines: ‘I think the opening pages talk about the need for highly qualified, highly skilled people … for the development of the country and New Zealand’. This is exemplified in the Foreword to the document where Karen Sewell, the education secretary, commented that: ‘In New Zealand, successful transition from secondary schooling into tertiary education and the workforce is a government priority’ (MoE, 2009, p. 4). An economic focus is brought to bear as the knowledge economy discourse, which underlies this, precedes any concern with personal fulfilment and social connectedness. Hence the state’s priorities, and the expected career progressions of students, are clear. New Zealand is not alone in this. Winchester (2001) observed that the Department for Education and Employment in the UK (the equivalent of the MoE) has been instrumental in reinforcing the importance attached to ‘attainment and, ultimately, employability, rather than on helping young people to develop

and achieve their potential in the broadest sense’ (p. 19). This ideology reflects the commodification of (career) education, and can be attributed to neo-liberal preoccupations with the exploitation of human capital and enhanced productivity (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006), underpinned by the notion of a ‘free’, autonomous, self-serving, entrepreneurial individual (Davies & Bansel, 2007). Career education thus becomes aligned with discourses of social exclusion/inclusion that, as Levitas (1996) identified, is conditional on economic participation.

Are We Up To It?

For many of my participants, the term social justice was new and relatively unknown. A number sought out definitions before our interview. Overall they recognised and acknowledged the multiple ways in which ethnicity, gender and/or socioeconomic class might impact on life-chances, choices and opportunities. The dominant ideology within the participant schools, whatever the cultural mix, appeared to be informed by liberal perceptions of (in)equality and (in)justice. While support was specifically targeted at some groups, such as Māori and Pasifika students, the focus is often on access rather than a cultural reaffirmation of identity and/or recognition of difference. The family and community are positioned as the sites of disadvantage where, it is believed, structural injustice can be overcome through individual tenacity and self-belief, as articulated in the excerpts below:

I kind of look at things like inequalities, I mean they’re there and I’ve got no issue with that, but I don’t really want to focus on that with a young person. I want to focus on what I can give them to arm them to do well in their life irrespective of what they’ve got. (Jenna)

I’m a big believer that your background shouldn’t hold you back, but you need to have an awareness of that so it’s all about what you believe about yourself and what you know about yourself, identifying what your strength is … (Lara)

There was an apparent reluctance by many participants to engage students in a critically reflexive exploration concerning the structural nature of inequality, how it has different impacts on groups and

"For many of my participants, the term "social justice" was new and relatively unknown."
communities, and how power is unevenly distributed. It was generally felt that this could be detrimental and reduce motivation. Focusing career education activity on the development of self-awareness and decision-making and decision-taking skills, within the context of post-school opportunity choices, was seen as the route to enhanced self-efficacy. Marjorie presented a different, reflexive, understanding of the complex challenges she faces:

I’m conscious [of social (in)justice]. I want to look at ways to deal with it … I don’t think everyone is conscious of it … I think I am, but in reality, well, there’ll be heaps of time when I’m not but I’m just oblivious, which is bad, and I think I’m quite socially aware, it’s ways to … tools to recognise that in yourself and in others, and then what to do about that. (Marjorie)

This interpretation reflects a degree of powerlessness, which raises questions about where social justice concerns have fitted into the professional development (PD) and training of school-based career advisers. The data identified that a significant amount of PD related to visits to or from tertiary institutions with reference to courses, entry requirements and scholarships. Many of my participants reported that a significant amount of PD activity is information based, and while there are opportunities for the sharing of ‘good practice’, little attention is paid to any form of theory. It appeared that, as a professional group, there were few opportunities for them to collectively explore concepts of (in)equality and/or social (in)justice, identify where these might fit within career education and to share ideas about how they might inform practice. ‘I haven’t found [training days] particularly useful for the stuff you’re talking about’ (Jenna); ‘in the past I think I’ve been to equity training days, but they’d be a long time ago’ (Rosemary); ‘not besides our own PD here at school … lots of that has a social justice focus’ (Bryony—Catholic school).

I don’t think so, nothing specific … we’re constantly aware of the gender issue … I guess it’s something that often gets talked about in the staffroom actually, rather than there being specific professional development. (Gaynor—girls school)

The issues faced by some groups have been given attention, such as the (under)achievement of Māori and Pasifika students, and the challenges encountered by migrants (including refugees) from non-English speaking countries. Jenna comments: ‘[Careers Services] are always harping on about Māori and Pacific Islanders … I think to a large extent they’re quite well catered for … migration, that’s another hot topic for them’. Jenna’s concern is that the privileging of particular groups ‘of the moment’ deflects attention away from broader interconnected sites of social (in)justice, which include socio-economic class and gender, for example. It is important to note that school-based career advisers are not required to hold a recognised career-related qualification. Moreover, there are no qualifications that specifically engage with career education as such. Professional career qualifications in New Zealand are generically targeted at practitioners, where the focus is on career theory, counselling and guidance. Issues of social justice are tangential at best, rather than central, as a result.

Given the constraints of space I also want to briefly mention the relationship between school-based policies related to social justice concerns (such as equality, diversity, anti-bullying, Māori/Pasifika) and career education. While, in varying degrees, my participants were aware of such policies, the link with their programs was often tenuous. There was also a lack of clarity about how their programs engaged with these issues. ‘I guess it’s not mentioned specifically but it is mentioned implicitly, within our current scheme’ (Gaynor).

we have an equity policy, don’t ask me what’s in it ’cos I just printed it off and I’ve no idea … [when asked whether it influenced her work, she continued] probably if I looked at them I’d probably do some of this stuff that’s in there, so it’s probably more implicit, I’ve never sat down and read the policies, ’til you asked for a copy. (Louise)

no, I haven’t [read a statement on social justice] … but maybe that’s something I haven’t … but if that’s something that would be helpful … ’cos it is good to have frameworks to hang things off and guiding principles to go back to and think how does this fit in, so that would be a helpful thing. (Marjorie)

I guess [social justice is] something that’s not overt in what we do, it’s just infused into everything we do, and the whole philosophy of what we do that … it’s not probably, I guess it will now you challenge me …
yeah … perhaps it should be, perhaps I should think of some way of doing it. (Ken)

The above excerpts suggest that many of the participants had not really considered how school-wide policies in this arena might connect with career education. It is also apparent that the interview process provided an opportunity for some to reflexively explore this issue. As discussed earlier, if we are not explicit about where social justice issues fit within career education, how will we know that we are engaging with them in/through our practices?

Are We On Task and How Do We Know?

There appears to be a particular taken-for-grantedness about what career education ‘is’, the role it should play and whose interests it serves. In recent years career education has been recast, and is now euphemistically referred to as career development. Career learning is focused on the development of individual competencies that aim to empower students, to prepare them for an apolitical life beyond school. Beneath this are more instrumental messages, as life, employability and economic participation become individualised and intertwined. As Vaughan and Gardiner (2007) reported from their review of career education in New Zealand secondary schools, while there was a strong commitment to ‘meeting the needs of individual students and target groups of students … careers education seems to be about so much on the one hand and be so lacking in focus on the other’ (p. 81). Thus there is need for greater clarity in this curriculum area. I also believe that the reliance on psychologised career theory is inadequate.

Guichard (2001) observed that:;

[career education] practices only rarely aim at enhancing equality of opportunity, of lessening social inequity or enhancing collective development actions … [it focuses] on the individual [and] tends to ignore society or community. (p. 166, original emphasis)

While there may be a healthy debate in the academic literature about social justice and its relationship to career construction and learning, at a practice level little appears to have changed. Therefore whether ‘we’ are on task, and how we will know this, depends on what it is we are actually measuring and attempting to achieve. Identifying how many students progress into further education or training or employment, and whether this is congruent with their stated goals at school, presents only a partial and incomplete representation of career enactment. Until we are clear about the purpose of career education, are open about what it is we are measuring, and determine why, I am unconvinced that we can make such sweeping judgements.

Is Career Education a Site of Oppression and Domination?

Although a work in progress, the early findings from my study suggest career education may well be a site of oppression and domination, yet there is also potential for resistance. Career education cannot be divorced from ‘wider political, social, cultural and economic contexts within which it has been constructed and reconstructed’ (Harris, 1999, p. 16). Thus the embedding of a social justice philosophy within career education practice and training will help to make oppression and domination visible. Spaces can then be found for critical exploration of, and discussion about, the complex ways in which concepts of ‘self’, citizenship, career, opportunity and justice are influenced and shaped by social, political and economic discourses (Irving, 2010a).

This will require us all to become sensitised to the multiple dimensions of career and the political nature of career education, and to be more critically reflexive in our professional practice(s). As Giroux (1992) noted, ‘without a political project there can be no ground on which to engage questions of power, domination, human suffering and the possibilities of human struggle’ (p. 22).

References


Articles


Author

Barrie A. Irving is a PhD candidate at the University of Otago College of Education where he is researching into how social justice is positioned and understood within career education in New Zealand secondary schools. He is also a sessional lecturer at James Cook University (Singapore), teaching a Masters paper in Guidance and Counselling. Barrie’s writing and research is located within a critical social theory perspective.

Email: irvba060@student.otago.ac.nz
This Irish study is positioned within the wider international discourse on outcome evaluation in career guidance practice. The overall aim of the research was to consider the development of a best practice framework for the longitudinal tracking of individual progression in the Irish Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI). The AEGI was established in 2000 by the Department of Education and Science (Department of Education and Science, 2000). Currently, there are 40 services supporting adults in their pursuit of education, training and employment (Philips & Eustace, 2009). While the sector is still relatively new, the need for appropriate quality assurance mechanisms to evaluate the long-term outcomes of guidance interventions for clients is paramount (National Guidance Forum, 2007a).

In this study, a critical analysis of the discourse on the measurement of progression within policy, practice and research unpacked some of the prevailing issues in the field (Kincheloe, 2008). One key concern is the need for quality assurance activities to be inclusive, democratic and reflect the realities and needs of individuals and society in a rapidly changing world (Killeen, 1996; Plant, 2005; Wannan & McCarthy, 2005; Young, 1990). The outcome of this research is the proposal of a constructivist evaluation framework for future practice.
that requires the involvement of all key stakeholders, including clients, to determine the range of outcomes for long-term measurement (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Although the primary focus of this article is on the methodology and results, a synopsis of the literature provides a context for the research study.

Public policy is crucial to the development of career guidance services (Watts, Sultana & McCarthy, 2010). The consolidation of lifelong guidance into lifelong learning and employment policies is viewed as a major achievement in the delivery of guidance to individuals (Council of the European Union, 2008). Lifelong guidance refers to the provision of guidance throughout the lifespan to help citizens manage transitions between education, training and work as a consequence of the changing nature of labour markets (Sultana, 2008). Adult guidance in Ireland is now firmly embedded within European and international socio-political discourses on the role of guidance to achieve lifelong learning, labour market and social equity goals. The AEGI, as both an ‘object’ and an ‘instrument’ of public policy, is viewed as a measure to support Ireland’s economic development, labour market efficiency and occupational mobility (Department of Education and Science, 2000; National Guidance Forum, 2007a; Watts, 1996).

The issues of quality assurance and quality standards in guidance have gained considerable momentum in recent years (National Guidance Forum, 2007a; Sultana, 2008). Quality is measured for a number of reasons, including political motivations, to secure funding, to measure learner progression, to improve services, to monitor and regulate outcomes, for strategic planning, for practice or policy development and to ensure the efficient use of public funds (Plant, 2004; Scheerens, Glas & Thomas, 2003; Sultana, 2008). Recommendations to deal with the diffuseness of quality standard approaches include the introduction of monitoring and feedback mechanisms, criteria for the establishment of performance targets, and the involvement of users in the design, implementation and evaluation of quality assurance systems (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2004). In dealing with some of the gaps identified by the OECD (2002), the development of an integrated framework for lifelong guidance in Ireland has been an important development but the emergence of formal structures has so far been limited (National Guidance Forum, 2007a). Although the AEGI has adopted the National Guidance Forum’s ‘Quality in Guidance’ (2007b) standards for its services, the initiative still needs to move beyond the pursuit of purely ‘tangible’ outcomes as a measure of individual progression and quality of provision. For example, the National Guidance Forum’s Integrated Framework (2007) recommends four specific outcomes across the lifespan: emotional, social, learning and career. The focus of measurement in the AEGI is overwhelmingly on indicators related to learning and career, and largely ignores the personal development outcomes for individuals.

The topic of appropriate outcome measures reflects the current critical discourse on impact measurement and the need for consensus on specific performance indicators that reflect the progressive impact of interventions over time (Hughes & Gratton, 2006; Kidd, 2006). Current economic conditions have highlighted issues of accountability, cost and the value of publicly funded career guidance services (Hughes & Gratton, 2009; Mayston, 2002; Sampson, 2009). Implicit in this is the need for career guidance services to prove their economic worth despite the lack of evidence that the effectiveness of guidance interventions has an eventual impact on labour market processes (Kidd, 2006). While evidence-based research, such as longitudinal studies, is viewed as crucial for evaluating effectiveness, the literature finds divergence on the rationale for outcome measurement and the ability to measure outcomes adequately from the perspective of the client, practitioner and policy-maker.

Methodologically, impact measurement is challenging, costly, time consuming and may be reliant on the motivations of those involved. Even though logical-positivist models may provide reliable quantitative indicators, the use of constructivist approaches to capture the change process in evaluation contexts is strongly advocated (Bimrose, Barnes & Hughes, 2008; Hawthorn & Alloway, 2009). The measurement of progression requires more broad minded, bottom-up approaches that eliminate structures of domination and value democratic decision-making (Plant, 2005; Ravenhall, Hutchinson & Neary-Booth, 2009; Young, 1990). It is therefore necessary to dispute the dominance of the technicist-positivist production of knowledge in relation to the types of outcomes for measurement (Kincheloe, 2003). This approach centres on the taken-for-granted
assumptions embedded in public policy discourse that only hard outcomes are relevant and meaningful in evaluation. The subtle, intangible outcomes such as personal development and the ‘distance travelled’ by individuals are largely ignored (Bimrose, Barnes & Hughes, 2008; Hearne, 2010; McGivney, 2002). It is strongly argued that longitudinal studies can deepen understanding of the multifaceted and subjective nature of progression, external influences in the career development process, and the barriers that hinder transitions into education and employment (Bimrose, Barnes & Hughes, 2008; Bujold, 2004; Duffy & Dik, 2009; Hawthorn & Alloway, 2009). The methodological stance taken in this research is that, in order to capture such complexities and to provide a fuller account of individual progression, softer outcome measures need to be included in longitudinal studies (Maguire, 2004).

**Method**

A critical constructivist methodology was employed to examine the dominant discourses on the meaning of progression as a construct for measurement within evaluation contexts (Foucault, 1982). This approach supports contemporary thinking on the integration of modern and postmodern theories in career guidance. Constructivism emphasises how people construct, deconstruct and reconstruct their education and career experiences over time (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Young and Collin (2004) identified four dominant discourses in career guidance: the dispositions discourse, the contextualising discourse, the subjective discourse and the process discourse. The critical dimension of this study stresses the need for career practitioners and researchers to be more reflexively aware of their own and other powerful discursive practices (McIlveen & Patton, 2006; McMahon & Watson, 2007; Sampson, 2009; Stead & Bakker, 2008). Critical research rejects naturalism, rationality, neutrality and individualism and argues for a dialectic between individual agency and structural determinism (Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997; Rogers, 2004). Therefore, the critical tasks for the practitioner-researcher include identifying and challenging dominant ideology, unmasking power, contesting hegemony and practising democracy (Brookfield, 2005).

In evaluation practice, power is secured through meaning as it legitimises some discursive practices, ‘positivist’, over others, ‘constructivist’ (Edwards, 2008; Kincheloe, 2008). As Young (1990) contended, this type of political theory ‘consists in too often assuming as given institutional structures that ought to be brought under normative evaluation’ (p. 3). For example, one of the prevailing assumptions in Irish adult guidance policy is that only quantitative methods can elicit data that are relevant and meaningful to demonstrate outcomes but the conventional paradigm ignores the subjectivity and agency of clients, neglects contextual factors and presumes that progression is a linear and vertical process. This in effect objectifies clients and reduces them to a unity that values commonness or sameness over specificity and difference (Foucault, 1982; Young, 1990). In relation to this study, the undertaking has been to advance understanding by illuminating the particular phenomenon of progression from the standpoint of clients, practitioners and policy-makers within the wider social and political contexts of outcome evaluation.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Multiple methods were used for the primary and secondary data collection and the analytical phase in the study. The study was undertaken as a longitudinal single-case study situated in one AEGI service, the Regional Educational Guidance Service for Adults (REGSA). Case studies can develop new theories on outcome measurement, help explain causal links in real-life interventions and illustrate certain topics in a descriptive mode through thick description (Bimrose, Barnes & Hughes, 2008; DePoy & Gilson, 2008; Yin, 2003). Although case studies are critiqued, Yin (2003) contended that a single-case study design can be representative and revelatory in its uniqueness on a particular topic and context. In terms of generalisability, the findings of the study are not idiosyncratic and may be typical and transferable to other AEGI settings.

The three main sources of data in this study were clients, practitioners and policy-makers. As the primary source was the clients, a longitudinal dimension involved repeated measurements of the behaviour of clients purposively sampled from an earlier quantitative study (Hearne, 2005) during different ‘time waves’ in 2005, 2006 and 2009 (Taris, 2000). After the 2005 study, five clients (two male, three female) were interviewed face to face in 2006, and four agreed to a follow-up telephone interview
in 2009. Four of the clients had received one-to-one guidance in 2001, and one in 2003. In order to capture multiple perspectives within the discourse, two focus group interviews with UK adult guidance practitioners in 2006 and content analysis of a representative sample of Irish policy documents produced between 1997 and 2008 was carried out. In addition, fieldwork involved observation visits to two national public employment services to enlighten the researcher on alternative tracking systems within a closely related sector. The organisations were in Ireland (that is, FÁS) in 2006 and in Finland (Public Employment Service—PES) in 2008.

Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimensional discourse analytic framework was used to critically analyse the discourse of the clients, practitioners and policymakers. Postmodernist approaches such as discourse analysis enable career practitioners to expose the value systems and power relations implicit in client, practitioner and public policy discourses (Stead & Bakker, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The study specifically concentrated on Foucault’s (1982) theory of ‘scientific classification’ to expose how government tracking systems decentre the subjectivities of clients, making them objects of knowledge through such regulatory practices. But Wodak & Meyer (2009) argued that, as discourses produce subjects and reality, discourse cannot be reduced to an idea of ‘ideology critique’ alone. The rationale for using discourse analysis in this study was to examine the constructive nature of accounts to show how the same phenomenon—progression—can be described, or created, in a number of different ways in the discourse.

The analytical framework involved a combination of two approaches. Initially, **textually oriented discourse analysis**, which is concerned with the way various forms of language work, was used on the text of the clients, practitioners, policy-makers in a thematic format. Later, at the interpretative stage, **critical discourse analysis** (CDA) was used to synthesise the textual data analysis and the literature review to analyse the discursive and social practices in the field (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The discursive practices relate to the various dissemination channels used in adult guidance such as expert groups, international policy centres, policy publications, conferences and symposiums. The social practices relate to ideologies and hegemonic practices in current adult guidance policy and practice.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to consider the development of a best practice framework for the longitudinal measurement of individual progression in the AEGI. This required a critical analysis of the construction of progression and the current methodological issues involved in its longitudinal measurement. In the study the construction of meaning on the measurement of client progression highlights significant tensions in the different discourses on the long-term evaluation of outcomes. The overall finding of this study was that greater value is placed on measuring progression into education, training and employment at the exclusion of measuring the personal outcomes for clients.

From a constructivist perspective, the four dominant discourses identified by Young and Collin (2004) emerged in the study. The dispositions discourse, based on a positivist epistemology, is the dominant discourse used by Irish policy-makers to quantify outcomes in adult guidance. In contrast, the contextualising discourse, the discourse of subjectivity and the process discourse were evident in the client and practitioner discourse. Specifically, the client’s narratives corroborate the findings of Bimrose, Barnes and Hughes (2008) that adults’ education and career progression experiences are located within the broader social, economic, historical and temporal contexts of their everyday lives. Their stories brought to light the subjective issues of identity, agency and purpose, and verified the range of complex processes involved in an individual’s career progression that adult guidance counsellors attend to on a daily basis. Bujold (2004) claimed such processes include decision-making, risk-taking, overcoming obstacles, chance and inner conflicts. As one client in the study stated regarding making a career change it involved ‘a fearful decision … making that change … and that change brings with it a rollercoaster of emotion, doubts and questioning’. Subjective factors such as this are neglected by evaluators and policy-makers who favour objective measures for individual progression.

"Greater value is placed on measuring progression into education, training and employment at the exclusion of measuring the personal outcomes for clients."
This study clearly illustrates that progression is a subjective and context-specific construction that is extremely difficult to define, measure and capture through the conventional paradigm. The findings corroborate McGivney’s (2002) claim that the process aspect of learning, and guidance, is overlooked in the drive for standardised and measurable parameters. In this study, progression as an individual experience was found to be ‘non-linear’, ‘cyclical’ and ‘retrospective’, which is in opposition to the linear and vertical process espoused by Irish policy-makers. From a methodological perspective, the pursuit of quantitative data is indicative of the need to prove that hard outcomes are more valuable in a sector where there may be greater competition for resources and higher levels of accountability. This was highlighted in the practitioners’ discourse in this study indicating that cost–benefit analysis has a palpable effect on provision, as practitioners need to achieve targets and prove the economic worth of guidance interventions to managers, funders and policy-makers. On this issue, responses from the practitioners in the study included ‘outcomes are required to be tangible and linear which are related to learning goals, retention rates, achieved qualifications or employment’ and government policy is ‘often perceived to be more to do with measurable economic benefits’. In Ireland, despite the proposals by the National Guidance Forum (2007a) to include interpretive methods, quantitative data supersedes qualitative data in the AEGI. Nonetheless, observation of the Finnish PES suggests that methodological pluralism is attainable if sophisticated systems, funding and human resources are made available in the sector.

The main objective of this research was to use a bottom-up, democratic approach to consider one of the key quality assurance issues in the AEGI: the longitudinal tracking of individual progression. This practice aligns itself to the model put forward in Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) constructivist evaluation framework. A comparison between the positivist and constructivist methodology applicable to evaluation contexts is displayed in Table 1.

Concerning the five items listed in Table 1, this research study established the advantage of using a constructivist evaluation framework in adult guidance. The discourse of the clients and practitioners shows that the attribution of meaning on progression is subjective.
Articles

and value-laden, and therefore generalisability is problematic. Specifically, the uniqueness of each client's experiences underlines the difficulty of quantifying the various elements of personal progression through the conventional paradigm. The constructivist approach made it possible to create hard and soft outcome constructs with two key stakeholders for the purposes of evaluation. In particular, the co-construction of meaning in the dialogues with the five clients elucidated the possibility for consensus on better informed and more sophisticated constructions on the meaning of progression for individuals. These constructions allow for a better understanding of the range of outcomes that need to be measured in client tracking systems (see Hearne, 2010).

In terms of accountability, the conventional methodology seeks to determine what went wrong, why and who is to blame and is used as an instrument to maintain the status quo in power (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In guidance, the equation of hard outcomes with specific targets places pressure on practitioners to be accountable for their provision at the expense of all other types of outcomes. A constructivist methodology could help to redress this hegemonic practice through a democratic inclusion of all relevant stakeholders in the design of evaluation systems. Finally, in contrast to the conventional approach where evaluation data is prescriptive, the constructivist data in this study is not to be viewed as having any special power or legitimacy. Instead, the data represents the voices of two key stakeholders that can be fed into the negotiation process in the design of evaluation systems in adult guidance practice.

**Conclusion**

The strengths and challenges of measuring individual progression in an Irish longitudinal tracking system in adult guidance practice have been explicated in this article. This study provides an insight into the transformative processes of personal development, change and transition for clients who are neglected in current technical systems used to measure long-term outcomes. The outcome of this research has been the proposal of a constructivist evaluation framework that would involve the democratic inclusion of all relevant stakeholders in the design of evaluation methods to measure a broad range of outcomes.

**References**


**AUTHOR**

Dr Lucy Hearne is Co-director of the Graduate Diploma in Guidance Counselling and the MA in Guidance Counselling, University of Limerick, Republic of Ireland. As a practitioner, she has worked in a number of guidance settings, including the Irish Adult Educational Guidance Initiative. Her doctoral research was supported by an Irish Research Council Scholarship for Humanities and Social Sciences. Her research interests include adult guidance, non-formal guidance, evaluation practice, portfolio learning and reflective practice.

Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie, http://www.ul.ie/education
THE PERCEIVED ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN CAREER GUIDANCE AMONG PRACTITIONERS WHO ARE EXPERIENCED INTERNET USERS

RAIMO VUORINEN
University of Jyväskylä

JAMES P. SAMPSON
Florida State University

JAANA KETTUNEN
University of Jyväskylä

The increasing use of technology is placing new demands on career guidance practitioners. This article examines what changes, if any, have occurred in the perceptions of guidance practitioners regarding their role and the role of the internet in meeting guidance goals and delivering career guidance services. The data were collected in focus groups in 2001–2002 and a follow-up study in 2010. A total of seven focus groups were held. The data were analysed using combined methods. The results indicated that practitioners now observe that the need for differentiated service delivery modes is more explicit due to varied levels of readiness in decision-making and ICT literacy.
INTRODUCTION

The current wider paradigm of guidance is recognised as a crucial dimension of lifelong learning, promoting both social and economic goals: in particular, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of education, training and the labour market through its contribution to reducing drop-outs, preventing skill mismatches and boosting economic productivity (for example, ELGPN, 2010; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004). Lifelong guidance enables citizens of all ages and in any phase of life to analyse their own interests and skills, make educational and vocational decisions and manage their individual span of development in learning and at work (Council of the European Union, 2008). A key rationale for this recent policy interest is the notion that lifelong guidance represents both a private and a public good (Watts, 2008). A second major change relates to the concept of ‘lifelong guidance’ and its linkages to lifelong learning. The move from ‘education and training’ to learning changes the focus from structures and institutions to development of individual lifelong career management skills (Watts, Sultana & McCarthy, 2010).

There has been a consistency in various policy documents (Council of the European Union, 2008; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004) emphasising quality assurance and more diverse service delivery in guidance services. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) has the potential to expand access to career guidance. New forms of virtual tutoring and support, distribution of working life information and career planning and development resources are being developed. Overall use of new technology in guidance settings is expanding. Generic counselling processes have been developed to help clients make effective use of ICT in career guidance (Sampson, 2008).

The increasing use of technology will require reconsideration not only of the services provided, but also of the means by which those services are delivered. A consensus has emerged that both the counsellor and ICT have an important role to play in the delivery of enhanced career guidance services via the internet (Vuorinen, 2006). But a broader understanding in the perceptions of guidance practitioners regarding their role and the role of the internet in meeting guidance goals and delivering career guidance services is needed because that understanding will determine effectiveness in the use of the internet in their practice. In fact, practitioner perceptions of the role of technology will have an impact on how their practice will evolve. Thus, the aim of the present article is to examine what changes have occurred over time, if any, in the perceived role of technology in career guidance among practitioners who are experienced internet users. The study will focus on whether or not there were differences in the perceptions among practitioners in 2001–2002 and in 2010.

The Internet in Guidance

Several innovations have emerged to supplement traditional career guidance practice. One such innovation is the use of ICT. The past decade has seen an incredible expansion in access to ICT and today technology permeates almost every aspect of our lives. Individuals are now able to access the internet not only through their personal computers but also through mobile phones and other mobile devices. A ‘read web’ has changed towards a more social, collaborative, interactive and responsive web.

The potential of using ICT to deliver career guidance services has long been recognised by the broad community of careers guidance professionals and researchers. Beginning with access to traditional occupational and career information, ICT in career guidance has evolved to include a wide variety of information sources as well as facilitating interaction among clients and guidance professionals (Bimrose & Barnes, 2010; Harris-Bowlsbey & Sampson, 2005; Offer & Chiru, 2006; Sampson, 2008; Vuorinen, 2006; Watts, 2002). Material development (Barnes, La Gro & Watts, 2010; Vuorinen, 2006), automated interaction, games and simulations present a wide range of opportunities (Hooley, Hutchinson & Watts, 2010) and purposes for using ICT in guidance. In the last few years, the potential of ICT in the development of more integrated lifelong guidance systems is also being realised. ICT is acting not just as a tool but also as a powerful agent of change that illustrates the transversal elements of education, employment and social policies (ELGPN, 2010).

ICT in career guidance has evolved to include a wide variety of information sources as well as facilitating interaction among clients and guidance professionals.

ICT in career guidance has evolved to include a wide variety of information sources as well as facilitating interaction among clients and guidance professionals.
The goal of using ICT-based career guidance resources and services is to help young people and adults to make informed and careful occupational, educational, training and employment decisions (Sampson, 2008). Information delivered via ICT facilitates the clarification of self-knowledge or the knowledge of options for the person seeking assistance in solving problems and making decisions. Completing practitioner-assisted or self-help career assessment via ICT provides a resource for clarifying self-knowledge about values, interests, skills, aptitudes and employment preferences. Using occupational educational, training and employment information provides a resource for enhancing knowledge of options. Communication among and between career guidance practitioners and the individuals served provides opportunities to facilitate use of the overwhelming amount of information that is now available (Sampson, Shy, Offer & Dozier, 2010).

Guidance on the Internet
In guidance, technology has generally been used to deliver information, to develop material, to provide an automated interaction or to provide a channel for communication (Hooley, Hutchinson & Watts, 2010; Sampson, 2008; Vuorinen, 2006; Watts & Offer, 2006). Several types of ICT applications and internet-based services have emerged since the last decades of the previous century: for example, email, chat, newsgroup, websites, SMS (text messaging), telephone, software (CD-ROM and free-standing computer programs) and video-conferencing (Watts & Offer, 2006). Applications with or without automated interaction have been integrated in various guidance activities:
- self assessment or awareness-raising exercises and psychometric tests
- facilities to retrieve information about training and work opportunities relevant to the user
- decision aids
- training or distance-learning materials for job seekers
- CV and résumé writing programs or templates
- matching systems relating the user's input to work or learning opportunities
- dedicated experience-exchange mechanisms, such as email lists, chat rooms and discussion forums
- gateways or portals providing signposts to resources for work and learning
- dedicated authoring systems, including blogging and web page creation software (Offer, 2001).

New technology enables use of such resources to be massively increased but also poses challenges.

Generic counselling processes have been developed to help clients make effective use of ICT in career guidance (Osborn, Dikel & Sampson, 2011; Sampson 2008). According to Sampson (2008), career guidance services can be designed consisting of three elements. Career services include self-help, brief staff-assisted services and individual case-managed services that are delivered by staff members to assist students in making informed and careful decisions about occupational, educational, training and employment choices. All these elements can contain forms of web-based guidance services.

Effectiveness in the use of the internet is likely to be improved by providing counselling support for users who need it, by systematically integrating websites to existing services, by an ongoing re-evaluation of standards of practice, by awareness of ethical issues and standards in designing services, and by conducting research and evaluation to appropriately guide the evolution of internet-based career resources and services (Sampson, 2008). It is thus crucial to explore how counsellors recognise this need for support and how they should be trained.

Contextual Changes in the Use of ICT in Finland
The world of career guidance practitioners has changed considerably between 2001 and 2002 and then again in 2010. ICT has swept into modern society and rapidly been brought to use in various areas. According to the Official Statistics of Finland in 2002 (Nurmela, Parjo & Ylitalo, 2002), 66% of Finns had used the internet. Every other Finn had a computer with internet access at home, while 32% of Finns were using a computer daily. In 2010, the use of the internet is even more widespread. Now as many as 86% of Finns are internet users. The internet is used not only more commonly but also more often. In Finland, 72% of the population are on the web daily or almost daily. Every other Finn uses the internet several times a day, with 42% of Finns registered into social networks (Official Statistics of Finland, 2010). All of these figures are still trending upwards.

In a national evaluation of guidance at the secondary level in 2002, counsellors indentified the use
of ICT as one of the weakest competence areas in their practice (Kasurinen & Numminen, 2003). Including the use of ICT in the national core curricula as a compulsory element in careers education in 2003 had a great impact on the emergence of ICT in guidance in Finland. According to the guidelines, each student must be introduced to the existing national career information and career services on the internet. The goal is to help the students to use the services after their graduation with a lifelong-learning perspective. The other goal is to develop their skills to evaluate and select the relevant quality services on the internet to meet their individual needs. This is one competency for a citizen in a knowledge based society (Offer, 2001; Watts, 2002).

After the use of ICT became compulsory in guidance, the schools had to guarantee access to internet services for students. There was also a need to allocate funding for the in-service training for guidance practitioners and to integrate the use of ICT more explicitly in the initial training programs. Finally, there was a need for more dynamic national internet-based career resources and career information systems. The implementation of the core curricula was supported with a national in-service training program for guidance practitioners and 60% of the career practitioners in general education completed a 40-hour training module in the use of ICT in guidance (Vuorinen, 2006).

Aims of the Study
Our aim is to examine potential changes in the perceptions of guidance practitioners who are experienced internet users regarding their role and the role of the internet in meeting guidance goals and delivering career services. More specifically, we consider the following research question: what changes have occurred over time, if any, in the perceived role of technology in career guidance among practitioners who are experienced internet users?

Method
This study examined career guidance practice using a phenomenographic approach. In order to answer the research questions we collected data in focus groups in 2001 and 2002 (n = 46) and in the follow-up study in 2010 (n = 10) among Finnish guidance practitioners representing comprehensive, secondary and higher education as well public employment services. In both studies, practitioners represented the Finnish guidance community from a lifelong guidance perspective and represented both urban and rural settings.

The quality of the data collected in focus groups in part depends upon the nature of the focus groups and the quality of the focus group questions developed (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The focus group questions were designed to bridge the gap that was identified in the literature review on the perceptions of the practitioners on the use of ICT in guidance. Questions were tested among practitioners within an in-service training session focusing on ICT in guidance. Small amendments were made on the basis of testing.

The following questions were used in the focus groups:

- What is the contribution of information to students, in meeting career guidance goals? (In order to understand the contribution of Internet-based information to career guidance goals, it was necessary to understand the basic contribution of career information to career guidance goals.)
- What is the role of practitioners, in meeting career guidance goals? (This question was necessary in order to understand the role of practitioners in helping clients to use current Internet-based career information delivery systems and current internet-based career services. It was important to understand the basic role of practitioners in meeting career guidance goals.)
- What is the contribution of current Internet-based career information delivery systems and current Internet-based career services, in meeting guidance goals? (Within the analysis, this question provided information on how the practitioners perceived the nature of the Internet and its strengths and limitations.)
- What is the role of the practitioner in helping clients to use current Internet-based career information delivery systems and current Internet-based career services, in meeting career guidance goals? In the follow-up study in 2010 the same focus group questions were used with a minor update. With the rise of new information technologies during the Web 2.0 era, there was a need to add one new question. To obtain answers on how experienced guidance practitioners perceive the role of social media in the use of Internet-based career services and career information delivery systems a new question was presented:
What is the role of social media in internet-based career services? (The results of this question will be presented as a separate preliminary study.)

To examine the potential changes in the perceptions of the practitioners, the data collected during the two phases were analysed using a combined methods approach. First, the qualitative data were analysed with content-driven approach and coded in themes using NVivo by one researcher and verified by a second researcher. Cross-validation enhances the objectivity and reliability of the research (Krueger, 1998). The second analysis framework for the role of information and the role of internet-based career information delivery systems was based on the DOTS-model (Law & Watts, 1977). The role of the counsellor was analysed with a framework of a three-step generic counselling process, including screening, orientation and follow-up by Sampson (2008). The third analysis examined whether or not there were differences in the perceptions between data collected from practitioners in 2001 and 2002 and in 2010.

RESULTS

The Contribution of the Internet in Meeting Guidance Goals

Results from both 2001 and 2002, and 2010 revealed that the practitioners were motivated in their use of the internet in guidance. Rather than developing coherent strategies for the use of ICT, the practitioners were using technical applications in order to solve fragmented problems.

In both studies, the emphasis in ICT use was in delivering career information rather than promoting career management skills from a lifelong guidance perspective. The internet had added value, especially in obtaining educational and labour market information.

In 2001 and 2002, in many cases within the educational settings, the practitioners were not able to use the internet in a flexible way in meeting student needs. They were able to use the internet only when a computer class was available. In 2010, students have better access to the internet and better ICT literacy. Nationally, there are also more online resources available in Finland. Instead of using the internet in the same scheme as printed materials, the practitioners helped their students in obtaining and selecting the information from the internet. The practitioners noted that the internet had in large part replaced the use of printed material in their daily practice: ‘Updated information can be found from [the] internet—it is difficult to imagine work without the internet anymore’.

In 2010 the practitioners describe an external pressure to increase the use of the internet in their practice. They are expected to get involved in developing online career courses, to produce career information on institutional websites or to get engaged within social media. A clear need for peer support and ongoing in-service training in the use of ICT in guidance was identified both in 2001 and 2002 and again in 2010.

The Role of the Practitioner in Helping Clients to Use the Internet in Meeting Guidance Goals

In 2010 the practitioners used the internet in their practice more extensively than in 2001 and 2002. In addition to the internet-based career information and resources (for example, self-assessment tools) the schools have much more advanced administration software to follow up the students’ learning pathways. The practitioners recognised that students use more diverse communication channels than the practitioners: ‘students don’t read e-mails that often, I guess they use other channels for communication . . . We should be present where the students are’.

Both in 2001 and 2002 and again in 2010 within the three-step model (screening–orientation–follow-up), screening was based mainly on client interviews and the emphasis was more on client interests than on screening the readiness for career decisions or for the use of different information sources or career services. In both studies, the practitioners integrated internet-based self-assessment tools within their guidance process, but the internet was not widely used in the follow-up phase or in supporting the implementation of individual action plans or active transitions. The vocational psychologists in public employment services were using more internet-based resources during the entire service delivery process with their clients.
In 2010, the practitioners started to observe more clearly the need for differentiated services among their clients. They recognise the gap among students between low readiness and high readiness for decision-making and see that it has increased. They are convinced that the self-help model is not appropriate for some students. They seem to accept that they are not so much needed with skilled students who can provide evidence that their needs have been met from other sources. The practitioners note that the existing career information is still fragmented on the internet. They state that there is still a need for personal support for some students who need assistance in selecting and using internet resources.

According to the practitioners, the guidance process becomes documented and more transparent when using the internet. The practitioners use more time than formerly to formulate their responses to their clients, because these responses can be revisited later. This challenges the practitioners to evaluate their own work and their theoretical approaches, and generates new in-service training needs. The use of the internet provides a checklist that all the components of guidance during the whole process are covered and followed up.

**DISCUSSION**

In this study, perceptions of experienced guidance practitioners on the role of technology in internet-based career guidance were examined in 2001 and 2002 and again in 2010. The results show clear similarities but also some differences (see Table 1).

According to the results in 2010, students use the internet more than previously and this forces practitioners to change their communication channels; they cannot rely anymore on printed materials. The increase of career information and applications can be helpful but, on the other hand, fragmented services and data overload are now bigger problems than was previously the case. The results show that the gap between low and high readiness among the students has increased and the practitioners are seeing more clearly the need for differentiated service delivery modes (Sampson, 2008). The practitioners have more experience with using the internet both in and out of their work and in observations of the use of the internet among their children and other people. Due to more experience with using the internet, the practitioners may have acquired new lenses with which to view the situation.

**Table 1: Summary of the Similarities and Differences in the Role and Use of the Internet in Guidance in 2001–2002 and 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The results from both 2001–2002 and 2010 show that:</td>
<td>Compared to 2001–2002, the results from 2010 show that:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• practitioners were motivated to use the internet in guidance</td>
<td>• students have better access to the internet and better ICT literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ICT was used for delivering career information rather than promoting</td>
<td>• the number of ICT resources and services has increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>career management skills from a lifelong-guidance perspective</td>
<td>• the internet has replaced printed materials as an information source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• coherent strategies for the use of ICT were lacking</td>
<td>• practitioners are using the internet more extensively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• peer support and ongoing in-service training was needed</td>
<td>• there is external pressure on practitioners to increase their use of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• equal access and ethical issues were of concern</td>
<td>internet and social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• existing career information on the internet was fragmented.</td>
<td>• more advanced administration software is available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the need for differentiated service delivery modes has been observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and acknowledged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the gap among students between low and high readiness has increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the internet has changed in nature due to social media and web 2.0.</td>
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</table>
As the practitioners observe the need for differentiated services, they see a meaningful rationale for their future work. On the one hand, they must accept that they are not so much needed with students who identify that their needs are met while, on the other hand, those students who have not been successful in getting the information they need require support from the practitioner. Both studies identify that some practitioners do not believe that students are capable of using information on their own.

The results show that the practitioners are experiencing external pressure to increase the use of the internet in their work. This is partly due to the educational policies in Finland, which require the practitioners to use the internet in their daily work. The practitioners describe the expectations to change their practice but they are not able to articulate explicitly the reasons behind that. In their work, the focus seems to be on individual needs. The integrative role of ICT in creating a common conceptual framework for the guidance strategies or modelling the services has not been discussed. Despite the fact of national training programs, the ongoing evolution of the internet necessitates the continuing in-service training of practitioners.

According to the results, the practitioners say that they could not work anymore without the internet. In order to use the internet in a coherent way, a practitioner must be able to identify the targets for guidance and the theoretical framework used in service design. Within initial practitioner training, the use of the internet should be integrated in the methodology of training and not used only as a separate entity. Students should have the opportunity to integrate key internet-based career services and resources within individual guidance processes and group settings from the very beginning of their studies. The training programs should guarantee the coverage of all guidance competences from content and process dimensions. By the end of the program, the students could then be exploring how to turn this experience into their own professional skills in promoting the use of the internet in guidance.

References


Articles


AUTHORS

Dr Raimo Vuorinen is currently the Co-ordinator of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research, in the University of Jyväskylä. In his work, Dr Vuorinen has been focusing on the strategic design, implementation and evaluation of lifelong guidance services. Another key interest is lifelong-guidance policy development. He has been engaged in various national evaluations, development projects and in-service programs in the area of vocational and educational guidance from comprehensive education to higher education in Finland.

Email: raimo.vuorinen@jyu.fi

Dr James P. Sampson is currently a Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology and Learning Systems at Florida State University, where he has taught courses in career development and computer applications in counselling since 1982. Since 1986 he has served as Co-director of the Center for the Study of Technology in Counseling and Career Development, a research centre established at Florida State University to improve the design and use of computer applications in counselling and guidance. Dr Sampson has had a long-term interest in standards of practice and ethical codes related to the design and use of ICT in career guidance and counselling.

Jaana Kettunen works as a researcher at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research at the University of Jyväskylä. In her work as a project manager, she has been focusing on pedagogical use of ICT since 2000. Her current research focuses on the potential of ICT and social media in career guidance. She will also study that theme in her doctoral thesis.
Small businesses are the engine of the Australian economy’ (Rudd, 2009). Indeed, entrepreneurship as a career option is becoming increasingly desirable. Responding to this need, many colleges and universities around the world have significantly increased their offerings of entrepreneurship courses over the past 25 years (Fayolle & Klandt, 2006). The goal of many of these programs is to encourage their graduates to choose some form of entrepreneurship as a career option. But not all entrepreneurship programs facilitate entrepreneurship as a career option for their students; some programs may actually have the opposite effect of reducing the entrepreneurial intentions and motivation of their students (Kirby, 2004; Oosterbeek, van Praag & Ijsselstein, 2010). For example, a recent survey of undergraduate entrepreneurship students indicated that, despite being highly motivated to own their
own business, most do not have a business idea at the beginning of the course and only a small percentage of them develop a viable idea during the course of the semester (Smith-Nelson, 2011). A similar phenomenon exists in the marketplace among those who start new ventures. Of those who express sincere intent and motivation, only a few actually possess a viable business ‘opportunity’, resulting in premature business closures. For example, in 2007, a survey of Australian businesses reported that new businesses experience a 40% exit rate over the first three years in business (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). We thus have an opportunity gap. Entrepreneurship education needs to fill this opportunity gap by developing the students’ ability to recognise and develop opportunities.

A recent review of the entrepreneurship course materials suggests that there is a significant incongruence between course materials and activities associated with teaching entrepreneurship compared to what is actually experienced by entrepreneurs in the course of founding and establishing their new venture (Edelman, Manolova & Brush, 2008). For example, the cornerstone activity of most entrepreneurship classes is the writing of the business plan. Writing a business plan is a linear process and the current emphasis on such a linear process such as business planning in entrepreneurship courses is incongruent with the complex and non-linear thinking patterns that entrepreneurs need to use (Edelman, Manolova & Brush, 2008; Honig, 2004).

These findings suggest a need to revisit not only the pedagogical material but also our approach to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial career education. For example, entrepreneurship is most often linked with the creation of new businesses, yet its scope extends well beyond that single activity. In fact, the pursuit of opportunities, risk-taking and demonstrating tenacity constitute an ‘entrepreneurial perspective’ that may be exhibited across a wide range of organisational forms (Kuratko, 2005) and entrepreneurial activities. Therefore entrepreneurship pedagogy directed at encouraging entrepreneurial careers needs to focus on enhancing the entrepreneurial perspective and cognitive processes, such as opportunity recognition, in our students. Recognising this, Fayolle and Klandt (2006) proposed that the paradigm is changing for entrepreneurship education and we, as educators, should be focusing our efforts on the culture and state of mind, behaviour and specific situations involved in the entrepreneurial process, such as opportunity recognition (Gaglio, 1997; Gaglio & Katz, 2001).

The need for an entrepreneurial, opportunity-focused mindset extends beyond entrepreneurial careers to encompass a broader careers perspective. Traditional careers research has been concerned with ‘an individual’s relationship to an employing organization’ (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1542) and from a linear, single organisational perspective. But the evolving nature of work, such as changing employment relationships, downsizing, threats of lay-offs and advancements in technology have spurred the need for a much broader perspective for our understanding of careers. The reduced job security and forced entrepreneurship options (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) have created an increased interest in boundaryless, protean (Inkson, Furbish & Parker, 2002), self-managed and opportunity-focused (Tams & Arthur, 2010) careers. Changes in our current and academic environments are suggesting such a change in our perspective. For example, a recent New York Times article argues for a shift from traditional résumé building to a more contemporary approach of job creation (Seligson, 2010). Similarly, strategic management education has called for a mindset that requires a constant focus on opportunities, questioning the dominant logic in face of constant environmental changes (Ireland, Hitt & Sirmon, 2003)—in other words, an entrepreneurial perspective.

It has been documented that several facets of this entrepreneurial perspective can be developed through educational experiences (Kuratko, 2005). Such enterprising behaviour and such a perspective require that we need to take more of a learning approach (Blenker, Dreisler, Faergeman & Kjeldsen, 2006). We therefore agree with Fiet (2001a, p. 103) that the role of the entrepreneurship classroom should ‘be a world of ideas in which students learn theories that teach them what they ought to do to succeed’. Recent theoretical developments in opportunity recognition have improved our understanding of how entrepreneurs actually recognise opportunities. This article attempts to link theoretical arguments in entrepreneurship research to the development of practical pedagogical
tools that cognitively prepare students with an entrepreneurial mindset for their careers. This article thus attempts to narrow the research–teaching gap in management education (Burke & Rau, 2010).

Our model for tertiary entrepreneurship education is based on McMullen and Shepherd’s (2006) propositions that opportunities may be recognised as an opportunity for the self (a first-person opportunity) or an opportunity for others (a third-person opportunity), based on the ability and feasibility perceptions for the entrepreneur. By developing skills and behaviour for opportunity recognition and taking an experiential approach to entrepreneurial careers, students can improve their ability to recognise opportunities in general (third-person opportunities), further improving their chances of selecting and developing a successful opportunity for themselves (a first-person opportunity).

Of significant importance is the understanding that these opportunities need not be limited solely to opportunities to create new ventures. In fact, the opportunities may exist as new initiatives within an existing small business, as new initiatives in one or more larger corporate entities or within a social, environmental or non-profit organisation. This notion of opportunity-based careers is consistent with recent advances in career theory (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; Tams & Arthur, 2010). Entrepreneurs can be broadly viewed as promoters of innovation (Baumol, 2004) across diverse contexts and therefore educating for entrepreneurial careers requires promoting an entrepreneurial mindset (McGrath & MacMillan, 2000). An entrepreneurial mindset with the ability both to recognise opportunities in general and to pick the right opportunities for the self is a perspective also relevant for protean and boundary-less careers (Bridgstock, 2005).

In the next section, we discuss the latest theoretical insights into opportunity recognition as drivers of entrepreneurial behaviour. Based on theoretical insights, we develop a model of entrepreneurship education that can enhance the recognition of opportunities.

Two-Phase Model of Opportunity Recognition

Entrepreneurial opportunities are defined as ‘situations in which new goods, services, raw materials, markets and organizing methods can be introduced through the formation of new means, ends, or means-ends relationships’ (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003, p. 336).

How do individuals recognise opportunities? Since we know that entrepreneurship involves a nexus between individual and opportunity (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), this article follows the perspective that ‘Opportunities emerge from a complex pattern of changing conditions—changes in technology, economic, political, social and demographic conditions’ (Baron, 2006, p. 107).

Entrepreneurial opportunities thus abound. In the external environment, they are often triggered by changes in the equilibrium of information, technology or changes in the market’s needs and wants (Baron, 2006), yet they cannot exist unless they are recognised or created by an individual (Kirzner, 1997). Consistent with Baron’s work, Gregoire, Barr and Shepherd have defined the process of recognising opportunities:

as efforts to make sense of signals of change (e.g. new information about new conditions) to form beliefs regarding whether or not enacting a course of action to address this change could lead to net benefits. (2010, p. 415)

Their arguments suggest that the process of opportunity recognition is further composed of two sub-phases:

- a phase when the opportunity exists, and an individual recognises it as such, regardless of one’s ability to pursue it
- a phase when the opportunity is evaluated in relationship to one’s self, determining whether or not one has the abilities and motivation to pursue it (Gregoire, Barr & Shepherd, 2010).

Based on this model, we argue that educating for entrepreneurial careers requires a different approach. We propose an approach that encourages students to do more than just evaluate business ideas (such as the exercise of a feasibility analysis or the writing of a business plan) in anticipation of exploiting opportunities. Our approach encourages students to learn how to identify the existence of opportunities in general (third-person opportunities) and to evaluate them in the context of their individual interests and abilities. This personal introspection is critical as they determine whether an opportunity is relevant for them (a first-person opportunity). If it is so, then they can proceed to the activities most commonly associated with the traditional entrepreneurship coursework of writing and presenting a business plan. Moreover, they will also be better equipped to generate more
third-person opportunities, evaluate them for self, and take their ideas beyond the classroom as they pursue an entrepreneurial career.

**Drivers of Opportunity Recognition**

If opportunities are triggered by external environmental changes, why is it that only a handful of people recognise them? What drives some but not others to recognise opportunities? Previous research has suggested that the ability to recognise opportunities rests in attributes commonly referred to as human capital, while others have taken a more cognitive perspective. Shane and colleagues have suggested that human capital includes an individual's education, prior knowledge, background and experiences and these are closely linked with opportunity recognition (Shane, 2000, 2003, 2008; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000) but not all aspects of human capital are considered to be of equal influence. For example, some have argued that not all education or experiences add to an individual's entrepreneurial abilities (Chandler & Hanks, 1994; Chandler & Jansen, 1992; Haynes, 2003; Sardeshmukh & Corbett, 2011; Stuart & Abetti, 1990); rather, it is more important to have relevant entrepreneurial experience.

A more recent perspective has been on the influence of cognitive skills and abilities (Mitchell et al., 2002; Mitchell et al., 2004; Mitchell et al., 2007). These skills and abilities include aspects such as entrepreneurial self-efficacy or the individual's confidence in their ability to pursue entrepreneurial endeavours (Chen, Greene & Crick, 1998; Zhao, Seibert & Hills, 2005), pattern recognition (Baron, 2006; Baron & Ensley, 2006), the ability or tendency to think using heuristics and shortcuts (Busenitz & Barney, 1997), intuition (Mitchell, Friga & Mitchell, 2005), structural alignment to prior knowledge (Gregoire et al., 2010) and creativity (Corbett, 2005; Lumpkin & Lichtenstein, 2005). Some of these cognitive skills and abilities such as entrepreneurial self-efficacy and pattern recognition may actually be enhanced through relevant entrepreneurial experience. Even though it is unclear which influence the process of opportunity recognition more—aspects of an individual's human capital or their cognitive skills and abilities—the unique combinations may create what Ronstadt (1988) called information corridors, ultimately enabling opportunities to be recognised (Venkataraman, 1997).

These theoretical developments have very strong implications for education and preparation for individuals interested in entrepreneurial careers. They suggest that entrepreneurship education needs to acknowledge the factors that influence an individual's ability to recognise opportunities by including activities relevant to advancing both cognitive capabilities and human capital resources. We suggest including a structured program based on classroom exercises and relevant experiences. Further, such an experiential component needs to be tailored to the individual's needs as entrepreneurship depends heavily on 'who you are, what you know, and whom you know' (Sarasvathy, 2001), and personal experience is critical for entrepreneurship as 'Enterprising behavior cannot be created in a contextual vacuum' (Blenker et al., 2006, p. 26). Such an experiential and cognitive component could assist in developing opportunity-recognition ability.

Thus, based on the theoretical insights, a structured program incorporating classroom activities along with an experiential component may enhance the opportunity-recognition ability, so that the individual will be more likely to recognise more third-person opportunities. The more third-person opportunities an individual generates, the more likely he or she is to find a suitable opportunity for the self. This ability to recognise opportunities can also help individuals in managing their careers.

**Model**

Based on the two-phase approach, we propose a model that incorporates how both classroom activities and experiential activities enhance opportunity-recognition ability that will help students identify more third-person opportunities (see Figure 1). Opportunities emerge as a result of individual efforts to exploit the inconsistencies generated through different types of changes in the external environment (Baron, 2006). Baron has proposed that the spotting of
such opportunities can be attributed to an individual’s ability to recognise patterns across diverse sets of information (Baron, 2006; Baron & Ensley, 2006). Based on Smith-Nelson and colleagues (2011, p. 9), we define opportunity-recognition ability as:

An individual’s ability to recognize business opportunities from changing environmental events that may produce new and/or useful products or services or a means for which an existing business may generate a profit measured in consideration of quantity, quality and originality of opportunities identified in response to a given stimuli or set of circumstances.

Even though the relationship between cognitive abilities and opportunity recognition is well recognised in the research literature, there are few research studies that have published data on how opportunity recognition is being incorporated into the teaching of entrepreneurship (DeTienne & Chandler, 2004). Encouraging opportunity recognition can be a helpful step in motivating aspiring entrepreneurs to act on their ideas and engage in entrepreneurship (DeTienne & Chandler, 2004). Recognising third-person opportunities involves identifying inconsistencies that occur as a result of broader environmental changes.

This can be attributed to cognitive abilities as well as experience. The two-pronged approach therefore focuses on both classroom and experiential activities.

**Implications for Practice: Classroom and Experiential Activities**

**Classroom Component**

Traditional classroom-based education is generally regarded as being an important source of most human capital development. This delivery method can also be used to develop a knowledge and skill base for opportunity-recognition ability. Since we are unable to influence the individual before he or she enters our entrepreneurship classroom, the activities suggested for influencing the development of recognising opportunities should be varied, being both traditional and experiential in nature. They should draw on the student’s previous knowledge and experience and allow a significant amount of flexibility so that each student can create their own experience. As Fiet (2001a) argued, such student-focused and theoretically grounded approaches are very important for entrepreneurship pedagogy. Activities associated with creativity such as divergent thinking,
pattern recognition, recombination, ideation and categorisation exercises may facilitate the development of the relevant cognitive skills and abilities to create unique combinations. Since recognising shifts and changes in the marketplace for sources of the emergence of new opportunities, we recommend some basic training on the industry life cycle and the macro-environmental scanning, focusing on examining change in industry as a response to environmental change. This can be accompanied by an exercise covering the changes in a particular industry (for example, video games or digital music) and how the changing nature of environmental influences—along with customers’ changing needs and wants—created new opportunities in the marketplace. A relevant and timely example for our traditional students is the emergence of digital music and images, the corresponding explosion of applications and accessories and, as a result, the extinction of others.

Experiential Component

‘Much of what entrepreneurs do is the product of tacit knowledge’ (Honig, 2004, p. 263), and such tacit knowledge can be acquired effectively only through hands-on experiential activities. In fact, a pure focus on traditional university and classroom approaches is inappropriate for entrepreneurship (Blenker et al., 2006); rather, practical programs and real-world experiences are more useful and effective (Honig, 2004; Peterman & Kennedy, 2003). The experiential component of entrepreneurship education for developing opportunity recognition therefore needs to include more ‘substantial hands-on experience working with community ventures’ (McMullan & Long, 1987, p. 267). Such an experiential component, while engaging with community entrepreneurs, may range from guest lectures by entrepreneurs, mentoring by local entrepreneurs and live case studies (Kuratko, 2005). Further, a specific strategy that might help students who have not been intimately exposed to entrepreneurial environments might be to work within the industry of choice for a period of time, perhaps in the context of an internship. Such structured work-integrated learning programs have several advantages related to career development in general (McIveen et al., 2008); we argue that such structured work-integrated learning and experiential components can also help enhance opportunity-recognition ability.

The opportunity-recognition advantages are manifold. First, knowledge and experience in such a setting may allow the individual access to new information, and we know access to information is a key component in opportunity recognition. Second, such engagement experiences in entrepreneurial settings may expose students to the decision-making heuristics used by entrepreneurs, and awareness of these heuristics and non-linear logic associated with entrepreneurship may prepare them better to recognise new opportunities. Such programs are important way of acquiring entrepreneurial skills and competencies (Aronsson, 2004; Greene, Katz & Johannsson, 2004). For example, experiential components such as internship experience can contribute to development of intuition (Sadler-Smith & Burke, 2009), an important construct in entrepreneurship (Mitchell et al., 2005).

Conclusion

Based on the theoretically grounded two-phase model of opportunity recognition, we propose a model of entrepreneurship education that combines classroom and experiential components related to enhancing opportunity-recognition ability. Such a two-pronged approach of classroom and experiential exercises can enhance students’ awareness of entrepreneurial heuristics (Busenitz & Barney, 1997), non-linear (Honig, 2004) and effectual (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2008) cognitive processes and can give the students an edge in learning the entrepreneurial perspective (Kuratko, 2005) that can be applied in a diverse set of circumstances.

Opportunity Recognition in a Broader Careers Context

Incorporation of experiential exercises and internships in tertiary education has several benefits in terms of the broader career context, including development of social networks and mentoring relationships that can be leveraged in a student’s career development. Even strictly in terms of opportunity recognition, application of our approach has implications beyond entrepreneurial careers. Recent careers literature has focused on self-management of careers (King, 2004). Such self-management has self-awareness as a component (Watts, 2006). By focusing on an educational experience that emphasises ‘who you are, what you know, and whom you know’ (Sarasvathy, 2001), such opportunity-focused entrepreneurship
education can help the students to be more competent in managing their own careers.

Such self-management also requires identifying opportunities, reflecting a similar recognition of opportunity-recognition ability for careers literature as it articulates opportunity awareness as an important component of career development (Watts, 2006). In fact, such opportunity focus is an important component of self-management associated with successful protean careers (De Vos & Soens, 2008). In the context of entrepreneurship, opportunity-recognition ability involves connecting diverse pieces of information to identify a profitable business opportunity. A similar concept can be extended to a broader career context as well.

References


**AUTHOR**

Shruti R. Sardeshmukh came to academia after working in IT start-ups for several years. Influenced by her work experience, her research interests lie at the intersection of HR and entrepreneurship. Her research in entrepreneurship covers opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial intentions. She is also interested in exploring people issues in small and medium-sized family businesses. She did her PhD at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, USA and has been teaching in University of South Australia since 2009.

Email: shruti.sardeshmukh@unisa.edu.au

Ronda M. Smith-Nelson earned her PhD in entrepreneurship, with areas in strategic management, OB and HR from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and is most recently employed as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Management at the University of Georgia. She holds degrees in business administration and industrial-organizational psychology. Her research areas include the nexus of human resources and entrepreneurship, with a particular emphasis on psychological influences, developing capabilities regarding human resources management in nascent entrepreneurs and cognitive abilities such as opportunity recognition.
In March 2008, the Australian federal government instigated a review into the direction of the higher education sector, the projected ability to meet future needs of students and the community and to identify options for improvement. This review was undertaken by an independent panel, headed by Emeritus Professor Denise Bradley AC (DEEWR, 2010). Findings and recommendations were compiled in the Review of Australian Higher Education Final Report, otherwise known as the Bradley Review.

Initiatives resulting from the Bradley Review are anticipated to see an increase in enrolments of students with a low socio-economic status (SES). The purpose of this article is to highlight the career needs of low SES university students as an area that requires further research and clarification; more specifically, identifying if the career needs of low SES university students are different from students who don’t have a low SES. If so, how can a university careers service meet these needs effectively?

With increased funding from the Australian federal government to improve the enrolments of students with low socio-economic status into university, identifying the career needs of this student cohort is of utmost importance, if indeed they are different from other university students. This will ensure career services offer comprehensive and effective support, and avoid duplication or redundant measures. Findings indicate that the careers needs of low socio-economic status university students are different from other university students. Strategies that were reported to increase the effectiveness of career development for low socio-economic status university students included person-centred counselling skills; careers education across all courses to familiarise and normalise the careers planning process; avoidance of jargon or assumptions of implicit knowledge regarding university requirements; ensuring careers practitioners are aware of the experiences of students with low socio-economic status; up-to-date labour market information; and extending careers support to students for at least two years after the completion of their studies.

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**Career Theories**

As career development practice has evolved, it has moved from a school-based vocational guidance approach to a broadened, lifelong concept, catering for the needs of young adults through to retirees. The spectrum of client experiences, situations and aspirations has progressed career theory to consider more complex career needs and, as career theory advanced, so too has the realisation that diverse populations such as the Indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse, immigrants, people with a disability, those identifying as gay, and people of low SES were under-represented in terms of research, which assumed all people were homogenous in their careers needs (Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004).

Discussion about integrating existing careers theories has been an ongoing area of debate but lack of consideration in the past of minority and subgroups reflected a significant gap in career development knowledge (Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004). According to Hughes and Gratton (2009), in more recent times, research focus has changed to better comprehend the career development needs of minorities and subgroups, by moving away from traditional matching approaches and considering a more holistic and longitudinal perspective, including the ‘influences on and the life histories of persons as they engage in the various roles available to them across time’ (Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004, p. 165).

Criticism has also surrounded the assumption of ideal circumstances that career theories have traditionally been based on. External factors such as a limited labour market are largely overlooked. For many individuals throughout their life, simply having an income and contending with multiple priorities will be a more urgent and significant issue (Savickas & Lent, 1994).

A contemporary careers framework that applies to social status is systems theory framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Systems theory framework approaches a person as being interconnected with their external surroundings, as a part of the larger system (Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004). Reinforcement from family and the modelling of parents, siblings and friends would therefore be taken into account. Instead of fitting a student or client into a theory that assumes opportunity and availability, this framework considers a broader outlook of a person, their perspective and their external influences. Practitioners using this framework would, together with the client, review influences and how these manifest in their life. This approach is relevant to low SES students in particular, as working with a student to review their social environment or their self-concept or both can lead to systemic changes (affecting family and friend relationships) and, in turn, lead to more broad issues relating to careers.

A second approach relevant to the needs of university students and those from a low SES background is person-centred theory, created in the psychology field by Carl Rogers (Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004). This is an approach that focuses on genuine relationship building between the client or student and practitioner, and views the client as the expert, using open communication, demonstrated empathy and mutual respect. This theory aligns with the constructivist approach, whereby practitioners work holistically with clients on important issues in their lives, recognising that all things are inextricably intertwined. Low SES clients would benefit by having a supportive and empowering environment that provides more than just information giving (Lent, 2001). So, when applying these techniques, how do we define low SES?

**Low Socio-Economic Status (SES)**

People can be designated as being low SES, or working class, or indeed simply lower class (Lent, 2001). This can be a fairly fluid group, with varying definitions and features depending on the culture, government or researcher offering the label. Parents’ highest level of education, job status, or an individual’s income level or home address, or a combination of such factors can be one of many demographic indicators employed to classify SES (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, 2008; Lent, 2001). What is generally agreed upon is the societal and individual implications of social class, as insightfully reflected by Herr (1996): ‘A poor person is not simply a rich person without money’ (p. 7). Life experiences and education form a basis upon which a person approaches their career and working life, which in turn contributes to a person’s cultural capital. His or her place in society is a fundamental part of that process.
Career Development Implications of Low SES

The particular career needs of people defined as low SES have been identified as different from those who are not low SES. Herr, Cramer and Niles (2004) argued that ‘socioeconomic status is comprehensively related to career choice. SES differences are associated with differences in information about work, work experience, and occupational stereotypes, which, in turn, affect vocational interests’ (p. 198). These differences about work and occupational experience are further reinforced by exposure (or lack thereof) to opportunities that require financial resources to gain access to, as well as having practical resources such as having a personal computer and a single room to retreat to (Greenbank, 2007; Schulz, 2005).

In addition to missed opportunities, behaviour towards low SES young people can create a follow-on effect as well. In one study, high school principals and guidance counsellors rated basic employment preparation skills to be more important for students continuing into higher education than for at-risk students (Lent, 2001). It seems biases towards low SES students begins early and may continue to disadvantage them over the long term. Literature is awash with generalisations about low SES groups, suggesting they may be less intelligent than higher SES classes, indifferent to educational achievement, possess only short-term goals and lack ambition (Greenbank, 2007). It is unsurprising then, that preconceptions exist towards low SES groups as being seen as responsible for their social location (Lent, 2001).

Career Development Needs of University Students

Figures cited by the Government of Canada and the Canadian Council on Learning confirm that the number of jobs requiring post-secondary education and training are increasing on an annual basis and that upwards of two-thirds of all job openings over the next ten years will be in occupations requiring some form of post-secondary education. (Kirby & Sharpe, 2010, p. 4)

The prominence of career initiatives in higher education has increased in recent years, with high-level strategic plans and policies reflecting graduate employability and career readiness as an indicator of university success (Australasian Survey of Student Engagement, 2010). But who are these students for whom these plans exist and how can a careers service meet their needs?

Career Development for University Students

Of the services typically offered in a tertiary careers service, careers education and careers counselling are standard (Morey, Harvey, Williams, Saldana & Mena, 2003). The effectiveness of each is a moot point, with one-to-one careers counselling reported as the most effective of interventions (Brown & Rector, 2008; Fouad et al., 2006; Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004; Kirschner, Hoffman & Hill, 1994; Watts & Dent, 2006; Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1998). Studies indicate positive outcomes are brought about more effectively and more quickly through this than by any other method and with long-term results. A further benefit to individual career counselling is the tailored and specific outcomes for each person.

To deal with the wide variation in the decision-making processes and career development needs of students (Blenkinsop, McCrone, Wade & Morris, 2006), one-to-one appointments can be offered to tackle preferred individual intervention timing and needs (Howieson & Semple, 2001). But research also shows that those people who would benefit from careers interventions the most are those least likely to seek it out (Harris, 2000; Howieson & Semple, 2001).

A strategy to ensure at least minimal connection with all students is across-curriculum careers education. An across-curriculum approach raises awareness of the career development process and the tailored and specialised career services available to all students.

This leads to the main benefits of careers education, being its efficiency, with often only one staff member required to deliver to a large audience. Across-curriculum approaches also enable mass exposure to career services to many students who would not have otherwise sought careers information or assistance (Folsom, Peterson, Reardon & Mann, 2002; Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004). Although many higher education institutions have indicated that they are

Numerous studies have reported a relationship between the implementation of career education classes and higher education student retention rates (Folsom et al., 2002). But there have been some inconsistent findings within the literature, as some research studies have also found no statistical significance between career class participants and retention (Folsom et al., 2002; Polansky, Horan & Hanish, 1993). Career education participation has also been associated with personal gains in career decidedness and career maturity, decreasing career indecision and self-efficacy (Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004).

With various strategies in place to connect and support students, it is of great importance to continually evaluate their effectiveness and value, so as to spend time, effort and budgets on resources that hit their mark.

**Evidence-Based Career Development Practice**

Evidence-based practice is an area of increasing discussion amongst career development practitioners, policy-makers and governments, with numerous initiatives cropping up in a number of countries to increase and improve employability outcomes for many cohorts of people (Baudouin et al., 2007). The anticipated benefits of enhanced self-awareness and career direction are manifold, with personal, community and economic advantages. Measuring the effectiveness of careers guidance interventions has traditionally proven difficult, as discussed in a UK report by Hughes and Gration (2009), with client self-reporting and surveys the easiest but most flawed of options. In addition, the Canadian Research Working Group for Evidence-Based Practice in Career Development (CRWG) has also been working to tackle the need for reliable research in the careers field. They suggested that there is no one evaluation model that is best in all areas (Baudouin et al., 2007), and recommended choosing an evaluation model that appears to be most appropriate to the context and target group, and developing it as fully as possible.

An important consideration when reviewing the benefits of careers interventions is the issue of causality (Hughes & Gration, 2009; Watts & Dent, 2006). This is a complex matter, in that those students or clients accessing career services and consequently reporting positive outcomes (that is, motivation, positive self-regard, job attainment) may have had these outcomes regardless of whether they accessed career support or not. Perhaps those who seek assistance or act on advice are similar to one another in their proclivity towards action and motivation, which then adds a further dimension to consider when conducting research or identifying examples of best practice (Hughes & Gration, 2009; Maguire & Killeen, 2003). The value of recognising the complexities of careers evaluation is that it contextualises the research climate and highlights why there exists such a dichotomy between variables, findings and methods. More longitudinal and qualitative studies are recommended by researchers.

With all the difficulties in evaluating career interventions, it remains of utmost importance to persist. In order to ensure we are providing a comprehensive and responsive service, reviewing the career needs of different student groups guards against the assumption of a one-size-fits-all approach.

**Career Development of Low SES University Students**

Research has indicated that students from poorer backgrounds are more likely to need support when undertaking further study (DEEWR, 2009; Osborne & Shuttleworth, 2004), and identifying what these needs are can assist to inform effective careers service delivery.

**Low SES University Student Identification**

The previous model for identifying low SES applicants to higher education was through the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Educational and Occupational Index, developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which reviewed and assessed all postcodes based on four indexes. Applicants whose home addresses were in the lowest quartile were considered low SES. For the current funding round the classification has been updated to Collector Districts rather than postcodes and now considers the number of students receiving Centrelink benefits, which is anticipated to more accurately identify incoming low SES students (Payne, 2010).
Low SES University Student Characteristics

Low SES students are more likely to enrol in university if their parents were born overseas or if they come from non-English speaking backgrounds (Rothman, 2003); interestingly, the latter group is also one of two cohorts reporting the lowest academic results upon completion (Coates & Edwards, 2009).

Low SES university students are also under-represented in more high-ranking courses such as law and medicine (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, 2008; Dwyer, Smith, Tyler & Wyn, 2003). Issues surrounding why this is include confidence issues, length of course and cultural capital (are low SES groups exposed to these career paths and people working within them?). University participation for low SES students has increased but has not caught up to other SES group enrolments (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, 2008; James, 2002; Rothman, 2003), with middle and low SES most highly represented in regional universities (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, 2008).

There is a higher rate of course transfer or withdrawal for all student groups enrolled in more generalist university courses, such as arts and sciences (Dwyer et al., 2003), which should be taken into account if significant numbers of low SES students enrol in these courses in future. Further, when considering drop-out rates, the course studied, language background and more than 20 hours part-time employment per week are major indicators (Rothman, 2003). The SES of individuals was not identified as a variable in this research, although characteristics identified as common across the low SES group in higher education were evident, such as courses, language background and employment.

Transition to University of Low SES Students

The transition into a university environment consists of many new priorities and requirements, with learning course material being only one of them. There is new jargon (Harris, 2000), communication methods and often strict guidelines to adhere to. Individuals with access to information about higher education through their family and friendship connections have more cultural capital to understand university language, policies and processes and to assimilate into university life (Greenbank, 2007; Kirby & Sharpe, 2010; Williams, 2007). There is widespread evidence that high and low SES university students have different cultural capital—that is, knowledge and modes of thinking—but there are discrepancies in research findings when considering ease of transition into a university environment between these two groups. Some literature contends that low SES students are more likely to have difficulty adapting to university life and may even choose less prestigious universities because they believe they would fit in better (Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Collander & Grinstead, 2008; Greenbank, 2007). Low SES students are purported to be more likely than others to experience alienation from higher education communities (Greenbank, 2007), to lack confidence in their abilities and to have difficulty in seeing the relevance of their study to future career opportunities (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, 2008). An assumption that lower SES university students need to work more and longer hours than higher SES groups to support themselves and perhaps assist their family was only partially supported (Greenbank, 2007). Low SES students indicated they have more financial concerns than any other SES student groups (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, 2008; Hillman, 2005). However, recent Australian research found that low SES students were less likely to have a job during the semester (81.9%) than high SES students (88.9%), although those low SES students who did have jobs worked longer hours (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, 2008). This research finding was based on parental education and occupation SES classification techniques, which is considered a more accurate index tool than geographical home address alone, and thus increases the finding’s validity.

Targeting Low SES University Students to Provide Additional Support

Discussion abounds regarding the targeting and identifying of at-risk students for support (low SES being part of this group) and how to do so effectively. Proponents suggest doing so very early within their study experience to ensure services are appropriately rendered (Harris, 2000), as is done routinely in the USA, where very specific groups are catered for, such as Latino-Chicano students going into public service (Williams, 2007). This could involve using clear criteria for employing specific resources or strategies.
to enable students to identify and counter the socio-economic restrictions that affect their lives (Bowes, Smith & Morgan, 2005; OECD, 2004). A further consideration would be to actively involve low SES students in the design and implementation of careers support services, which would ensure the content was relevant and more likely to be used (OECD, 2004).

Other researchers argue that students are a diverse community by definition and targeting low SES students would be a fruitless exercise, or worse, generate negative feelings of being identified and separated from their peers (Crozier et al., 2008). In a national review of tertiary careers services in the UK, Morey et al. (2003) found graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds (ethnic minorities, people with a disability and people from low SES backgrounds) did not want to be identified as disadvantaged or receive special treatment, although some disadvantaged students indicated that the services appeared too broad or generic for their needs.

**Academic Achievement of Low SES University Students**

With studies reporting such negative experiences of incoming low SES students, a logical consequence would be expected in low retention, success and completion rates. This is not the case. Lower SES university students have been reported as doing almost as well, or equally as well, with regard to retention, success and completion rates as any other social group in their first year and beyond (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, 2008; Greenbank, 2007; Hillman, 2005; Rothman, 2003). One reason put forward for this is that lower SES students who successfully break the family or social mould into higher education, despite the obstacles, have higher personal motivation or have strong support groups to encourage course completion (Greenbank, 2007).

**Impact of SES on Graduate Employment**

Cultural capital has been considered a factor in obtaining graduate employment, with the job selection process unintentionally favouring applicants who have similar backgrounds and university education to recruiters (Greenbank, 2007). The development of employability skills, which are demonstrated by engaging in paid and volunteer work, internships and extracurricular activities, also enhance the employment prospects of university graduates (Greenbank, 2007).

A major study undertaken in the UK on working-class (low SES) students in higher education found a major influencing factor for students not enhancing their employability skills (such as communication, problem solving, teamwork) while studying was not related to lack of finances or time. Students were simply unaware this was something that graduate employers valued (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008). Low SES students tended to focus singly on getting a ‘good degree’ (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008, p. 6), which they felt would hold them in good stead in the labour market.

Further findings from the report indicated that low SES students had a general lack of awareness of the importance of career planning activities and tended to approach priorities one at a time, which inevitably pushed careers activities down the list, and more immediate assignment activities up the list (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008). This behaviour was reinforced by those around them, who were doing the same. Low SES students reported they didn’t approach the careers service for assistance because of a lack of understanding about the service, as well as being afraid of embarrassment or humiliation due to lack of understanding about career issues. Students preferred to approach people they knew and were familiar with for career advice (family, friends, and lecturers). A very small minority had the confidence to apply for graduate positions.

Upon study completion, low SES graduates have been found to earn less than higher social groups (Greenbank, 2007) but employment rates across all SES groups were equal after five years (Coates & Edwards, 2009). Unfortunately, ascertaining whether graduates were in jobs they were happy in or if the job was simply considered to be a source of income was not established. Other studies have examined the link between post-school pathways and life satisfaction and found that less time put towards study or work led to lower satisfaction levels (Hillman & McMillan, 2005), which is an important aspect to consider when working with low SES university students and graduates.
University Careers Service Delivery for Low SES Students

In terms of service delivery, the policy-makers and administrative hierarchies existing in higher education institutions are arguably higher in social status than the support service users and, as such, may not have a thorough understanding of the needs of those they are servicing. Herr’s (1996) proposition to understand more fully ‘the treatment of persons whose transactions with the environment have been very unfulfilling’ (p.6), and to engage purposeful measures to provide a service that will help to counter that, would appear to have application to low SES student career service delivery in universities.

To do this—recognising the diversity of students enrolling at tertiary institutions—employing an array of techniques to connect with them is an important strategy to bear in mind (Bowes, Smith & Morgan, 2005). Approaches to become more familiar with the difficulties, ethnocentricities and experiences low SES students face include meeting with community groups, professional development activities, secondary schoolteachers, career advisers and the students themselves.

The recent growth of literature on social justice within the careers field (McMahon, Arthur & Collin, 2008a) suggests the need for practitioners to take a broader approach to career interventions, acting in an advocacy role for social reform when needed. This competency is particularly relevant when supporting low SES students, although practitioners generally lack the resources and know-how (McMahon, Arthur & Collin, 2008b). To improve this, incorporating change at a career education level and within professional associations will enhance understanding of social justice and the actions and discourse needed to create systemic change.

Further, as highlighted by Hughes (1995) regarding social justice in Australia, the support programs and initiatives developed for disadvantaged minority groups tend to unquestioningly espouse the attributes that are consistent with the advantaged main group. But advantaged groups often do not use the same opportunity to review and question their own location and outlook in regard to other societal groups. In a university environment, the responsibility falls firstly on the shoulders of the staff to actively review and question programs put in place for disadvantaged groups, as well as themselves. Practitioners can also facilitate the student use of autoethnographies, an autobiography of a person’s experience within their ‘socio-political environment’ (Diemer & Ortega, 2010, p. 16) to extrapolate information and perspective as an additional career tool.

Being up to date on labour market information is another area of importance, with this being a significant factor in making careers practitioners credible to clients (Watts, 2009). A review in the UK on vocational education and technology recommended careers practitioners should undertake a minimum number of employer visits per year (Watts, 2009). Employer visits also enhance career practitioner local labour market knowledge and create stronger engagement connections between universities and the community.

Quality standards and evidence-based practice is another area of focus. In the USA, criteria were created for use by guidance officers in vocational schools to assess their service, which allowed all educational facilities the opportunity to compare their services with each other (Watts, 2009). Another potential approach is giving consideration to widening the definition of evidence-based practice to include both soft and hard outcomes (Baudouin et al., 2007; Watts & Dent, 2006), such as increased motivation, confidence, career direction, as well as job attainment and course retention.

Along with more traditional strategies to support students, such as self-help career information and individual and group careers programs, integrating careers education into discipline curriculum is a strategy being encouraged in Australian universities (Smith et al., 2009). A cross-university approach to careers education would ensure that all students, including low SES students, would be more informed and aware of university career services and the importance of careers initiatives to develop career development competencies (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008). Cross-university career curriculum would also assist in normalising the process and challenge of career planning for those who are unfamiliar with it (Morgan & Ness, 2003).

Extending the availability of careers support to students, including those who have discontinued their studies, for at least two years after they have left is a recommendation resulting from the Harris Report (2000). This will ensure that if students missed the opportunity to use the services while studying, they still have access to support while in the workforce.
Finally, connecting low SES students with local employers and recruiters by offering information and networking opportunities is an important step to consider, with Morey et al. (2003) reporting this student cohort to be lacking in this area. Employers were also found to be more reluctant to attend careers fairs at universities that had a larger number of students from non-traditional backgrounds. As disappointing as this may sound, universities have the potential to be the catalyst for change through effective community relations, better connections with small and medium-sized organisations and career initiatives that will support students in breaking these barriers.

The findings from this literature review indicate that low SES university student career development needs are in some ways similar to and in some ways different from those of non-low SES university students. Differences include lower cultural capital about university education compared with higher SES students, which can affect the transition of low SES students into university life. Low SES university students were more likely to be unfamiliar with university procedures, language and expectations; lack awareness regarding the importance of developing employability skills during study; and to lack awareness about the career development process and university career service. In addition, low SES university students do not want to be embarrassed by their lack of career development knowledge in front of others.

These findings have implications for university career service delivery, including the provision of person-centred counselling skills, developing an awareness and understanding of the cultural capital low SES students have, considerations on how to best market and normalise career development processes and services, and implementing curriculum and career planning across university disciplines. Incorporating low SES students into the design and implementation and evaluation of services would further improve the likelihood that initiatives hit their mark.

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AUThOR

Erin Doyle has recently completed her Master of Career Development, where her interest in the careers needs of different student groups began. She has worked as a career counsellor at Deakin University until recently, having relocated to Canada with her family. Erin hopes to expand her work in this research area in Canada.

Email: emdoyl@gmail.com
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The audience for the journal includes professionals in educational and academic settings, community and government agencies, business and industrial settings. Therefore, topics should be presented with implications for practice. Authors of research reports and theoretical discussions should relate their conclusions to the realm of practical applications.

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Material will be considered for submission if it meets one or more of the following criteria:

- It expands the body of knowledge of the discipline of career development
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Research articles are invited dealing with career development, planning, guidance and education, labour market and training issues, vocational education and training, occupational information, career management policy, practice and programs. Normally they should be a maximum of 4,500 words.

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University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba QLD 4350
AUSTRALIA
Tel: (07) 4631 2375 Fax: (07) 4631 2828
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