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Career guidance in communities:
A model for reflexive practice

The aim of this paper is to inspire practitioners and professionals to leave their offices to bring career guidance into communities that might not identify with career guidance at first. By making the effort to engage with communities, practitioners may bring about a critical change in career guidance practices as well as in the lives of the people in the communities. My argument in this paper proceeds in two parts. The first part considers the collective as a starting point for the development of meaningful career guidance activities. Based on previous research on career guidance in communities from a critical-psychology perspective, the paper introduces a social practice theory of career guidance. The social practice theory of career guidance argues that career guidance can be seen as a collective practice in which people can join forces with career guidance practitioners to analyse their situations and, based on these insights, to create new opportunities of future educational or vocational participation in society (Thomsen, 2012). The second part of the paper moves on to consider practical implications of taking the collective as a starting point for the development of a critically reflexive career guidance practice. The argument is organised around the following seven elements: Creating opportunity, structure and access; Entering a community and increasing visibility; Providing guidance in communities; Exploring potentials in guidance situations; Deciding on guidance activities; Developing, planning and implementing; and Documenting and evaluating. These elements are combined into a model for reflexive practice. Each of the elements is introduced, illustrated and examined, noting important areas for reflection and action.

Key words: career guidance in communities, reflexive practice, context, participation, community interaction, critical psychology

Introduction

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

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

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

The other book that underpins this paper is *At Vejlede i Fællesskaber og Grupper* [Guidance provision in communities and groups] (2013). In this book, I collaborated with my colleagues Rita Buhl and Randi Skovhus to develop a model for reflecting on the practical processes involved in organising career guidance in communities. A further impetus for this paper was provided by two invitational lectures I gave in 2016: The Annual Lecture at the International Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby and a guest lecture at the University of Lower Silesia in Poland.

What is a community and reflexive practice?

In this paper community:
- is characterised by people conducting their daily lives (or parts of them) together in the same physical or virtual place;
- is sustained and created through individuals' joint actions; and
- is comprised of people who have different reasons for being there and for participate in different ways that change over time.

The concept of community has continued to re-surface in the career guidance literature but has not made it to the centre of it. Important contributions have been made by Law (1981, 2009), Hyslop-Margison an Naseem, (2007), Niles and Harris-Bowlsby (2009), Thomsen (2012) and Hooley (2015). Based on Willis (1977) and Roberts (1977), among others, Law (1981) views community-interaction as a "mid-range" account of career management which without overlooking either the overall

social structures or private lives, explores the mutual interplay of the two. Hyslop-Margison and Naseem, (2007) are taking a Freirean perspective to career education and lifelong learning and addresses students in plural. They point to career education as community-based large-scale meetings and small-scale study groups that meet regularly to discuss and problematise challenges faced by the community and to develop community-based ways of moving forward. Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2009) discuss how community settings remain largely unrecognised as relevant settings for the delivery of career development interventions. On their model, communities function outside institutions. This understanding of community is somewhat different from the understanding used in this paper, where communities can be within institutions, but they can also be outside of them. Crucially, communities are created and sustained in their own right and purpose and not for the purpose of career guidance (as opposed to the delivery of group career guidance where the group is established with a view to career guidance activities). This means that people in communities are together in various ways based on geography, race, gender, age, civil status, shared experience of specific struggles and many more factors. Consequently, career guidance practitioners will be approaching communities that already exist.

Finally, Hooley (2015) suggest a radical career education framework where the aims of career guidance are to help people: 1) explore themselves and the world where they live, learn and work; 2) examine how their experience connects to broader historical, political and social systems; 3) develop strategies that allow them individually to make the most of their current situation; 4) develop strategies that allow them collectively to make the most of their current situations; and 5) consider how the current situation and structures should be changed.

Further he argues that this shifts the focus of career guidance towards the collective and foregrounds the need to highlight structural issues as they intersect within individual's career building (Hooley 2015).

A model for reflexive practice

This paper addresses reflexive practice. In her important article "On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner," Cunliffe (2004) draws on the work of Freire and suggests that critical reflexivity, rather than just a technique, is a "philosophy-driven" practice (p.408), emphasising that a critical stance where practitioners interrogate their own assumptions about reality, their actions and their ethics, when combined with the impact of other participants constantly transforms ongoing practices. According to Cunliffe (2004, p. 414), "[c]ritically reflexive practitioners therefore question the ways in which they act and develop knowledge about their actions. This means highlighting ideologies and tacit assumptions – exploring how our own actions, conversational practices, and ways of making sense create our sense of reality." Further, the critically reflexive practitioner recognises a moral

requirement to make opportunities available to others to communicate while being aware of how our use of words, concepts and theories directs our ways of relating and engaging (Cunliffe, 2004). In this paper, I explore reflexive practice rather that the reflexive practitioner, and I do so to emphasise the middle-range level of action – "people in communities" – comprised in the model and the social embeddedness of career guidance practice.

Career guidance in communities: The research

(From an interview with a factory employee)

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

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

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

(From an interview with a folk high school student)

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

Career Guidance in Communities presents a qualitative study of two different institutional arrangements for career guidance: one at a Danish folk high

school[1] and the other at a large manufacturing company. The aim of this study was to understand how career guidance interacts with everyday lives of people and the communities they participate in. The research took place over a two-year period. 15 participants (folk high school students, teachers, employees and career guidance practitioners) were followed for two days each using participatory observation, ending in semi-structured interviews.

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

In many European and other countries, special *institutional arrangements,* referred to generically as *career guidance* (see Cedefop, 2010; Watts, Sultana & McCarthy, 2010) have been developed to support citizens involved in processes such as those referred to by Tine and Poul. This reflects a political expectation that career guidance can make a difference in people's lives as they face a variety of societal challenges.

Career guidance as an institutional arrangement

Studying career guidance as an institutional arrangement (Dreier, 2008, pp. 76 ff.) involves focusing analytically on the fact that career guidance is a response to societal issues; it is an institutional practice that has been established to help remedy and solve particular problems. When career guidance is described as an institutional arrangement, two particular characteristics of career guidance are brought into focus: (1) career guidance as a practice has institutional links that establish and regulate career guidance practices; and (2) career guidance must be *arranged* in the sense that someone must undertake action vis-à-vis practice in order to make career guidance work and ascribe a meaning to it (or not). An arrangement has participants who each contribute to the performance of this arrangement.

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[1] Folk high schools are residential schools providing general and non-formal education, based on the ideas of N.F.S. Grundtvig, a Danish philosopher, poet, educational thinker and clergyman. Courses vary in length – from one week up to almost a year – and are attended by adults of all ages, but mostly young people in their gap year between upper secondary and higher education. The topics vary from politics to sports. The overall aim is to increase the students' general and academic knowledge and skills and enhance their ability and inclination to take responsibility for their own lives and to engage actively in society. Folk high schools receive economic support from the Danish state.

Conceptualising career guidance as an institutional arrangement highlights practice as a societal institution which is arranged for specific purposes; it also foregrounds the fact that specific meetings and activities need to be arranged by the participants to ensure that career guidance takes place and works. In the study that underpins the development of the reflection model, the aim was to study, analyse and understand career guidance from the participant perspective.

The participant perspective

The participant perspective is a particular way of understanding how people are in the world. Within the fields of practice research and critical psychology, which formed the theoretical underpinnings of the aforementioned study, participation is described as an ontological concept: we are in the world due to our participation in it (Dreier, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Dreier argues also that structure is to be perceived as something practical: the arrangement of multiple practices in social practice structures (Dreier, 2008). Critical psychology and practice research employ a dialectical concept of structure, which means that people act together, in and with social structures. "In this way, we seek to underline that structures are things which we create together in various types of human community in which we structure our possibilities for doing things when we act together," as Højholt explains (2005, p. 31). In order to avoid abstraction, structure is not analysed at a general social level. Instead, the meaning of structure is analysed by considering the concrete and practical ways in which people conduct their lives and their encounters with career guidance in particular institutional arrangements. The analysis is therefore decentralised in relation to the actual career guidance practice (Dreier, 2008).

Centred analysis focuses on the practice of career guidance and on the encounter of a guidance practitioner and a participant, asking questions such as: What happens in a career guidance session? How do career guidance practitioners interact with the participants in career guidance interventions? By contrast, decentred analysis is interested in locating career guidance within the context of how participants lead their lives: What is the impact of career guidance on participants' lives, and vice versa? Decentred analysis examines how career guidance interacts with the many different ways in which people handle vocational and educational challenges, decisions and development as well as with the many contexts outside career guidance practice in which such challenges are addressed (in the workplace, with friends and family or anywhere else where people join forces to consider work, livelihood, family, education, career and their past, present and future). With this introduction to the two central concepts which will be used in the analysis presented in this paper, I will now turn to the practical setting.[2]

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[2] For complete analyses, including the case of young people enrolling in higher education, see *Career Guidance in Communities* (Thomsen, 2012).

Welcome to the company: A vignette

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

Erik walks into the factory and over to what is known as the pouring line, where he works next to Jim. The factory is a confused jungle of pipes, huge mixing machines, taps and conveyor belts. They take turns having their breaks so the production process goes on uninterrupted.

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

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

"Then we occupied the wall"

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

Ulla arrived at the company and was shown a room in which a "career guidance corner"[3] was to be set up. She was given a bookcase, a table, two chairs, a notice board and a computer. The bookcase was stocked with brochures about various supplementary training courses, and various job advertisements ("vacancies") were posted on the notice board. The computer was put on the table with two chairs at it: one for the career guidance practitioner and the other for the employee. The career

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

guidance corner was located on the ground floor in a building separated from the production hall and administration offices. Located about ten metres away from the building, the production hall housed, besides the production facilities, the foreman's office, the lunch room, showers and changing facilities.

> Ulla: *The career guidance corner was placed in the corner of this office and we were given a desk and chair. The staff sat over there. I'd already been round and introduced myself. We had a meeting and a couple of employees came over sent over by Tonny. I didn't think it was the best idea, so I started to find job adverts and hang them up on the wall in here. People started coming in to have a look at them. So Tonny and I agreed – or else it was Tonny who said, "You'd be better off coming over here, wouldn't you?" So I moved over there and started using the wall in the lunch room, and settled there and got a desk and chair. They stared at me at first … I was a stranger, after all. And then … it suddenly became obvious that this was a situation they weren't very keen on … They could see me there, so they started to think they were going to be fired any minute now, or the place was going to be closed down, and they knew that redundancies had already been mentioned. So it was a sensitive situation.*
>
> Rie: *I see. How did you cope with that situation?*
>
> Ulla: *Well, at first I sort of tried to … I wouldn't say I tried to be invisible, but I tried to sort of approach them without forcing myself on them. We'd sort of occupied the wall in the lunch room, where I could put up some job adverts so we had something to talk about at least.*

In the passage quoted above, Ulla employs the "visible/invisible" image. She uses the phrase "tried to be invisible" to describe the way in which she functioned in the production part of the factory. But the terms "visible/invisible" also reveal something about the interaction between career guidance and everyday practice at the company. When career guidance practice was located at some distance from the production section, those who decided to look for career guidance became visible to all their workmates when going to talk to Ulla. But when Ulla moved over into the production area, by her own account, she was realised she had to avoid forcing career guidance on the employees and nearly had to make herself invisible in order to talk to them. The intention behind the career guidance corner seems clear, but its location and arrangement in practice seems to prevent the intention from being fulfilled. Ulla decided to change both the location and the arrangement in order to salvage the intention, with the arrangement being a career guidance corner and the intention being the provision of career guidance for the employees who had been made redundant. The physical movement influenced the career guidance practice: instead of individual, private dialogues, it became a more shared and collective practice, largely centred on a career guidance wall featuring job advertisements in the lunch room. The function of the lunch room as a place of informal

interaction influenced career guidance, which, in this new location, could no longer involve establishing a private sphere. As a result, career guidance became more collective, with several people listening in and asking questions at the same time.

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

> Rie: *I've noticed that something happens when you put up job adverts. What is it that happens?*
>
> Ulla: *They all come running (laughs).*
>
> Rie: Yes *(laughs). But not actually to look at the adverts?*
>
> Ulla: No … *no. But the reason is the same. It's not a threatening situation.*
>
> Rie: *And what can happen in an unthreatening situation?*
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> Ulla: *Well, for one thing, they can have an informal chat with me even though it's about something formal. Because they're going to be out of work soon. It's an informal situation so they feel comfortable and unthreatened. If I go too far and say, "Have you sent off that application?" and push them a bit, they can pretend that I'm talking to someone else. This [situation] is not threatening. And then they've got each other – I think that's important too. I think they need to hear what the others have to say. And then sometimes I wonder whether they're actually competing with each other for the same jobs. Although, at the same time, they say things like "What about that? Don't you fancy applying for that one?"*

In this excerpt, Ulla relies on a different form of dualism to describe the movement in practice: the movement between formal and informal career guidance. Instead of accepting simply that some types of career guidance are described as formal while other ones as informal, one could usefully consider what meanings are conveyed when the career guidance practitioner uses the formal/informal terminology. Ulla describes the informal situation as unthreatening, thereby identifying the employees as people who might be afraid. For Ulla, the formal/informal opposition designates, respectively, arrangements in which the employees are willing take part in career guidance activities and ones in which they are not.

A social practice theory of career guidance in communities

Cited above, the passages from the analyses included in *Career Guidance in Communities* (Thomsen, 2012) indicate that the actions of the employees shift career

guidance from the private towards the public sphere; from being organised as individual sessions towards organisational forms rooted in the collective; and that collective forms of organisation interact with concrete places, communities and participants to produce a path to new participation possibilities (Thomsen, 2014).

These include the possibility to:

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

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

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

In response to the positive feedback from and discussions with career guidance professionals, career education teachers and their superiors on the insights presented in *Career Guidance in Communities* (Thomsen 2012), we have developed a model for reflexive practice to support career practitioners in their critical analyses and in designing collective and context-sensitive activities in their career guidance practice (Thomsen, Skovhus, & Buhl, 2013). The model consists of seven elements, as illustrated in Figure 1, below. As my colleagues and I have previously explored these seven elements in detail (Thomsen, Skovhus, Buhl, 2013), in the following I will focus on the particular aspect of community-based guidance provision, only briefly touching on the other elements.

Career guidance in communities – a model for reflexive practice
Source: Thomsen, Skovhus and Buhl 2013

Although the model might suggest a linear process, this is merely a cognitive construct while in reality, it is difficult, if not entirely impossible, to progress through a sequence of discrete and completed "phases." The elements of career guidance in communities are entangled, and reflections on them occur simultaneously. It is our hope that the model can support the development of reflexive practices, "problematising" (Freire, 1976) career guidance practice. The model is expected to support career practitioners in re-thinking the ways in which they act and develop knowledge about their actions. As such, it is supposed to inform practical action since "[t]heory does not dictate practice; rather, it serves to hold practice at arm's length in order to mediate and critically comprehend the type of praxis needed within a specific setting at a particular time in history, (Freire, 1985, p. xxiii).

The first element of the model is: **Creating opportunity, structure and access**. As stated in the first part of the paper, the idea of the critically reflexive practitioner emphasises a moral requirement to make available to others opportunities to communicate. Therefore, the first element is meant to support career guidance practitioners in identifying communities with which to engage for the purpose of making

**Creating opportunity,
structure and access**

Identify
communities,
make contact, and
establish collaborative
structures

Who to contact in order to gain
access and enable community-
based guidance?

• colleagues
• management
• teachers
• others?

meaningful and relevant career guidance activities available to the participants in those communities. While many career guidance practitioners might justifiably feel that the opportunity to step out of their offices is not available to them, my hope is that this paper will inspire and support them in doing so by providing arguments as to why it is important, ideas on to how this could be done and indications of the benefits to be had. Career guidance practitioners might easily think of classes and workshops held at schools, vocational education and training facilities, workplaces, canteens of universities and other educational institutions, organised by trade unions or maybe involving local libraries. But groups of young parents, street communities, residential areas, shelters, sports and youth clubs, for example, are also potential sites of community-based career guidance. Practitioners must reflect on questions such as: What characterises the community in question? Where is this community located? What is this place like? How is it organised on a daily basis? Next comes reflection on how the practitioner can approach the community and gain access. Who to contact? What kind of collaboration is needed? And what structural arrangement needs to be agreed on? As the analyses above imply, career guidance in communities needs to be sensitive to everyday life in and of the communities. The purpose of the model's first element is to consider the specific context and place in which to interact with people in order to gain in-depth knowledge about them, the challenges they face and their experiences and feelings.

The second element in the model is: **Entering a community and increasing visibility.** Here, career guidance practitioners should reflect on the following questions: How should I make my presence known to the community? How can I create opportunities of informal interaction with the community members? Practitioners can use a number of ways to increase their visibility within a community: using social media, exploring the place of the community and interacting or staying at a certain venue. However, practitioners need to be visible not only to potential participants in career guidance activities but also to other professionals, such as teachers, social workers and community workers. Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2009, p. 416) point out that

Entering a community and increasing visibility

When guidance practitioners moves into a community, visibility is crucial

Visibility makes it possible for participants in the community to get to know the practitioner and learn what support s/he can provide

Visibility requires that the practitioner is able to administer resources in terms of time, money and knowledge

career guidance professionals must be able to connect with and access resources from other professionals working in a community. They describe this as a three-step process. In the first stage, other services and/or professionals are identified. In the second stage, personal contacts with support services within and outside the community are established and sustained in order to obtain detailed information on who can access this service and how (What are the criteria? How long does it take? What does it cost and is there a process for referral?). In the third stage an informed link between the person's need and the access criteria to the service is established.

The third element in the reflection model on career guidance in communities concerns **Providing guidance in communities**. Doing career guidance in communities involves encouraging and engaging in dialogue in the existing[4] communities, which most career guidance practitioners can do in the many various institutional arrangements for career guidance in which they participate on a daily basis. Many also have an opportunity to look beyond their institutional basis to identify needs for dialogue around career guidance questions. In this dialogue, the career practitioner exercises the standard virtues of professional career guidance, such as active listening, unconditional positive attention, congruence and empathy (see Rogers, 1971; Amundson, 2006; Westergaard 2010). The practitioner acknowledges also that community-based dialogue serves several purposes as a continuation of efforts to increase visibility, to democratise the use of available resources and to maximise relevance for all citizens. The literature on career guidance reiterates that not everyone finds it easy to relate to the word career, and that those who are least likely to seek out career guidance on their own are often those who might benefit the most from such services (Westergaard, 2010; Roberts, 1977).

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

Providing guidance in communities

The guidance practitioner must participate as a professional

Listen, show one's empathy and unconditional positive attention

To hold back - to take the initiative
Participant positions and connections

Exchanges across individual activities and community

One-to-one consultation when expedient

To remember and to follow up with accurate information

By engaging in and encouraging dialogue in communities, career practitioners make additional participant positions available to the community members. For instance, in the "listening" position, the participants can gain an insight into different possibilities while listening to questions asked and answers received by other people can help them form questions they feel are relevant and meaningful for them. To invite the participants' engagement in such dialogues, the model encourages career practitioners to reflect on the relationship between answering participants' questions and inviting others to take part in the dialogue, while at the same time acknowledging certain participants' need to engage from a listening position. Often, career practitioners feel obliged to give immediate answers to the questions they are asked, but by simply waiting to see if other participants have something to contribute, be it an answer, a new question, an experience or a feeling, career practitioner can invite more participants to engage. This engagement can even be encouraged by questions such as: What do you think about this question, feeling or experience? Do you have the same thoughts? Can I invite you to join in this dialogue? (see Christensen, 1991, for inspiration on "The questioning teacher in action"). By reflecting on the relation between waiting, taking initiative and answering in community-based dialogues, career practitioners seek to trigger the activation and exchange of the participants' own resources, shared experience of problems, barriers to and opportunities for action, and thus to mobilise their mutual support.

The acknowledgement of the resources that the community members can offer in support of one another can be revisited through group guidance activities around themes and problems that, in the view of both the career practitioner and the participants, could benefit from more a structured dialogues. I will return to this in the next section. In an existing community, the participants are together, a fact which

allows career guidance practitioners to engage from a listening position because people in communities are already engaged in that place in their daily activities. From this position, practitioners listens to stories about struggle, success, problems, obstacles and barriers that hinder the participants' career development, and reflect upon how problems could be addressed and where. Particularly the question of where to address problems is meant to draw attention to the opportunity for career practitioners to exercise advocacy with community and through other societal arrangements. This can be done by problem-posing (Freire 1970); by putting pressure on different parties to improve the resources available to tackle the problems; by joining protests of various kinds; by engaging in development projects to lower barriers and build springboards; or by presenting the issues to those who have an influence on the problems experienced by the community (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009, p. 418).

The social practice theory of career guidance in communities (Thomsen, 2012) states that career guidance has a potential to serve as a context for action in which people can join forces to deal with problems and the conditions associated with these problems. To stimulate this, career guidance practitioners are encouraged to reflect upon their possibilities for connecting people who could benefit from speaking to each other. This must, of course, be done with ethical awareness and with respect for confidentiality. That being said, ethical awareness and confidentiality should not be cited as reasons for NOT connecting people per se, but they must be considered in each specific case (Thomsen, 2012). To give a concrete example: During a dialogue in a school canteen, a career practitioner encounters a student who seems to want to engage in the dialogue, but who, at the same time, stops himself from doing so. The career practitioner has spotted a quiet, more private location not far from the canteen and invites the student to accompany him/her. During their dialogue, the practitioner realises that the student finds it challenging to be in college while at the same time being a parent, since most of the students do not have parenting responsibilities. The career practitioner knows of another student on a different course who copes with the same challenge. The career practitioner says: "I think you might benefit from talking to another student I know who shares this challenge with you. Would it be OK if I contact this student to see if he is willing to meet you for lunch? I could be there, too, if you like." In this way, no confidentiality is abused, but an opportunity to join forces and enjoy mutual support is established. Another way of moving career guidance from an individual approach to collective support is to explore if there is an interest in group activities. In the example above, the practitioner could have responded: "I think what you are telling me is very important, and I know that other students with parenting responsibilities encounter different challenges during their studies. I would be interested to find out how I could support you in the best possible way and whether some changes to the structure of the programme are needed. If I were to gather 4-5 students in a similar

situation to explore this further, can I then contact you with an invitation to join in? Would you find this relevant?"

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

The fourth element in the reflection model is devoted to **exploring the potential of career guidance situations**.

Exploring potentials in guidance situations

The guidance practitioner explores potentials by:

• Listening to the participants in the community

• Initiating open dialogues

• Examining the characteristics of the community

• Discussing possible themes for different types of guidance activities

• Need for guidance vs potential of the practice

This element emphasises that career guidance activities, programmes, services and practices should be based on the community and its needs and resources. Specific activities will often be based on individuals' needs as identified prior to and outside the guidance processes (Westergaard, 2009). These identified needs for career guidance guide then the allocation of available resources, sometimes specifically targeting particular groups, leaving the career practitioner with little room for context-sensitive prioritisation. When Buhl, Skovhus and I choose to speak about exploring the potential for career guidance instead of identifying needs, we had a number of reasons for this shift. Firstly, career practitioners have a professional insight into the purpose and potential meaning and effect of different career guidance activities, theories and models and are therefore able to say something about *potential* benefits for the participants. However, that does not mean that people necessarily feel that they need these activities, especially in communities with little or no prior experience of career guidance activities. Therefore, this potential could only be realised if the activities connect with the community members in ways that they consider meaningful. Thus, the potential for career guidance

is examined while the practitioner explores the community together with the participants, talking with and listening to them. It is based on this exploration that s/he becomes aware of possible themes that can guide the design of guidance provision and various guidance and advocacy activities.

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

The next element of the model concerns reflection on how **to choose and decide on guidance activities.** The aim is to encourage career practitioners and their superiors to challenge the idea that practices can be recycled or "taken off of the shelf" for all clients and contexts (Mørch, 2006). The aim of reflexive
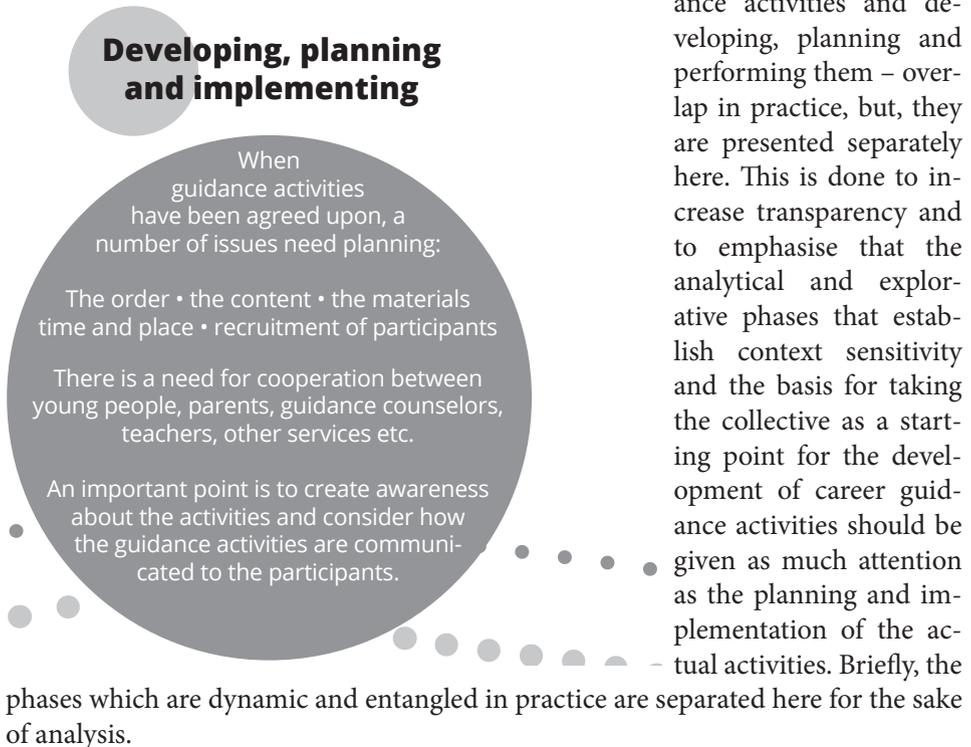
Deciding on guidance activities

Based on the exploration of potentials, the practitioner decides which guidance activities should comprise the guidance provision in the specific context.

They decide forms of organization, activities and methods and collaborative partners

practice within career guidance in communities is to stimulate context sensitivity, to build on the resources of a community and to establish exchange and collective support in finding, sharing and enhancing new possibilities for education-and-work-related action. Based on participation and dialogue in a given community, explicit or implicit expressions of ideas for activities and the exploration of the potential for guidance, career practitioners decide which guidance activities should be offered. This decision must consider the themes and activities suggested by participants as well as the activities career practitioners find potentially relevant based on professional judgement. Initially, the activities proposed by some participants or by career practitioner might not be perceived as meaningful or relevant by the other participants in the community. This highlights the fine line between explaining, illustrating and negotiating activities and the need for all the participants to see that ideas can be debated and discussed. The model for reflexive practice seeks to be inclusive of other theories and models of career guidance as s basis for activities as long as the activities included respect the overall purpose of career guidance in communities.

Having reflected on how to choose guidance activities, we can now think about how **to develop, plan and implement** them. The two elements – deciding on guidance activities and developing, planning and performing them – overlap in practice, but, they are presented separately here. This is done to increase transparency and to emphasise that the analytical and explorative phases that establish context sensitivity and the basis for taking the collective as a starting point for the development of career guidance activities should be given as much attention as the planning and implementation of the actual activities. Briefly, the phases which are dynamic and entangled in practice are separated here for the sake of analysis.

Developing, planning and implementing

When guidance activities have been agreed upon, a number of issues need planning:

The order • the content • the materials time and place • recruitment of participants

There is a need for cooperation between young people, parents, guidance counselors, teachers, other services etc.

An important point is to create awareness about the activities and consider how the guidance activities are communicated to the participants.

Inspired by didactics, the development, planning and implementation of career guidance activities support critical reflexive practice regarding who decides about:

- communication about the activities (To whom are they address? How? Why?);
- how participants become aware of or enrol in an activity;
- the sequence in which activities should take place;
- the content of the activities;
- the timing and location of the activities;
- the materials required to deliver the activities; and
- the necessary agreements with other professionals or (internal/external) parties involved.

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

Being present in a community, engaging in dialogue, exploring the potential, establishing connections and answering specific questions all add up to a serious demand placed on career practitioners. They are therefore encouraged to keep a field diary. Inspired by ethnographic approaches to social research, a field diary can contain observations about practitioners' engagement with the community, ideas for activities and thoughts on why these activities would likely be perceived as relevant by the community members. The field diary can also be used to note specific questions that career practitioners might not have an answer to in situ but will respond to via email, phone, another activity or by sharing information with the larger community. A field diary can be analogue or digital. In the final element of the reflection model – **documenting and evaluating** – I return to the use of the field diary.

Documenting and evaluating guidance activities is as important when practising career guidance in communities as it is in one-to-one sessions. However, it is also important to find ways of documenting and evaluating activities that can convey this specific mode of delivery. For documentation purposes, the field diary can be used to capture and register encounters in the community with a focus on noting: Who did I speak to? Who

Documenting and evaluating

Documentation can be supported through the description of activities in a field diary:

- Who participated?
- What was the purpose?
- What was the outcome?

In written evaluations, it is important to ask questions which cover the various aspects and activities of community-based guidance

did I listen to? Where? What was said? What ideas for activities/important themes/ problems/barriers came up in this encounter? These notes can serve as a basis for documenting the activities at a later stage. When changes are made in the mode of delivery, one needs to consider whether the current form of evaluation can capture this change. For example, evaluation of the **providing guidance in communities** element could be based on the following questions:

- (Name) The career guidance practitioner has sought to engage in dialogues in the community; did you notice?
- Have you asked the career practitioner a question when meeting her in the neighbourhood, library, canteen, workshop, lunch room or other places outside of her office?
- Did you listen to others when they talked with the (Name) career practitioner?
- Does it matter to you that the career practitioner is available for questions and conversations in your neighbourhood, canteen, workshop, lunch room or other places outside of her office?

Evaluation can also concern the relevance, benefits and meaningfulness of the various activities that the career practitioner and the participants have chosen to launch in order to identify needs for adjustment. Suggested questions to support reflection on the documentation and evaluation of career guidance in communities are:

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

Conclusion: Career guidance as a collective phenomenon

The places in which career guidance is provided and where communities live their daily lives shape and limit some career guidance interactions and open up others. By viewing career guidance as an institutional arrangement in the first part of the paper, we could bring the concrete arrangement of practice and the place of delivery into focus. We also saw the participants' way of (not) engaging trigger a change in practice, shifting from an individual mode of delivery to taking the collective of workers as a starting point. This was shown through an analysis from

the participant perspective. The second part of the paper aimed then to introduce career guidance in communities as a model for the development of a critical, reflexive and democratic career guidance practice. Overall, the paper has argued that engaging with communities for career guidance purposes facilitates the development of career guidance activities that can acknowledge and activate the resources of the communities. This builds on the idea of career guidance as a collective practice in which people can join forces with career guidance practitioners to analyse their situation and, based on these insights, to foster new opportunities of future educational or vocational participation in society (Thomsen, 2012).

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

Acknowledgements

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