Part III

Conclusions and Next Steps
Towards an Emancipatory Career Guidance

What Is to Be Done?

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Introduction

‘Ring the bells (ring the bells) that still can ring, forget your perfect offering’ sang Leonard Cohen in ‘Anthem’, offering hope in an imperfect world. He continued ‘There is a crack in everything (there is a crack in everything), that’s how the light gets in’, reminding us that there are always possibilities even where things seem to be solid.

As we write this we live in a world of Trump and Brexit, of #MeToo, of gun violence and young people leading movements against it, of calls for Catalan secession, of striking steel workers in Iran, striking university lecturers in the UK and Finland, striking teachers across several states in the USA and prolonged negotiations about pay, working hours and conditions between the Danish state, regional and municipal employers and public employees. Amongst such struggle and contestation, it seems increasingly clear that Fukuyama’s (1992) pronouncement of the ‘end of history’ was premature and naive. There are cracks opening up in neoliberalism and individuals and groups are ringing bells that herald all kinds of change (not all of it for the better). Our task in these volumes has been to theorise where these ‘cracks’ are and explore which ‘bells’ can still be ‘rung’ with particular reference to the field of career guidance.

We are not, of course, the first to ask the crucial question: ‘What is to be done?’ Most (in)famously, Lenin’s (1902) eponymous pamphlet, penned in revolutionary Russia, made the case for a vanguard of politically informed élites whose capacity to see beyond immediate economic gains qualified them to lead workers to their ‘true interests’. Vanguardism has remained a popular answer to the question of how we change politics and is influential far beyond the Leninist tradition. Such a view has major, and in our opinion undesirable, implications for the kind of politics of contestation and transformation that can be imagined and organised, as well as for the roles that can and could be played by different members of society, including those within the career guidance profession, practitioners as well as researchers.

The concept of ‘multitude’ that we have utilised in this volume offers an alternative to vanguardism. It conceptualises social change in a decentred,
bottom-up way. We are not led by a revolutionary vanguard seeking sovereignty, but rather struggle in many ways and in many places and seek constant dialogue about our common interests. This is what Hardt and Negri (2004, p. 328) call the ‘democracy of the multitude’, although as others have pointed out that it can be difficult to operationalise in practice (Bencivenni, 2006). Hardt and Negri (2000) argue that in a world dominated by Empire, by what we have characterised as neoliberalism, the global multitude will inevitably find new common interests. The growth in access to communication technologies such as the internet creates new terrains for interaction, democracy and struggle. For example, the field of career guidance is increasingly engaged in forms of global dialogue enabled by the falling financial cost of travel, by the internet and by the recognition of common experiences of practice and of careering in a neoliberal world. Such dialogue opens up the possibility for increased solidarity, empathy and exchange of practice and for the growth of the common ground.

But, it is also true that neoliberalism has found new ways to separate people both ideologically and through the crudest approach of building walls and fences. Although Trump has yet to build his iconic wall to keep Mexicans out of the USA, the USA, like 39 other countries around the world, has fortified its borders and sought to prevent the intermixing of the multitude (The Economist, 2016). The notion of ‘Fortress Europe’ is increasingly becoming a sad and shameful reality (Carr, 2016). Career guidance practitioners are unlikely to have to scale a wall in order to interact with one another, but they are constrained by a lack of time, by the imposition of targets and other responsibilising technologies that push them to work harder with the inevitable consequence that they engage less in the kind of dialogue and reflection advocated by Maksimović and Nordentoft in Chapter 15, by Wikstrand in Chapter 14 and by Poulsen, Thomsen and Skovhus in Career Guidance for Social Justice.

There are also other questions about the speed, extent and nature of any move away from neoliberalism and about the strategies that might bring such a change about. Should one aim for wholesale revolution that addresses all institutions in the economic, political and cultural sphere with a view to bringing about a new humanity, free from the shackles of oppression? Or should one instead aim for a more evolutionary approach to social change, with diverse groups contesting different aspects of the social formations they inhabit, and constructing alternatives to them, from the ground up, in distinct but linked ways? Should one have a blueprint to aim for, or should humanity’s utopic and creative impulses be given wide berth, thus short-circuiting the imposition of one form of life by those who claim to have ‘the answer’? Should one attack the state, or should one, in a Gramscian spirit, struggle on the terrain of the state, emboldened by a coalition of progressive social forces? Or perhaps the way forward could be that of building alternatives outside of the state, parallel forms
of life and of sociability that—much like the monastic orders in mediaeval Europe, or the counter-cultural communes of the 1960s—operate with alternative sets of values, institutions and practices, such that their success in finding a harmonious balance with each other and with the environment gives them increasing legitimacy, until the exceptional becomes mainstream by force of example?

Whatever approach to social change is taken, it cannot be considered in isolation from individuals’ lives and careers. At the same time as the multitude is struggling for political change, singular individuals will also be struggling to put food on the table and find meaningful and socially rewarding forms of work. The politics of both production and consumption intersect with people’s careers in both individual and collective ways. The decision to strike may endanger your job (if the strike fails) or improve your working conditions and career prospects (if it is successful). Similarly, a large-scale boycott of a company has implications for those pursuing their careers within the company. There are many other terrains on which political struggles can take place but all of them require people to devote time, energy and creativity in ways that may not always be compatible with study, employment and family life as these are currently conceived. Such intersections highlight the way in which politics and struggle are not separate domains from career and show how decisions about political and civic participation are usefully seen as career decisions and should therefore be within the domain of career guidance.

If career guidance is to be part of a movement for social justice, it needs to find a meaningful way of relating to struggles. Having an awareness of such struggles, finding common cause with them and being willing to talk about this with clients is clearly an important part of this. In Career Guidance for Social Justice and in this volume we have worked with others to build a critique of how neoliberalism shapes and constrains career and explored how career guidance is implicated in this. We have also begun to explore the stances and approaches that career guidance can adopt in order to build on these critical analyses of neoliberalism to engage in struggling for a better world. Many of the authors utilise versions of the Freirean strategy of ‘conscientisation’. Conscientisation suggests that education, in this case career guidance, has a role in helping individuals to understand the different ways in which prevalent social arrangements jeopardise and harm human flourishing. The attainment of such critical awareness requires the mastery of tools provided by critical social theory or pedagogy in order to cut through the representation of ‘reality’ presented through discourse and other means (Thomsen, 2017), thus identifying the myriad ways in which subaltern groups endure what Young (2005), also building on Freire, has referred to as the ‘five faces of oppression’, namely exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.
Awakening the Profession

Social justice work is not typically a part of the education of career guidance practitioners, which, as several authors across our two volumes have noted, more usually draws on liberal, developmental and vocational psychology. The theoretical and disciplinary basis of career guidance is influenced by culture and geography with the guidance community in some countries typically exposed to stronger traditions of critical theory and social justice than others. Yet despite the existence of some critical voices practitioners are often ill equipped to see how oppressive practices prevail not despite, but because of what Young refers to as ‘the everyday practices of well-intentioned liberal society’ (2005, p. 41). Although there are some positive trends, such as the development of the IAEVG (2013) Communiqué on social justice in educational and career guidance and counselling, and the NICE memorandum (2015) mentioning that ‘in line with the relevant UN declarations, training programmes in career guidance and counselling should promote the inclusion of all citizens to participate fully in society, education and work’, there is still a need to create the spaces in which this critique can become embedded into the field. Such approaches might include providing practitioners with opportunities for creativity, experimentation and cross-border, cross-disciplinary and inter-professional dialogue. Poulsen, Skovhus and Thomsen’s work on research circles in Career Guidance for Social Justice provides an example of one such space and Midttun and McCash’s contribution (Chapter 12) to this volume on professional development provides another. Such programmes seek to foster the ‘conscientisation’ of practitioners and increase their capacity to undertake social justice work.

Conscientisation is therefore a key concept in our attempt to reorientate career guidance around social justice. Conscientisation seeks to help us to critically reflect on the manner in which our very desires and aspirations, our sense-making and our values, our passions and our drives have been shaped by the environment we live in, such that what we consider to be ‘social justice’, and whether or not we feel moved to struggle to bring it about, have been deeply impacted by where we stand in the social order. Neoliberalism is not simply ‘out there’; rather, it shapes our very core, leading us to privilege, admire and celebrate possessive individualism over solidarity, for instance, or acquisitiveness and consumption over simplicity and frugality. Career guidance, and also the education and development of career guidance professionals, has the potential to intervene in such psychosocial processes and beliefs by helping people to become aware of, manage and transform these contradictions (Thomsen, 2012).

However, such entreaties to the profession to become ‘woke’ and drive the awakening of others through practice risk ignoring the fact that careers practitioners are workers who are just as subject to neoliberal ideology as their clients. This awareness of the self as a socially located subject is crucial in terms of the nature, depth and breadth of our critical social consciousness. It mitigates, once again, against us viewing the career guidance
profession as a kind of vanguard. The fact that many career guidance advisers are civil servants and in the employ of a state which, in many countries, is increasingly uncivil in its dealings with immigrants, refugees, the ill, the unemployed and the down-and-out, raises questions as to the spaces that are left for practitioners to be emancipatory in their practice, as well as to whether their loyalty is ultimately to the institution, or to the service users—a point that is made in this volume by Nunn with respect to public employment services (Chapter 11), by Rawlinson and Rooney with respect to higher education (Chapter 13), by Wikstrand on norms in career guidance practice in general (Chapter 14) and by Maksimović and Nordentoft in relation to the practice of career guidance in Serbia (Chapter 15). It thus also raises questions as to the extent that the profession is open to conscientisation, to the adoption of a social justice stance in practice and to reaching out to other professions and to those they seek to help to find common ground and to exercise the small but important everyday (political) actions on behalf of social justice.

While a structural analysis of the roots of political action is sobering, it should not lead to cynicism or despair: Gramsci’s (1971) dictum that we need to balance the pessimism of the intellect with the optimism of the will comes to mind here, reminding us that the thirst for social justice can cross social divides, and that humanity has the capacity to dig deep within itself to quarry empathy, care and generosity, and to overcome greed and self-interest (Sultana, 2014). Besides, the proletarianisation and precariatisation of so many workers, including white-collar employees and middle-class jobs in the professions, such as teachers and nurses, for instance—not to mention the apparent threat of the wholesale decimation of work opportunities thanks to automation (see Hooley’s chapter in Career Guidance for Social Justice)—actually render self-interest a motive for class-consciousness and political mobilisation on the basis of what ultimately turn out to be shared class interests. Recently we have seen a glimpse of a realisation of shared interests in Denmark when 750,000 public employees, including social workers, university professors, primary school teachers, nurses, administrative staff and cleaning personnel, joined together to attain better results for all public employees during the negotiations on collective agreements in the public sector. Trade unions believed that this mobilisation saved ‘the Danish model’ for the benefit of the employees. In other words, it is important to recognise that social justice is not merely a moral question but also an economic one and one which is bound up with all of our chances of accessing career development.

A Way Forward for Careers Work

Our view is that, working with a clear understanding of social justice, career guidance can be reconceptualised in ways that address and combat the harms inflicted on individuals and groups, and further their interests, well-being and future possibilities. Transformative strategies are likely to
differ in relation to the groups that career guidance practitioners are working with, as well as the specific contexts in which we operate, since different contexts, located as they are in time and space, present different obstacles and possibilities. This is why putting together a compendium of emancipatory practices is such an important and worthwhile endeavour, as it serves to highlight the multiplicity of ways in which neoliberalism can be and has been contested, providing inspiration both for emulation, as well as for a connective synergy between initiatives that, if effectively coordinated, can constitute—and be built up into—a movement that challenges hegemony.

In *Career Guidance for Social Justice*, Ribeiro and Fonçatti taught us how a contextualised form of career guidance could empower precarious workers in Brazil by allowing them to name their life story as a career and helping them to build a critical consciousness; Poulsen et al. showed how participatory research could serve as a mechanism to raise consciousness amongst professionals and facilitate the organisation and support of socially just practices. In this volume, Chapter 3 offers examples of social justice–inspired interventions designed to be used with people with disabilities, Chapter 9 discusses the development of new programmes which empower low-skilled adult workers in Spain, Chapter 10 shows how interventions by schools can support the growth of social capital and mitigate against class privilege and Chapter 14 sets out how ‘norm criticism’ can help career guidance professionals to challenge stereotypes and queer the assumptions of heteronormative, patriarchal neoliberalism. These examples and the many others that are included across the two volumes show that there is an alternative and that it is possible to find other ways to represent the problems that career guidance is asked to solve and that there are other ways to do career guidance.

While there is no one way of practicing emancipatory career guidance—no ‘recipes’ or painting by numbers—there are nevertheless signposts that can guide and inspire practitioners. We have already identified ‘conscientisation’ as the first such signpost in the quest for emancipatory forms of career guidance, since this entails understanding the social embeddedness not only of the suffering and injustices we see around us, but also of our very worldviews, ideological frames, desires and motives or even a feeling of de-motivation and despair. A deep appreciation of how the personal is in fact political compels us to a make a personal commitment to the political. This is thus not action driven by a heroic sense of self, as much as by a hard-nosed and strategic alliance with like-minded citizens within and outside the career guidance profession that share the same determination to decode the way the world works, and to unpack the layers of complexity and contradictions that hide the often simple realities of raw power which diminish the lives of so many. ‘Conscientisation’ has the social as its focus and target, and it is through social interaction and social action that the different faces of oppression already alluded to can be unmasked, confronted and changed.
In *Career Guidance for Social Justice* and in the current volume we provide some insights and practical examples as to how career guidance practitioners can confront exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. Indeed, the very act of *naming* oppression as such is a political act in and of itself, since it counteracts and thwarts the ‘blame-the-victim’ logic that too often underpins and drives oppressive practices. Many of the chapters across the two volumes seek to deepen our analysis and our shared capacity to name such oppression and to clarify how career guidance relates to it. The naming of oppression therefore can serve as our second signpost towards an emancipatory career guidance.

The theoretical pluralism represented across the two volumes offers us a range of lenses which allow us to see oppressions from many directions and identify many routes that may lead us beyond the neoliberalising hegemony. Indeed, it is this kind of intellectual labour that provides us with a language of critique, enabling us to problematise everyday reality by asking the simple yet all-important question: ‘How does this work and in whose interests?’ The chapters by Bimrose, McMahon and Watson (Chapter 2), as well as by Wikstrand (Chapter 14), are good examples of this. But authors also struggle to go beyond this in order to provide a language of possibility as well, through advocacy for minority rights as in the cases of the chapters by Ginevra, Santilli, Nota and Soresi (Chapter 3), by Hancock and Taylor (Chapter 4), and by Chadderton (Chapter 6), the articulation of alternative value systems and practices in relation to work (as with Wong and Yip in Chapter 5), and showing up oppressive social processes for what they are, thus performing a form of ‘socio-therapy’ to reveal how power is exercised to the detriment of the subaltern (as with the chapters by Romito [Chapter 7], by Ratnam [Chapter 8], and by Rawlinson and Rooney [Chapter 13]). This idea of the problematicisation of norms, assumptions and the structures of power is our third signpost.

Taking up similar themes, and expressing them in different ways, leads to the suggestion of different signposts that emerge from, and connect to, several of the chapters throughout the two volumes, as well as the broader literature that explores social justice issues in career guidance and related fields. A set of signposts revolves around the kinds of principles that should motivate and guide the exercise of ‘conscientisation’ referred to above. Mignot (2001), for instance, working within a liberal recognitive frame of social justice, draws on several sources to propose what he refers to as WISE principles for anti-oppressive practice, whereby emancipatory practitioners *welcome* diversity in society, *welcome* diversity *welcome* diversity in society, are aware of the damage that can be done to subaltern groups if their *image* is negatively portrayed, offers of support to enable people to function well in society, and commit to action, including advocacy initiatives, that enhance the *empowerment* of those they are seeking to help.

‘Conscientisation’, the ‘naming’ of oppressive practices, and the practice of problematisation are valuable signposts in the search for emancipatory
career guidance. In the introduction to *Career Guidance for Social Justice*, we defined ‘career guidance’ highlighting that key components of career guidance are its ability to develop ‘individual and community capacity to analyse and problematise assumptions and power relations, to network and build solidarity and to create new and shared opportunities’ (p. 20). By highlighting ‘solidarity’, we were pointing to another signpost that should guide the direction of emancipatory forms of career guidance. Career guidance should seek to connect people, to help them to find community and mutual aid and allow them to move away from atomised disempowerment. Solidarity is a comfort for those in need, but it is also a weapon that allows people to come together, to discover their common interests and act in concert to challenge neoliberalism and change the world.

These signposts do not just have implications for practitioners, they are also suggestive of new directions for those who research the field, and who are responsible for policy development. This leads us to highlight another signpost, namely that such anti-oppressive strategies need to be explored *simultaneously* at different scales and levels. One way of articulating this is to highlight the way the one-to-one and group activities that career guidance services involve are intimately linked to the institutional principles, cultures and routines that structure practices, which in turn are framed by the broader political context and commitments as well as policy orientations that define and regulate interactions between the polity. The very nature of career guidance offered by public employment services would be quite different, for instance, if at the policy-making level, a government had to adopt flexicurity (Sultana, 2012), unconditional universal basic income, or a citizens’ wealth fund. All three privilege security and solidarity in access to livelihood over precarity, and all three reframe the notion that people are unemployed necessarily due to some personal deficit, whether in competence or in character. Career guidance offered within the logic of any of these three wealth-sharing regimes would be qualitatively different from what we are accustomed to in most countries, and would necessitate comprehensive changes to the way citizens are catered for, the kinds of programmes offered and the very language that is used, where words like ‘activation’ and ‘employability’ implicitly convey the notion that what we have in front of us are either ‘scroungers’ or persons with incapacitating deficits.

One of the re-occurring ideas across the two volumes is this need to engage with what Nunn describes in Chapter 11 as multi-scalar neoliberalisation at a variety of levels. This reframes how we conceptualise career guidance practice and recognises that it will necessarily operate on the micro, meso and macro levels. Career guidance can no longer be seen as just interactions that take place between the individual practitioner and their client. Career guidance also has to act on systems at every level from the familial to the global.
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This is not to argue that there is no place for the intense focus of the one-to-one guidance interview, nor to argue that an understanding of the psychology of individuals has become irrelevant against the bigger canvas of global political movements. Career guidance needs to operate at all levels and help citizens to see the way in which the personal, the organisational and the political are inter-related. If, as so many social theorists have argued, neoliberalism has so thoroughly colonised our life world that we have almost lost the capacity to imagine alternatives, it is absolutely crucial that career guidance seeks to intervene at the level of individual habitus. But it is also critical that it encourages people to look up and seek out the different forms of contestation and resistance that exist. Career guidance should stimulate spontaneous and creative responses, help people to spot the institutional cracks that the Cohen lyrics refer to and work with them to come together into a diverse multitude capable of challenging neoliberalism.

Such reflections allow us to propose five signposts to lead us towards an emancipatory career guidance. If career guidance is to align with social justice it needs to commit to (1) conscientisation; (2) the naming of oppression; (3) problematising norms, assumptions and power relations; (4) building solidarity and collective action; and (5) working at a range of levels and scales from the individual to the global. We do not argue that these signposts offer a complete theory of emancipatory career guidance, but we hope that by drawing them out of the contributions that have been made to these two volumes they can help to reorientate the field and offer a new direction.

If Not Now, When?

The present moment seems like a good time for a focus on social justice to grow even stronger in the field of career guidance. If consumerism and mass media have historically had a soporific and domesticating effect on citizens in ways that not even the Frankfurt School theorists could have imagined, the 2008 financial crisis, the perverse loyalties shown by the state, in close collusion with supra-national entities, towards the haves against the have-nots, and the increasing weight on ‘everyman’ and ‘everywoman’ of precarity, austerity and insecurity have created what Mouffe (2018, p. 7) describes as ‘the populist moment’ which will bring about a ‘return to the political after years of post-politics’. This echoes the verses from The Cure of Troy by Seamus Heaney, the Irish poet and Nobel laureate: while history urges to forego hope ‘on this side of the grave’, nevertheless there are those rare moments when ‘the longed-for tidal wave of justice’ does materialise, ensuring that ‘hope and history rhyme’ (Heaney 1990, p. 77).

Whether that tidal wave will roll in a more just, fair and equitable world, or dredge up right-wing populism fed by reactionary instincts instead, is a recurrent question that is as pertinent, sharp and pressing today as it was in the previous century, and in the centuries before that.
While it is impossible to look around the corner of the future, there are some constants in humanity’s history, among them one captured long ago by the Romans in their concept of the ‘interregnum’. Gramsci re-appropriated the term in relation to the crisis that society was going through in his own time, when ‘the old is dying and the new cannot be born’, an interregnum that gave rise to ‘a great variety of morbid symptoms’. As Bauman (2012) has argued, we are living through another such ‘interregnum’, and it would be nothing short of ludicrous to imagine that career education and guidance can, on its own, turn the tide. And yet such a realistic assessment does not exonerate the field, or us, from the responsibility to do the best we can, mobilising all the means at our disposal as citizens and workers, individually and in groups, in collaboration with our own professional organisations and with those of others.

The strategies for social transformation are well-known and varied, and include policy advocacy, the mobilisation of key publics, gatekeeper campaigns, coalition building, tapping ‘inside champions’, bringing celebrity opinion leaders on our side and of course impacting on institutional and broader political movements, with the understanding that gains in equality and diversity have more of a chance of becoming permanent shifts in power and public norms when they are many and joined-up. We need to explore how our ethical actions and critical stances can intervene into power structures at every level, remaking them in the interest of the multitude. This requires us to act at every level from our families to courts to corporations, in our own careers and the careers of others and of course wherever public services, including career guidance, are practiced.

References


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