Chapter 15
QUALIFICATION STANDARDS FOR CAREER PRACTITIONERS

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Introduction and Driving Forces

Although the term career has an array of meanings, a converging point of view is that career is associated with work (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989; Blustein, 2006; Richardson, 2000). This association is complex due to people's varied experiences with academic preparation, employment, unemployment, and the personal meanings that they associate with careers versus jobs. There are also many variations in people's cultural norms and values about work, their motivation for participating in the labour market, and how they determine their degree of satisfaction or success (Brown, 2002). Further, people's career development must be viewed in light of many contextual influences that support access for some members of society to meaningful employment while continuing to pose barriers for others (Arthur, 2005a; Arthur & McMahon, 2005). Career practitioners are encouraged to review some of the excellent sources that detail the historical development of the concept of career, e.g., Blustein, 2006; Collin & Young, 1990).

While notions of career continue to evolve, career development practices also need to be revised. Career practitioners need to be familiar with the broader changes that are taking place in society and their relevance for guiding career practice (Herr, 1993a, 1993b, 2001). One of the key roles of career practitioners is to interpret for clients how changes in the world of work impact career planning and decision-making. Career practitioners need to be knowledgeable about theories and models that account for adult working lives that are characterised by multiple transitions (Guichard & Lenz, 2005).

Career practitioners may be involved in a variety of roles ranging from direct services with individual clients who are seeking educational or vocational opportunities, consulting to organisations, informing policy makers, and a range of other roles that may involve working directly or indirectly to promote community capacity-building and greater access for clients to employment. It should be remembered that the roots of social justice can be traced to Parson's (1909) vision of social respon-

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sibility in the provision of vocational guidance (Hartung & Blustein, 2002). Career practitioners have a large role to play in advocating for clients who have been disadvantaged by social and political conditions.

Just as the term 'career' has evolved to reflect changes in the world of work, the practice of career development must also evolve. The seminal work of Parsons (1909) left a legacy of trait and factor approaches to understanding people's career development, but unfortunately, Parson's view of empowering clients within their social and occupational roles is often left out of models of career decision-making (Hartung & Blustein, 2002). Contemporary approaches to career-decision making require the incorporation of factors within the individual, interpersonal factors, and broader social and contextual influences to explain people's career-related behaviour (Patton & McMahon, 2006). As the world of work becomes increasingly complex, career practitioners must be skilled at navigating through the myriad of presenting client issues, available resources, and ever-pressing need to prepare people for entering the labour market. The focus on life-long learning is paramount in developing holistic approaches to the provision of career and guidance services (Van Esbroeck, 2002). Given the widespread nature of changes in the world of work, it is timely for us to consider the preparation of career development practitioners for working in local and global contexts.

The purpose of this chapter is to acquaint readers with background contexts and contemporary issues regarding qualification standards for career practitioners. The chapter will begin by reviewing selected changes in the field of career development that represent the driving forces behind national and international initiatives to design and implement qualification standards. The second section of the chapter will discuss the proposed benefits of standards of practice for practitioners, including the changing consumer base. The third section of the chapter will outline some of the difficulties in developing and managing qualification standards. The fourth section of the chapter will focus on recent initiatives to develop international standards for career development practitioners, highlighting promising directions and challenges associated with integrating and implementing tans-national perspectives. The fifth section of the chapter will provide a selected focus on diversity and social justice as an example of how qualification standards can be leveraged to provide leadership for positively embracing changes in the global context of career development. The concluding remarks will summarise key areas for future consideration in the development of qualification standards for career practitioners. Examples of qualification standards and guidelines from several countries will be incorporated into the discussion.

The Changing World of Work

The North American work society has evolved from an agrarian-based, to an industrialised, to a highly information-based and globalised economy (Herr, 2001). The "globalization of business and industry are having profound

effects on career" (Young & Collin, 2000, p. 10). Trends in immigration and mobility between countries mean that there are increasing opportunities to work alongside people with diverse cultural backgrounds and for greater interaction between workers from other nations. There are opportunities and pressures for people to be mobile within and between countries to address temporary and longer-term shortages of skilled labour. In response, educational systems are being transformed through internationalisation initiatives to prepare students for participation in an international labour market. Consequently, students and workers need to shift their mindset to become "globally minded" workers and develop international and cross-cultural competencies (Arthur, 2000, 2002). The implication is that career practitioners need to be informed about work force trends, support clients to acquire skills for working across cultures, and help them to access local, national, or international employment opportunities.

The shift from job-based employment to contingency-based contracts and career portfolios requires a fundamental shift in thinking to connect career development and life-long learning (Patton & McMahon, 2006). In order to respond to changing life circumstances and new developments in work systems and technology, workers are learners who must be prepared to constantly update their skills. The term, career adaptability captures the need for "readiness to cope with changing work and working conditions" (Super & Knasel, 1981, p. 195). At the heart of career adaptability is the capacity for flexibility and ability to fit into new or changing circumstances (Savickas, 1997). The surge and decline of resource-based economies, shifts in consumer markets with stronger demand from emerging nations, and rapid technological advances pose immense challenges for predicting future labour market trends. It appears that workers of the future need to be ready, willing, and able to update and transfer their learning into marketable skills and creative ways of designing work-related activities.

Individuals are challenged about how to chart their academic preparation and skill enhancement to prepare for labour market fluctuations. People must revise their view of career planning and decision-making from a one-time event to a series of learning activities that support their entrance into and mobility within the labour market. It is imperative that consumers have access to trained service providers to help them explore who they are, explore the world of work, and to make informed decisions about charting a course of action to enhance employability. There is currently a wealth of resources available to support clients with planning and decision-making. However, along with the burgeoning growth in consumer products, there are strong variations in the quality, costs, and usefulness of available material. Few products are effectively used as stand-a-lone resources; rather, they should be used in conjunction with a supported learning process of career development planning and decision-making. In turn, service providers need to be skilled at selecting the processes and resources that meet a diverse range of client needs. The emphasis shifts from available products to an emphasis on meeting consumer needs. These issues underscore the importance of qualification standards in the preparation of career practitioners.

Benefits of Standards of Practice

Standards of practice for career development practitioners offer several potential benefits. In the document, *Applying the Standards and Guidelines: A Practical Guide* (Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners, n.d.), five potential benefits are identified for career development practitioners and the clients they serve. These include, (a) enhancing the quality of services, (b) recognising career development as a distinct and specialised discipline, (c) advocating for quality career development services, (d) supporting progress and consistency in career development educational programs, and (e) promoting accountability in service delivery. A number of related benefits are extrapolated from the document and expanded in this section of the discussion.

First, standards outline the distinct practices and qualifications of career development practitioners. It is important to emphasis that the career development field is currently an unregulated industry. This means that anyone can claim to be a career practitioner and offer public service. A major implication is that the academic backgrounds and preparation of practitioners are highly varied, ranging from "life experience", learning on the job, through to doctoral degrees specialising in career development theory and/or practice. There are debates about what background qualifications are minimally acceptable for standards of practice. Most countries have preferred to use the term career practitioner to recognise the broader range of backgrounds that can lead to related expertise and to recognise the broad range of professional services provided. For example, it is believed that the term career practitioner is a broader umbrella term that incorporates specialist functions.

Most standards of practice suggest three or four core domains and then specify additional domains of specialisation. For example, the *Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners* (CSGCDP) (National Steering Committee for Career Development Standards and Guidelines, 2004) outline core competencies in the domains of (a) professional behaviour, (b) interpersonal competence, (c) career development knowledge, and (d) needs assessment and referral. Areas of specialisation are defined as advanced competencies required to provide specific career development services in domains such as (a) assessment, (b) facilitated individual and group learning, (c) career counselling, (d) information and resource management, (e) work development, and, (f) community capacity-building. The core and specialisation competencies define what makes the practice of career development a unique helping profession, "that helps citizens manage and make the most of their learning and work opportunities throughout their lives" (CSGCDP, p. 4).

Second, standards of practice are designed to improve the accountability of professional services. Codes of ethics provide minimal standards for professional conduct. Standards of practice expand upon ethical principles and outline foundation competencies that are required for offering quality services to the public. The *Code of Ethics and Quality Standards in Career Counselling* (Euro/guidance, 2004)

published in Europe provides an excellent example of jointly considered principles of practice. Standards of practice are intended to maximize the competency levels of career practitioners, and conversely, strengthen the quality of services delivered to the public. Consumers are often in a position of choosing between various types of service providers. Standards of practice provide consumers with a benchmark for assessing the qualifications of career practitioners and for strengthening confidence about professional services.

Third, at an organisational level, standards of practice can be used to establish service objectives or improve the delivery of services. For example, a local employment agency concerned with the needs of workers ages 45 and older used the standards to strengthen the capacity of the organisation to serve a more diverse range of unemployed workers. The standards were used in strategic planning to determine the group professional development needs of staff. In these ways, standards can be used to direct current and future learning needs of career development practitioners.

Fourth, standards for practice provide individual practitioners with a template for determining professional development needs. Practitioners can self-assess where they stand in light of core and specialisation domains. Therefore, standards of practice can be used to determine career practitioners' learning needs. This benefit is relevant for practitioners who are new to the field of career development and those who have practised for several years. Individuals who are exploring career development practice roles as a potential career choice can review standards of practice to gain a better understanding about the kinds of roles and functions performed. Practitioners who have several years of experience benefit from reviewing standards of practice to determine new developments and to target learning goals for continuing education topics.

Fifth, standards of practice can be used as framework for curriculum design in courses and programs related to career development. For example, in designing graduate-level courses, the CSGCDP was used as a reference for establishing course objectives and planning the learning activities and course assignment. In one course, the learning activities for classes focus on reviewing topics related to career development theories, ethics, and diversity. Students are invited to access related domains on the CSGCDP standards of practice and complete the web-based self-assessment process called *Taking Charge*, available at http://www.career-dev-guidelines.org. This exercise fosters knowledge development about the related competencies. Students then integrate the completed self-assessment into a professional development plan as one of the required course assignments.

Sixth, standards of practice provide a framework that can be used to advocate for career development services. As noted in *Applying the Standards and Guidelines: A Practical Guide*, designed as accompanying materials to the CSGCDP (available at http://www.career-dev-guidelines.org), standards of practice "provide a framework for policy-makers and funding agencies to understand the scope and contribution to career development. They can be used to lobby for the availability of, and entitlement to, career services" (p. 4). Career development practitioners are encouraged to be active about influencing the direction of services. However, to do so requires

effective strategies for defining the nature of our work, the needs of our clients, and how career development services can make a positive difference. Standards of practice can be used to educate people involved in policy and funding decisions about what we do and the scope of our expertise. In turn, career development practitioners can leverage standards of practice to show funding personnel the types of services that are required to effectively meet client needs. These examples illustrate McMahon's (2004) position that quality standards provide a foundation for shaping a career development culture.

Challenges in Developing and Managing Qualification Standards

Despite the multiple benefits associated with standards of practice for career practitioners, there are a number of challenges associated with developing and managing qualification standards. Some of the challenges include (a) inconsistencies of language, (b) diversity of practice settings and practitioner backgrounds, (c) promoting the adoption of qualification standards by career practitioners, and, (d) monitoring of standards.

Finding an Inclusive Name

Earlier in the discussion, it was noted that the term *career practitioner* is used in most standards of practice as a broad umbrella term to capture the variety of roles associated with career development practices. Debates have occurred about the nomenclature to be used to in directing standards of practice for career practitioners. Although using the terminology "career practitioner" is intended to be inclusive, questions remain about who should be using the standards and if the net has been cast too broadly. Some practitioners have objected to the broader classification term, arguing that their specialisation qualifications need to be recognised. For example, professionals with expertise in career counselling and/or vocational psychology may feel that the term practitioner does not adequately acknowledge their professional training and credentials.

Qualification standards in the field of career development are written for educational and vocational guidance practitioners, including counsellors. However, counselling may be only one of several functions performed by educational and vocational guidance practitioners (Repetto, Malik, Ferrer-Sama, Manzano, & Hiebert, 2003). Counsellors may need additional training to competently facilitate educational and vocational guidance and to meet the career development needs of a wide variety of clients (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2004; Repetto, in press a). Curriculum on career development and career counselling is often absent, available as optional courses, or not seen as a priority in counsellor education programs. When curriculum exists, it

may only be limited to one course that is not integrated with a practicum or direct experience working with clients. One implication of devaluing career development curriculum in counsellor education (Dadgle & Salter, 2004) is that it should not be assumed that counsellors have the requisite skills for providing competent career development services. Additionally, the scope of services extends beyond counselling and may be effectively performed by personnel with backgrounds other than counsellor education. Therefore, the standards have been built upon competency frameworks to outline essential attitudes, knowledge, and skills for specific domains of practice (Repetto Ferrer-Saman & Manzano, in press). It is important to emphasise that career development practitioners should only be performing the tasks for which they have adequate training (National Career Development Association, 1997).

The term career practitioner may also have different meanings within career practice communities across countries and be more or less accepted as representative of professional identity. A major challenge then, in developing standards of practice is the issue of applicability to a broad range of practitioners across a broad range of practice settings. For example, the disparity of roles and tasks performed by career practitioners poses a challenge in defining the core components of practice. In other words, common standards of practice need to be defined as a foundation for all practitioners. In turn, the public can hold expectations about the basic qualification standards held by practitioners in any area of career development practice.

Diversity of Practice Settings and Roles

The diversity of practice settings and roles poses as both strengths and limitations in articulating standards of practice. For example, the field has grown beyond individual client services for career decision-making. Standards of practice need to be sufficiently broad for all practitioners to see their roles and functions represented. However, there are also objections raised when practitioners feel pressured to incorporate standards of practice that are not applicable to their roles. For example, practitioners with a clear scope of practice for serving individuals may not see the relevance of standards in domains directed at community-capacity building or policy-making. Consequently, there is a need for both core requirements in standards of practice along with flexibility of specialisations so that all practitioners can see their roles and functions reflected.

Considerable time, expertise, and dedication has been given to the development of standards of practice for career practitioners. Personnel involved in the developmental stages of such initiatives are indeed the champions in promoting their utility for the field of career development. However, the development of standards must be accompanied by efforts to gain recognition of their importance and acceptance by career practitioners. Otherwise, the fate of standards of practice will be seen as the domain of only a few with vested interests, and not be integrated into practice settings and associated roles. The rationale for adhering to the standards, and their

usefulness for career practice, need to be clearly articulated. The bottom line for any professional initiative is that people need to be able to see the benefits for themselves, for their practice, and for their clients.

The field-testing process associated with the development of the CSGCP provides an excellent example of bridging the written competencies with practice. A range of pilot projects were funded with the requirement of providing feedback regarding the standards (Hiebert, in press). This provided the opportunity for hundreds of career practitioners in Canada to be exposed to the standards and to give input into their applicability for practice. The *Promising Practice* document (National Steering Committee for Career Development Standards and Guidelines, 2003) provides examples of how the CSGCDP have been incorporated into a wide range of practice settings.

Adoption of Qualification Standards

Promoting the adoption of qualification standards by career practitioners requires an integrated effort at both pre-service and in-service levels of practice. As illustrated earlier in the discussion, educational curriculum can be designed to expose students to standards of practice on general terms and in targeting specific curriculum objectives. This provides students with the expectation that standards of practice should guide their subsequent practices and provides opportunities for trying out the standards through course assignments and discussions. Perhaps the bigger challenge is to promote the adoption of standards through continuing education for practitioners in the field. Partnerships with professional associations, ongoing workshops and other training opportunities, and promotion of the standards through written materials and website information are paramount. The ideal scenario is to support practitioners to move from a position of considering the standards as something external to their roles to actively incorporating standards and using them for ongoing professional development planning.

Assessment and Monitoring Issues

The development of standards of practice was intended to provide guidelines for career practitioners about the kinds of competencies that support their roles. The development of self-assessment tools is an important step to help practitioners monitor their current levels of competencies and to target areas for future learning. Despite the utility of such initiatives, there are issues associated with compliance and monitoring. Key questions are raised, such as "How will the standards be monitored?", and "What methods can be used to assess competences associated with standards of practice?"

Currently, the standards are monitored predominantly through self-assessment methods. That means that individual career development practitioners are responsible for reviewing the standards, defining their personal competencies, and taking responsibility for learning activities to improve their competencies. An emphasis on self-assessment is positive in that it relies on the professionalism of practitioners for self-monitoring and targeting their learning needs. However, self-assessment of competencies is plagued by discrepancies between *knowing that* and *knowing how*. For example, practitioners may be familiar with the content of competencies but not have sufficient skills for translating competencies into practice. For example, standards of practice associated with diversity usually contain competencies associated with respect for clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. One can have an intellection appreciation of diversity but that may not match with personal attitudes, nor does knowledge automatically translate into respectful career practices (Arthur, 2006) The bottom line is that standards of practice are intended to improve practitioner competencies in key domains of attitude, knowledge, and skills. This requires further consideration of what kind of behavioural indicators can be linked to specific competencies.

Although a number of instruments have been developed for the purpose of evaluating counselling skills (Repetto et al., in press a), these instruments are fraught with issues of reliability and validity. A key concern is that practitioners overestimate their abilities. Self-report questionnaires may measure the desire to posses and utilise specific competencies but not provide accurate information about actual abilities (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Observation of practice is suggested as a supplement to self-assessment measures. However, there are additional methodological issues such as consistency between raters, and the expense and time required to use an external evaluator. The subjectivity of an evaluator can also be problematic as evaluation is not value-neutral (House, 2004). Biases may be introduced when standards for performance are evaluated according to personal preferences. The use of career portfolios is suggested as a method for practitioners to document the ways in which they are applying competencies in practice. Portfolios may include formal and informal evaluation, documentation from clients, supervisors, and other artifacts to authenticate the nature of a practitioner's experience and related competencies.

The emphasis in this discussion has been placed on the responsibility of career practitioners for monitoring their adherence to standards of practice. There are considerable debates about the responsibilities of professional associations for monitoring standards of practice. Professional associations who adopt qualification standards for career practitioners typically emphasise the standards as a condition of joining the association. However, it is unclear as to their role in providing leadership, training, and monitoring of adherence to standards of practice. Perhaps as professional associations associated with career development become more formalised, more discussion will take place regarding how standards of practice are integrated into membership renewal. Until career development practice is regulated and receives a professional designation the monitoring function rests with compliance by individual practitioners.

International Standards of Practice for Career Practitioners

The need for career development services has gained increasing recognition worldwide (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2004; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2002; Watts & Sultana, 2004). There are wide disparities across countries regarding client access to counselling and guidance services, particularly for people seeking assistance outside of the school system (Hiebert & Borgen, 2002). There is also wide variation across countries in the professional training available to practitioners involved in counselling and guidance functions. As different countries attempt to improve the career development services available to a wider range of clientele, it is important/timely to consider the main competencies that define career development practice in the international arena (Repetto, in press b).

Although national qualification standards for career practitioners have been developed in several countries, they tend to be directed towards the national context of career development practice, for example, United States, Canada, Australia. In the increasingly global world of work, it is important to ascertain the kinds of competencies that define the work of career practitioners that would transcend national borders. A publication in Europe (Euro/guidance, 2004) resulted from collaboration by colleagues in the fields of education and labour for the development of codes of ethics and quality standards.

An exemplary initiative was undertaken by the International Association of Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) to lead the development of *International Competencies for Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioners* (Repetto et al., 2003). This initiative focused on establishing a common ground for practitioners in clarifying the competencies that career practitioners require to effective work with their clients, regardless of specialisation or country of residence. According to Hiebert (in press), international competencies have the potential to foster practitioner self-awareness, determine professional education and training needs, and support closer working relationships for all stakeholders involved in the delivery of career guidance services. Details of the process involved in developing the *International Competencies* are available on the IAEVG website (IAEVG, 2003) and in a forthcoming research monogram (Repetto, in press a) to be published in the *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*.

The work completed by the steering committee who led the International Standards initiative raises the bar in terms of how we view the work of career development practitioners, how they might be viewed by their clients, and in defining specific competencies that underpin the practice of career development. This initiative demonstrates how leaders in the field of career development can collaborate across countries, languages, and practice contexts to negotiate agreement about career development in the global arena. This groundbreaking work is to be commended for opening another level of dialogue about the global applications of career development practices and the competencies required to

support practitioners and their clients. It sets the stage for the process of establishing international credentials which will support the identification of practitioners who can work both within and across countries.

Challenges for Integrating International Standards

Despite the appeal of developing international standards for career development practitioners, there are a number of challenges associated with integrating and implementing tans-national perspectives. Some of these challenges are related to issues of representation and the cultural and contextual validity of standards of practice within and across nations.

A number of key steps were taken in developing the IAEVG International Standards (Repetto, in press a). Experts from specific countries provided feedback regarding the content of the competencies. The IAEVG process involved nine content experts representing Argentina, Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Slovenia, South Africa, and United States, with a broad range of background expertise and experience in different practice settings. Incorporating expert review in the early stage of competency development is considered to be a strength as it encourages multiple opinions to be incorporated. The use of expert opinion through approaches such as the Delphi technique (Collins, 1998; Martorella, 1991; Spinelli, 1983) is considered as a valuable method in research; however, it is important to be transparent about whose perspectives are privileged. One of the inherent issues in developing international standards is determining which experts should speak for many nations. To what extent can a small number of people adequately represent the diversity of opinion within a single country and be relevant for other countries and cultures?

In subsequent phases of the pilot background research to develop the competencies within the international standards, efforts were made to include career practitioners from various roles, types of service provision, and practice settings. Therefore, steps were taken to diversify the sample in terms of practitioners and their practice settings when data was gathered for the pilot study and the main study. The questionnaire was also translated into seven languages, including Spanish, English, French, German, Italian, Greek and Finnish. These efforts enhanced the quality of data collected regarding the competencies which practitioners consider important for their work, and also the training they have received.

Issues of Representation and Cultural Validity

Although the research process used for the pilot and main study in developing the International Standards followed an impressive process, there are some limitations. Specifically, concerns must be raised regarding representation and cultural validity.

For example, the geographical areas represented in the distribution of the pilot study data show a higher number of participants from Eastern Europe, Japan, and South and Central America, with lower participation rates from European Union member States. The pilot study data also illustrates that reaching consensus about the competencies that should comprise international qualification standards is difficult. For example, one of the groups who rated the competencies very high was from countries in South and Central America. In contrast, a smaller number of participants from the European Union and Japan were more critical of the proposed competencies (Manzano, Ferrer-Sama, & Repetto, in press). Despite efforts to include a broad range of practitioners, the majority of participants who provided responses are those who work in educative and/or employment work settings, with few participants coming from other community settings.

Similar issues pertaining to sample representation are evident in the main study in which practitioners completed a questionnaire based on the final version of the international competencies (Repetto, Ferrer-Sama, & Manzano, in press b). This research provided evaluation of 11 core competencies (that every practitioner must have regardless the tasks they perform) and 81 competencies that were distributed in 10 areas of specialisation. Although a sample size of more than 800 practitioners is noteworthy, it is important to consider that data was collected from practitioners in eight geographical areas and there was considerable variation in the response rates. Access to participants within some geographical areas was limited. For example, due to the inadequate number of respondents, data obtained from Asia and Africa was not included. Issues of generalisability arise when data is used from only a few respondents from individual countries within such large geographical areas such as the European Union or Latin America.

Future Directions

As the emphasis on career development shifts to the global arena, it is timely to be reflective about the utility of international standards of practice. The effort expended in the process of developing IAEVG's International Standards is commendable; this research marks the first extensive examination of competency based career practitioner training needs at an international level. In total, more than 900 career practitioners from 39 countries were involved in identifying the most relevant competences and in evaluating the competencies for which further training is needed (Repetto, in press b). Nonetheless, we must exercise caution about the cultural and contextual validity of international standards. A key question remains to be answered: how well do the international standards apply trans-nationally and across practice settings? The relevance of practitioner competencies, including the roles and functions assigned to them, differs according to countries (Manzano et al., in press). All standards of practice must be considered as "living documents" to be tested and revised through additional exposure to practitioners working in a variety of roles, job functions, and in a variety of practice settings. Future research is also

required to consider how well the international standards serve career practitioners in other countries and practice contexts, for example, emerging countries where career development practice is in its infancy and in countries such as Thailand where there is a large and well organised national association of guidance counsellors. The next steps appear to be reaching out to a larger audience of career development practitioners to incorporate their perspectives about foundation competencies that support effective service provision.

Expanding Social Justice Competencies in Standards of Practice for Career Development Practitioners

As previously stated, there is growing interest in career development services in many different countries to meet the needs of a broad range of consumers (OECD, 2004; UNESCO, 2002; Watts & Sultana, 2003). Shifting borders of trade, travel, and immigration are impacting employment patterns throughout the world, including who is available for work in an international labour market (Arthur, 2000, 2002). Although some may argue that the attention paid to globalisation is to promote capitalism and address skilled labour shortages, there are also opportunities to mobilize career development services to address social and economic inequities (Watts, 2000). We can no longer ignore the fact that the career development of individuals within many countries is strongly influenced by the systems that surround them, acknowledging broad, systematic societal inequities and oppression (Hansen, 2003). Within and across nations, there continue to be social and political forces that limit career development of individuals and there are inequities in terms of who can access career-related resources and services. More attention needs to be paid to the structural barriers that impede the career development of individuals who are disproportionately represented by individuals from non-dominant groups in our society (Arthur, 2005b). As a guiding value, social justice is a strong foundation from which to guide career practitioner roles and career interventions. Consequently, as standards of practice are developed and implemented, it is timely to consider how they may be leveraged to address social justice issues in career development.

Although there may be general agreement about the importance of social justice, there are many perspectives about the meaning of this term. It is even less clear how the concept of social justice should be applied in the practice of career development. Perspectives on social justice incorporate a number of principles related equity, self-determination, and fair distribution of resources (e.g., Prilleltensky, 1997). Emphasising distributive justice, social justice is a value directed towards the "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure" (Bell, 1997, p. 3). Helping people meet their needs for safety, security, and helping them to access resources is inextricably linked with the work performed by career practitioners. However, we might also incorporate ideas from

Young's (1990) work on the politics of difference in which it is argued that social justice should involve helping people reach their full potential. Guichard (2003) challenged us to consider the ultimate goals of today's career guidance practices. A focus on human development is central to the work of career practitioners in helping others to achieve their full potential. Blustein (2006) argued for an emancipatory communitarian approach to foster a better balance between the self-determinism of individuals and needs of the community. A common element in these perspectives on social justice is acknowledging the role that dominant cultural values and mores have in shaping concepts of career, notions of "on-track" and "off-track" career development, and how we define career problems, interventions, and suitable resources. Social justice interventions focus on advocacy for "helping clients challenge institutional and social barriers that impede academic, career or personal-social development" (Lee, 1998, pp. 8–9). This requires career practitioners to think of themselves as agents of social change. Lee (2007) noted that counselling for social justice requires a paradigm shift in which professionals need to step outside of their usual roles, and examine how their personal and professional values are committed to social justice. This call for action appears relevant for the practice of career development.

The General Assembly of IAEVG has taken an important stand in linking advocacy and leadership at the core of career development practice. Social justice is named as a foundation competency in the *International Competencies for Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioners* (Repetto et al., 2003): *Demonstrate advocacy and leadership in advancing clients' learning, career development and personal concerns*. This is an important statement in naming social advocacy as a core value in career development practice. However, there is considerable work to be done to help translate the value of social justice into career development practices.

An overriding issue is that standards of practice are inevitably limited in terms of scope and depth. They are often written to provide entry-level guidelines for practice and there are variations in how practitioners build upon core and specialisation competencies. Aspirational guidelines provide a starting point for addressing competencies for quality practice but they often do not provide sufficient depth of detail to support practitioners in translating standards into practice. To illustrate, diversity competencies are incorporated as core content in the *Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners* (National Steering Committee for Career Development Standards and Guidelines, 2004) and in the Counseling Competencies of the National Career Development Association (NCDA, 1997) in the United States, and in standards of practice for the careers industry in Australia (McMahon, 2004; Miles Morgan, 2005). Diversity competencies tend to be associated with interpersonal skills for working with individuals. However, diversity competencies need to be understood and practiced as fundamental to developing and effective working alliance in career development practice (Arthur & Collins, 2006). From the European context, Launikari and Puukari's (2005) edited collection provides several papers that illustrate the importance of diversity competencies for the provision of effective guidance and counselling.

A key debate is whether diversity competencies go far enough in specifying how to help clients overcome some of the external barriers that impact their career development (Arthur, 2005a, 2005b). There is a growing literature challenging the role of career practitioners as social agents in which their roles are constrained to helping people adjust to difficult conditions or circumstances in their environment. Helping people adjust to oppressive conditions does nothing to change the environmental influences that are negative or debilitating influences on people's career development (Vera & Speight, 2003). Alternatively, career practitioners could actively focus on empowering individuals and community groups to overcome barriers that adversely impact their career development (Cook, O'Brien, & Heppner, 2004; Herr & Niles, 1998). Lee (1998) stated that the goal of social action "is both remedial and preventive in nature. Social action aims at preventing individual from returning to disempowering environments by establishing social structures that empower people" (p. 12). On an international level, there is growing concern that sensitivity to cultural differences falls short of addressing the social, economic, and political systems that are inextricably linked to employment access and mobility. In order to help individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds overcome systemic barriers, career practitioners need to be informed about social justice and how they can incorporate multiples levels of career development interventions (Arthur & Collins, 2005; Arthur & McMahon, 2005).

The incorporation of social justice as an overriding value in standards of practice is an important direction. However, there is considerable work to be done to translate the value of social justice into an expanded scope of career development practices. The next step is to articulate the specific competencies that would support social justice practices in career development. As a starting point for this discussion, Arthur (2005a) provided examples of social justice competencies that are represented by five domains:

1. Knowledge about the potential impacts of systemic forces, including oppression, on the presenting career issues of clients
2. Consultation with local community groups to direct strategic planning about career development services
3. Expansion of career development interventions to include multiple roles and multiple levels of intervention
4. Increasing client access to services and the availability of culturally appropriate career resources
5. Professional development for increasing competencies related to social justice and career development

We appear to be at a crossroad in connecting social justice with career development practices. Although there might be general agreement that this is a desirable direction, this needs to be followed by commitment that leads to action. A critical point is raised regarding scope of practice for career practitioners. Is the primary role of career practitioners to work with individuals using remedial interventions and helping people to adapt to their environment, or is it to improve the conditions that enhance people's career development through interventions aimed at personal empowerment

or social change? Community capacity building needs to be more directly aligned with social justice initiatives for helping client groups to increase their agency for self-sufficiency and self-determination. This places career practitioners in an active facilitative role for helping to improve community access to career opportunities and resources. There is strong potential for career practitioners to increase their involvement in community capacity building. Competencies for community capacity building outlined in the CSGCD (National Steering Committee for Career Development Standards and Guidelines, 2004) are relevant for social justice but are not explicitly documented in this way.

A more challenging point is whether career practitioners actually see themselves and their roles connected to social justice. If career practitioners are not willing or able to function in advocacy roles for their clients, it does not seem reasonable to expect clients to address social change by themselves. The further development of social justice competencies in standards for career development practitioners requires systematic examination of how career development practice is linked to social justice, how career practitioners apply social justice interventions, and the barriers and enablers that they face in service delivery.

A research initiative in Canada and Australia funded by the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada is designed to address these gaps (Arthur, 2006). The project involves a review of conceptual literature to derive competencies in the domains of self-awareness, knowledge, and skills related to social justice. Similar to the process involved in the development of the International Standards, 10 content experts were invited to provide feedback and recommendations regarding the wording of the competency statements. The final version of the *Social Justice and Career Development Survey* (Collins, Arthur, & McMahon, 2007), consists of 41 competency statements and is designed for administration on-line. Career practitioners will also be asked to describe their understanding of the linkage between social justice and career development practices, provide examples of critical incidents related to social justice interventions, and describe any barriers that they have faced for implementing social justice competencies in their roles as career practitioners. Data collection was completed in 2007. This research will potentially offer many insights into the ways that career practitioners view social justice competencies and their ratings of current competency levels. In turn, the research has strong potential to provide examples of social justice interventions, perceived barriers, and directions for future training.

Ultimately, the competencies outlined in standards of practice need to be linked to the training of career development practitioners. Social justice competencies are no exception. Even though career practitioners may recognise the importance of systemic influences on the lives of their clients, they often lack training about how to implement related interventions (Burwell & Kalbfleisch, 2007; Hansen, 2003; Herr & Niles, 1998). Curriculum for career practitioners typically provides an overview of barriers to career development, minimal content on systems theories, and does not sufficiently prepare students with competencies for addressing systemic change. Additional curriculum content to broader social and structural issues was one of the key priorities identified at a think tank on the future of career counsellor education in Canada held in November, 2006 (Burwell & Kalbfleisch, 2007).

Career practitioners often lack understanding about what it means to be an advocate and what kinds of activities might be adopted to improve social conditions. Revisions to career development curriculum are needed to help practitioners see the importance of social justice as an underlying value to their work and to translate that value into practical career intervention strategies at individual, group, and systems levels. If we are to enhance the inclusiveness of career development services for people from all cultures and from all countries, practitioners must be adequately trained to incorporate social justice competencies into career development practices.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter outlines background information regarding qualification standards for career practitioners, including their purpose, and some of the benefits and challenges associated with developing career practitioner competencies at national and international levels. To recap, the movement towards competency-based standards of practice is to provide direction about the common and specialisation attitudes, knowledge, and skills required of career practitioners in a variety of practice settings and in a variety of roles. Standards of practice define foundational competencies that are important for delivering quality services in the practice of career development. They provide a common language for helping multiple shareholders to understand the nature of career development practice and what to expect from service providers. In summary, standards of practice are a key reference for the education of new practitioners and for the continuing education of practitioners in the field.

The development of standards of practice is one of the most important initiatives undertaken to consolidate the practice of career development. Considerable effort has been expended on determining scope of practice, wording of documents, gathering feedback from practitioners, and launching standards of practice in several countries. Plant (2004) observed that power issues lie embedded with the development of such efforts, including who defines, maintains and controls qualification standards. There are also issues associated with the maintenance of the standards. For example, who will 'house' the standards, who will regulate them, and who will ensure that they are updated? It may seem logical for standards of practice to be adopted in principle by career development associations, and indeed, many members have toiled to bring standards of practice forward as a priority for members. Several professional associations, including IAEVG, are moving to the next step of using standards of practice as the basis for determining membership credentials. However, it will take ongoing resources of time, financial support, and personnel, to provide the kind of support and infrastructure necessary for charting future directions. It will take concerted effort to ensure that standards of practice continue to be adequately promoted. It is also essential that a process of review is built into the longer term planning process, following the initial development and implementation phases. We do not know the extent to which qualification standards for career

practitioners are utilised nationally and internationally. Research initiatives are needed to provide this information.

Given the rapid changes in the world of work, we need to continually assess the relevancy of standards of practice for supporting the work of career practitioners. If the past predicts the future, our roles and functions will in career development practice will continue to evolve. The rapid pace of change requires a parallel process to make sure that our standards of practice are relevant for the work performed in the field of career development.

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