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REVIEW ESSAY[1]

Career guidance re-viewed: tiger, tiger, burning bright?

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International handbook of career guidance, edited by J.A. Athanasou and R. Van Esbroeck, Dordrecht, Netherlands, Springer, 2008, 744 pp., £220.50, ISBN 9781402062992

Introducing the handbook

There are many ways to write a book review. I have opted to approach this particular volume in ways that attempt to (a) highlight some of its many achievements, in the hope that readers are encouraged to either purchase it, or at least, given its hefty price, to order it for their institutional library, and also to (b) engage with some of the issues it raises in order to reflect on the state of career guidance more broadly. The volume, after all, represents a major undertaking, with no less than 35 chapters, covering just over 700 pages, authored by some of the best known researchers in the field. While most of the authors and co-authors hail from North America (five are based in Canada, 19 in the US), there is an effort to provide perspectives from other contexts, with contributors from Australia (3), Belgium (3), Bosnia (1), Croatia (3), Denmark (1), France (2), Hong Kong (1), Israel (2), Italy (3), Netherlands (3), New Zealand (2), Portugal (1), South Africa (1), Switzerland (2), the United Kingdom (3) and Zambia (1) – to some extent meriting, therefore, the adjective *International* in the title of the handbook.

Many of these authors are clearly inspired by US theoretical frameworks and literature, thus underscoring the dominance of American paradigms in the field, and its status as a 'referent', even if contributors do not shy away from criticising and contesting its hegemony. Authors, however, seem to have been invited to reflect critically on what career guidance might mean in diverse national, regional and social contexts. The editors are honest and modest enough to admit that, despite their considerable efforts to ensure that career guidance is presented as a socially constructed and situationally embedded practice, highly dependent on the surrounding environment for both its meaning and the modes of its delivery, much remains to be done. 'We look forward to the day,' they claim, 'when there will be a wider

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[1]The Book Reviews Editor welcomes review essays on landmark publications in the field of guidance and counselling. Please contact Léonie Sugarman (leonie.sugarman@cumbria.ac.uk) with suggestions if you are interested in undertaking such a review.

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international representation of cultural views, so that career guidance is not seen as a purely western phenomenon' (p. viii).

The concern with representing a diversity of perspectives is one of the threads running throughout the volume, revealing a strong editorial agenda that ensures that the diverse contributions do not read in isolation from each other, but cumulatively contribute to an organic intellectual project. Part of the project underpinning this volume is the attempt to define the field, and to show that it is a coherent and structured one at that. In that sense, therefore, the *Handbook* aspires to articulate a knowledge base for all those involved in researching, writing about and delivering guidance, representing a synthesis of the field. This is a timely endeavour. Career guidance has arguably never been as much in the policy limelight as over the past 10 years, with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD) review (2004), launched in 2000, triggering a spate of related studies by a range of organisations such as the World Bank (Watts & Fretwell, 2004), the European Training Foundation (Sultana, 2003; Sultana & Watts, 2007; Sweet, 2008; Zelloth, 2009), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) (Sultana, 2004, 2008), and DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (Sultana & Watts, 2006). It is somewhat ironic that, at the moment when, according to the likes of Sennett (1998), the very notion of 'career' – not to mention 'decent work' – in this particular phase of capitalism seems to be increasingly anachronistic, policy interest in career guidance has never been higher. Critical, informed and thoughtful reviews of the field, such as represented by the contributions to the volume, are therefore as welcome as they are necessary.

Issues and themes

The social contexts of educational and vocational guidance

The volume is structured around six parts, sandwiched between an introductory and concluding chapter by the editors. Part I focuses on the social context that frames educational and vocational guidance in the world today. There are three strong if somewhat overlapping chapters here whose leitmotif is the impact of a changing environment on the enactment of 'careers', and on our understanding of career guidance. Predictably, there is much reference in all three chapters to the phenomenon of 'globalisation', and to its impact on the nature of work, on workers, and consequently on career guidance. Much attention is given to what Edwin Herr (Chapter 3) refers to as 'hyper change', which, in his case, tends to be portrayed as both sweeping and inevitable, to which individuals and organisations have to adapt. Refreshingly, however, 'globalisation' is not presented in a reified or one-dimensional manner. Raoul Van Esbroeck (Chapter 2), for instance, is careful to highlight the imbalance of power that prevails in the relationship between states and regions, which means that some are more likely than others to benefit from global economic, social and cultural dynamics. It also means that the impact of globalisation on the definition of career guidance is context dependent, and cannot be generalised in an unproblematic manner.

Despite an effort on the part of contributors to this section to identify international trends, therefore, there is also a commendable sensitivity to the specificity of contexts that define career guidance and shape its delivery, so that 'globalisation' is not rendered synonymous to 'homogenisation'. This comes through particularly strongly

in the contribution by Kerr Inkson and Graham Elkin (Chapter 4), who highlight more explicitly the ways in which political choices (in favour of free markets and privatisation, for instance) shape the economic environment, the nature of careers, and consequently the roles that guidance can play. The authors also mount a healthy critique of the tired rhetoric surrounding the notion of a 'knowledge-based economy', suggesting that we should not turn a blind eye to the continuing prevalence of knowledge-poor sectors in many economies. Their use of sociological lenses serves to problematise some of the assumptions that are made within the 'lifelong guidance' paradigm, and reveal the dangers of maintaining the current over-reliance of the field on the 'big five' theoretical orientations that tend to focus on the internal psychology of the individual, when we should instead see agency as informed by structure. Implicit here is an acknowledgement of the ethical vocation of career guidance, a theme that comes through several chapters (such as Chapter 9 by Jean Guichard and Bernadette Dumora, and Chapter 32 by Robert Young and Ladislav Valach), and that the editors, drawing on the philosopher Ricœur, articulate explicitly by declaring that career guidance interventions should aim at 'more ambitious ends: those of helping young people think about their own contribution to the development of a world where people "live well, with and for others in fair institutions"' (p. 9).

Theoretical foundations

Many of the themes announced in the first part of the *Handbook* are taken up and deepened in the longest section of the volume, Part II, which focuses on 'Theoretical Foundations'. Seven chapters provide readers with an engaging and highly informative overview of some of the main contributions made to the development of career guidance by a range of 'foundational' disciplines. Mark Savickas's contribution (Chapter 5) is particularly enlightening in presenting us with a historical sweep that goes back to mid-19th century Europe (in contrast to many accounts that date the beginning of guidance with Frank Parsons) in an attempt to capture the origins and antecedents of career guidance. This is no mere exercise in scholarship, for Savickas's aim is to show us how 'each time the social organisation of work changes, so does society's methods for helping individuals make vocational choices' (p. 97) – a point that is also made by Fred Vondracek and Erik Porfeli in Chapter 10, with specific reference to Super's theories. The linkage of the conceptualisation of a field, and the delivery of services within that field, to broader social and economic dynamics is critical, particularly when seen from the perspective of history, which shows us how, over time, even those social forms of institutionalised activities that present and represent themselves as enabling are necessarily and inextricably caught in webs of power and in the logic of control.

Savickas's chapter is therefore immensely helpful in helping readers understand how and why specific disciplines and theoretical orientations evolved and became popular over time within career guidance, and why, as S. Alvin Leung shows in Chapter 6, the so-called 'Big Five Career Theories' (i.e. theory of work-adjustment, Holland's theory of vocational personalities in work environment, Super's self-concept theory of career development, Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise, and social cognitive career theory) came to frame and define the field in the way they did. Leung's main concern – shared by Frederick Leong and Arpana Gupta in Chapter 11 – seems to be with a self-conscious and highly reflexive account which seeks to understand the relevance of American theories for other contexts, and

the way they have been adapted and/or adopted through processes that he refers to as 'indigenisation from within' and 'indigenisation from without' (p. 127). Nevertheless, the careful overview of these five key approaches to career guidance ties in nicely not only with the *Handbook* editors' declared aim of destabilising the western-centred assumptions underpinning career guidance, but also with Savickas's concern to see 'scientific' formulations of social practice as deeply rooted in specific interests. Leong and Gupta note the ethnic and racial interests underpinning most career theories, which 'have failed to account for cultural variables/factors such as acculturation, language efficiency, values, family piety, etc that could influence career decisions and choices' (p. 232). However, the authors also highlight the fact that 'the consequences of socioeconomic status on career or academic success are stronger than those of culture or ethnicity, to the point that the effects of culture/ethnicity can become less significant or even obsolete when compared to the effects of socio-economic status' (p. 235). While I would have liked to have seen a more up-front use of the term 'class', given the theoretical analyses and insights that it would have prised open, the acknowledgement of the pivotal influence played by socio-economic status is praiseworthy – if anything, it helps serve as an antidote to the titillation of reducing everything to essentialist and exoticising views of 'culture'.

The focus on the material conditions of existence is expressed in other ways in Chapter 7 (Wendy Patton) and Chapter 9 (Jean Guichard and Bernadette Dumora), which pick up Savickas's focus on constructivism as the key emergent theoretical paradigm that is increasingly defining our understanding of the career guidance process over the life span. This signals the field's current interest in narratives and self/identity construction which, in principle, 'enables clients to fit work into their lives, rather than fit themselves into a job' (p. 110). Patton, correctly in my view, sees this shift towards constructivism (which, incidentally and significantly, has also taken place in other linked professions, such as education) as reflecting a move away from a logical positivist worldview that emphasises 'rationality based on objective value free knowledge; objectivity over subjectivity, facts over feelings' (p. 135) – a development that, as Itamar Gati and Shiri Tal (Chapter 8) point out, has major implications for decision-making models that are increasingly having to acknowledge intuition as complementary, not contradictory to rationality (p. 176).

This healthy scepticism about our ability to apprehend and understand 'objective truth' – a scepticism that is at the heart of, and indeed *defines* the postmodern condition – also opens up new epistemological opportunities that allows for a more playful and synergetic engagement with a range of theories that have, in the past, tended to be tightly compartmentalised. In career guidance, there is an increasing realisation that no one theory is enough to address the complexity of career development, and that attempts to construct 'bridging theories' ensure that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (p. 137). This is the role that can be fulfilled by constructivism, particularly when it is seen as a 'meta theory' that supports the effort 'to construct useful conceptual bridges, to identify major variables that may compose a more comprehensively explanatory system, and to sketch central processes linking these variables together' (p. 142).

Guichard and Dumora, like Savickas and Patton, also emphasise the importance of constructivist approaches to career development, if anything because any meaningful intervention in an individual's identity-building process has to sharpen its awareness of the way life and occupational tasks are perceived and experienced

differently by clients. In what is one of the most theoretically sophisticated of all the chapters in the volume, Guichard and Dumora draw on a range of social theorists in order to make a range of arguments that take us beyond technicist considerations of 'what works' (a standpoint also adopted and articulated exceptionally well by Young and Valach in Chapter 32, for instance), to make the vital point that 'vocational intervention' should also include 'an involvement in a reflection about the principles of a good and fair life, in particular an occupational one' (p. 200). This leads to an important reflection that should have, in my view, been placed more centrally in the *Handbook*. The approaches to the career constructivist project as presented in the volume tend to be infused with equanimity when it comes to considering the 'unstable universe' that contemporary forms of capitalism have given rise to. Savickas, for instance, argues that 'rather than developing in a stable medium, workers must actively plan and implement self-management behaviours in a lifelong quest to construct their best possible future' (p. 110). There is even a sense of bravado in presenting career models of self-construction and identity formation, with 'boundaryless, protean, intelligent careers … characterised by constant adaptation and personal responsibility' (p. 110).

This responsibilisation of the individual (Ball, 2008) – which, incidentally, underpins the personal action planning approach adopted by Public Employment Services across Europe, in the EU's efforts to 'activate' individuals and to move from welfare to neo-liberal workfare regimes (Sultana & Watts, 2006) – tends to eschew an acknowledgement of the insight provided by that master of suspicion, Marx (1897), who in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* reminded us that individuals make history, but not under conditions of their own making, or, in the words of Vondracek and Porfeli (Chapter 10), that 'the constraints placed on individuals by social policy and institutional and structural factors […] severely limit […] opportunities to make decisions, to have choices, and to pursue occupational careers' (p. 217). Guichard and Dumora are therefore right in citing Richard Sennett in order to make the crucial point that rather than supporting citizens in adapting to life as it is, career guidance should rise up to the ethical challenge in acknowledging that 'this unstable universe can be harmful for the individual' (p. 200), and to help clients in understanding and decoding the world around them in order to imagine a world as it could and should be. Of course, the scepticism expressed by Ken Roberts (2005) – one of the few authors in the career guidance field who adopts class analysis as part of his theoretical arsenal – regarding the suitability of guidance for bringing about a just world is *a propos*. However, Guichard and Dumora's emphasis on the ethical vocation of career guidance is nevertheless to be saluted.

The likelihood that such critical perspectives become more mainstream in career guidance increases when the challenge of 'theory-bridging' referred to by Patton is taken up in earnest. Vondracek and Porfeli, for instance, underline the need to 'combine both the macro perspectives commonly addressed in life course sociology and the individual and person-focused perspective of life span developmental psychology' (p. 212) – and to strive away, therefore, from circumscribed and segmented models from psychology, sociology or anthropology 'to seek and eventually embrace a unifying model that fully captures and organises the complexity of human functioning and development in context' (p. 216).

Practising educational and vocational guidance

The first two parts of the *Handbook* lead readers to expect a strong section on the implications of both social context and theoretical frameworks on the way career guidance is practised. This expectation is partially fulfilled in Part III of the volume, which is entitled 'Educational and Vocational Guidance in Practice'. This section, made up of seven chapters, is somewhat limited, and has to be seen in relation to the remaining three sections which deal with 'Educational and Vocational Guidance with Specific Groups' (Part IV), Testing and Assessment (Part V) and Evaluation (Part VI). The logic behind the bundling of some of the chapters in Part III also seems to break down somewhat, with at least one contribution – that by A.G. Watts (Chapter 17) – arguably fitting more appropriately earlier on in the volume. This chapter has a strong synthetic value, affording a highly knowledgeable overview of the most salient policy-related issues concerning the articulation and delivery of career guidance services in both the education and labour market sectors, based on the most extensive international database on career guidance that has been established thus far. That overview would have provided readers with a useful, overarching framework on which to hang the range of concepts, issues and concerns that currently define the field. Two of the chapters in this section of the volume – those by Norman Gysbers (Chapter 12) on career guidance in primary and secondary education settings, and by Spencer Niles and Azra Karajic (Chapter 18) on the training of career practitioners – are similar in style and share the same strengths and limitations. Both helpfully categorise different sorts of programmes, helping us become more aware of the options that we have in delivering services and in training staff to deliver these services. Both also look beyond the national and institutional contexts they are embedded in, drawing on examples of interesting practice from a range of countries in order to trigger off ideas and to inspire emulation.

Both chapters, however, remain somewhat descriptive, when deeper analytic syntheses are called for, based not only on theoretical or normative prescriptions, but also on research-based evidence that provides some indication as to what tends to be more successful practice and what works less well, and why. Nancy Arthur's review of qualification standards for career practitioners (Chapter 15) would have also benefited had it been placed immediately before that by Niles and Karajic, and more importantly, had there been an editorial effort to open up a conversation between the two contributions, from which the latter would have benefited. Arthur's chapter is indeed exemplary in that it provides the reader with a very useful and lucid overview of how and why career guidance stands to benefit from having standards of practice, without, however, eschewing a critical engagement with some of the most pressing problems in this endeavour. What makes Arthur's chapter particularly important is her emphasis not only on the challenge that diversity (of settings, of users) poses for the identification, adoption and monitoring of standards, but also on the imperative of leveraging standards of practice to address social justice issues in career development (p. 315). Surprisingly, given her project of linking standards to empowerment, Arthur fails to address two issues which, in my view, are central: namely, the way standard setting can be led by business interests, and the way the whole exercise can be hijacked by professional/status group interests in order to establish occupational closure, thus controlling the service market at a time when, in Europe at least, and due to the aspiration to personalise service delivery, guidance

functions are increasingly becoming embedded in tasks that had previously been thought of as largely bureaucratic and/or clerical in nature.

The latter issue is particularly relevant to Peter Plant's consideration of how career guidance can be delivered in a context that is neither the school nor the public employment service – a service context that, incidentally, is only occasionally referred to in the volume, and which would have certainly deserved a chapter to itself. Plant (Chapter 13) makes a very strong case for the development of workplace guidance, noting that most career guidance services in Europe are still very front-loaded, and offered in formally professionalised ways that are not readily recognised as useful by users. Indeed, Plant suggests that unless they resonate with felt needs, guidance can be associated with coercion – especially if it is imposed as a condition to access unemployment benefits. Embedding guidance on the shop floor – through the use of 'learning advisers', 'peer guidance' and 'guidance corners', for instance – renders the service more ecologically sound, meaningful and user-friendly, as initiatives in Denmark, Iceland and the UK have shown.

Plant's effort to draw on theoretical analysis in order to re-construct practice is echoed in one of the strongest chapters in this section of the *Handbook*, that by Norman Amudson and Erin Thrift. Indeed, Chapter 16 comes closest to fulfilling my expectations for this section, which purports to show us guidance 'in practice'. The authors provide us with valuable insights into what practitioners can actually *do* when they meet clients, particularly if they have taken on board the paradigmatic shifts outlined in Parts I and II of the volume, in terms of the move away from logical-positivism towards the postmodern emphasis on identity-building and the co-construction of reality. The authors' ability to bridge theory and practice means that the descriptions of such dynamic counselling methods as metaphors, storytelling and the use of paradox are not simply an attempt to be 'trendy', but rather represent a practical manifestation of deeper philosophical orientations that have major implications regarding fundamental aspects of the counselling relationship.

The contribution by Annalies Van Vienen, Irene De Pater and Paul Preenan (Chapter 14) also displays similar strengths, though its framing within a human capital perspective gives the chapter its own particular character, with some tedious overlap with contributors from Part I of the volume, particularly in relation to the nature of work in the present historical conjuncture. The chapter is nevertheless packed with insights and useful conceptual tools, with career management being seen in terms of such notions as self-efficacy, and career anchors that guide career directions and decisions. The case for developing career management skills is well made, and the authors are careful to show that people's experience of work in different sectors of the labour market is pivotal to the kinds of career-related behaviour they will engage in (e.g. risk-taking vs. risk aversion). There is also a healthy dose of scepticism about the ability of 'jobs' as currently conceived and institutionally organised in offering workers the kinds of incentives and motives to manage 'careers' in ways that promote personal development, optimise career prospects and balance work and non-work: 'employees may easily become the plaything of organisations' short-term operational policies and choices', warn the authors (p. 283). 'Career management' rings a bit hollow in contexts which are poor when it comes to the 'richness, variety and breadth of tasks and responsibilities people encounter in their work' (p. 286).

Targeting specific groups

The concern with applying theoretical insights to the development of appropriate guidance practices is pursued in Part IV of the *Handbook*, this time in relation to specific target groups, perhaps problematically bundling together women (Chapter 19 by Jenny Bimrose, and Chapter 22 by Charles P. Chen), persons with disability (Chapter 20 by Salvatore Soresi, Laura Nota, Lea Ferrari and V. Scott Solberg), immigrants (Chapter 21, again by Charles P. Chen) and 'at-risk' youth (Chapter 23 by Hazel L. Reid). What these chapters have in common is the conviction that it is absolutely necessary for career guidance to draw on both psychological and sociological perspectives if one is to do justice to the complex ways in which context, culture, life-stage and personality interact with each other to shape career orientations and career development. Indeed, as Soresi and his colleagues note in relation to persons with disability, it is not just a question of doing justice to the citizens we seek to serve: the very way we use words and labels (as Reid convincingly argues in relation to the 'at risk' category), as much as the way we define clients, has major implications for where we attribute deficits (to the individual? to the environment?), and which guidance strategies we adopt (addressing persons? institutions?). Soresi and his colleagues draw on their long research and practice experience to show that it is important to adopt a comprehensive approach in which, while developing a deeper understanding of the lived realities of clients, we also design interventions 'that empower individuals towards achieving their full potential by mobilising resources and establishing strategies that help build their capacity to participate as fully as possible in self-determined educational, vocational and leisure activities' (p. 406). The authors are therefore critical of an over-emphasis on deficits and on the assessment of such weaknesses that seems to characterise many guidance approaches with persons with disabilities. They privilege instead the establishment of age-appropriate, empowering intervention programmes that never lose sight of the link between the individual and society, since persons with disabilities can function well in communities that provide the required resources and support. They also helpfully outline a number of key ingredients and characteristics of such programmes.

The same conviction is articulated by Chen in relation to immigrants. Chen considers some of the key challenges that immigrants have to face with respect to life-career well-being, including language proficiency, familiarity with the host country culture and systematic barriers such as discrimination and lack of recognition of foreign credentials and work experience. While Chen's chapter is somewhat exploratory in nature, it serves to kick start a deeper research and reflection process on an issue that is as topical as it is important, given the increasing mobility of people that is required not only by global capital, but by the deepening divide between the economic 'north' and 'south'. Chen in fact proposes a Cross-Cultural Life-Career Development (CCLCD) framework that provides some macro-perspectives that could feed into the effort of providing career guidance services for immigrant workers, services that are sensitive to the 'dynamic, complex, and multi-faceted experience of a compounded cross-cultural life-career transition' (p. 431). He draws on Self-Concept Theory, Integrative Life Planning, and Social Cognitive Career Theory with a view to not only strengthening the capacity of immigrants for self-understanding, self-confidence, foresight, perseverance, resilience and willingness to learn and change in the context of cross-cultural life-career transitions, but also in

empowering them by acting as skilful and effective advocates on their behalf. Career counsellors therefore do not stop at promoting immigrants' vocational and career well-being in the professional helping contexts, but also contribute to 'the making of a more just and supportive world of work that facilitates the life-career development needs of special and non-dominant populations such as new and recent immigrants' (p. 439).

The importance of what can be called the social empowerment approach also comes through strongly in the chapters by Bimrose, Reid and Chen. Both Bimrose and Chen provide us with an overview of the literature on the intersections between gender and careers, highlighting the way developments in the world of work – such as the increase of service sector jobs and of part-time employment – are impacting differentially on men and women. Both also highlight the continued – and indeed in some cases, increasing – responsibility of women for domestic labour, which has major implications for the career development process, and which Chen discusses in terms of role conflict. While adopting different theoretical orientations, Bimrose as well as Chen look at both intra-personal and relational factors on the one hand, and extra-personal and environmental factors on the other, in order to generate insights about the gendered development of occupational identities and pathways. Bimrose's concern is predominantly to show the limitations of vocational psychology that has tended to take white, straight, often middle class men as a referent for career theories, which are then applied indiscriminately to other groups whose experience of life is qualitatively different, and whose particular needs consequently remain unaddressed. She is careful to show the relevance of critical perspectives in understanding the experiences of other groups that also face structural discrimination in a labour market that continues to exercise horizontal and vertical occupational segregation. Ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation and able-bodiedness are important considerations in their own right, and also in the way they intersect with gender in defining occupational aspirations, choice and experiences. Chen, on his part, explores how the organisation of the workplace environment is often inimical to, and discriminates against, workers with family obligations. Bimrose and Chen do not stop at critique: both value the advocacy and social transformative role that can be adopted by the career counsellor, showing how a range of guidance and counselling approaches can provide elements that contribute to the articulation of a suitable framework for working with women.

Part IV is brought to a fitting close by a very strong contribution by Hazel Reid. Reid develops several of the insights and themes announced in the previous five chapters, showing that, in relation to young people 'at risk' of social exclusion, 'discussions about careers cannot be separated from the wider circumstances of real lives in an uncertain world' (p. 461). As with many of the authors in this section and in the *Handbook* more generally, Reid contests an approach that considers youths who drop out of school, and who are neither in education, training or employment, or who suffer from a range of emotional, behavioural or health problems, as somehow 'deficient', and lacking in motivation, ability or moral fibre. Her position is more political and more structural in orientation, one that contests the dominant discourses that define exclusion in ways which reduce social justice to mere access to opportunities, when the real cause of exclusion is the patterning of power and privilege in specific social formations.

While Reid argues for a stronger awareness of the contextual dynamics that lead to the marginalisation of young people, warning that practitioners who lack the

ability to decode how power works in contemporary societies can end up colluding with that power 'by disciplining their clients into the *status quo*' (p. 465), she is careful not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Career guidance and counselling *can* make a positive difference, especially if, as with constructivist approaches, individual meaning-making is taken seriously. Here Reid's contribution connects with earlier discussions in previous sections of the volume – particularly those by Savickas, by Patton, and by Guichard and Dumora – in order to show how an enabling and empowering approach, which is not merely rhetorically so, gives power back to the client: it is the client – in this case, the 'at risk' young person – 'who determines the sense of a story and who makes decisions about the development of career goals and career action' (p. 467). This political, philosophical and ethical orientation can be operationalised through a range of career guidance approaches that are respectful of young people. Reid usefully outlines Motivational Interviewing, Solution Focused and Narrative approaches, peppering her account with case studies and examples which bring these theoretical orientations to life in a most engaging and helpful manner. Not only is Reid's chapter commendable, therefore, for its political and ethical stance and for its lucidly articulated content, but also for being one of the best exemplars in the volume when it comes to showing how theory can shape practice.

Testing and assessment

It is difficult to imagine a career guidance handbook without an extensive section on testing and assessment, and indeed, Part V of the volume features no less than seven chapters on the topic. I must admit to initially having had some misgivings about this section and the importance that it was given by the editors (a full 137 pages), for it seemed to me to be in tension with the preceding chapters and the leitmotif running through the volume announcing the end of the logical-positivistic paradigm with which much testing is associated. However, reading through the chapters it quickly became clear that such misgivings were only partly justified, for what most of the contributors to this section have in common is their effort to critique traditional testing and assessment and to reconceptualise it in all sorts of intellectually stimulating ways. There is, first of all, a strong connection to the aspiration of the volume to be truly international, and not to take for granted career constructs and concepts developed in the West, and which have too often insidiously become reified when embedded in scientific-looking tests.

This is a particularly strong concern of Maria Eduarda Duarte and Jérôme Rossier (Chapter 24), who focus on cross- and multicultural issues in testing and assessment; of Mark B. Watson (Chapter 25), who looks more specifically at the assessment of 'career maturity', which he sees as a value-laden construct that prescribes what the norm should be (p. 513) and which, *pace* Savickas, he feels should be replaced by the more contextually rich construct of 'career adaptability'; and of Branimir Šverko, Toni Bararovi and Iva Šverko (Chapter 27), who problematise the measurement of life and work values and of role salience, after first having carried out an in-depth exploration of the terms that are often used without much attention to the range of meanings that can be attributed to them, and following this up by an evaluation of the assessment instruments in use. All three chapters are commendable for their careful and critical reflection on the difficulties that historically and culturally contingent concepts and practices have in crossing temporal and geographical boundaries, with testing instruments (and the language and terms

employed) potentially telling us more about those who developed them (and the times they lived in) than about those with whom they are used.

The contribution by Terence Tracey and Saurabh Gupta (Chapter 26) helps us understand the pitfalls associated with tests crossing borders, in their extended discussion of Holland's ubiquitous hexagon RIASEC model which, it turns out, does not demonstrate structural equivalence across cultures. While there are elements in all these chapters that help us understand better the steps that can be followed to reduce some of the dangers in the process of adopting and adapting tests across cultural borders, we need to heed their warning against excessive optimism that ethnocentrism can somehow be completely overcome: 'Not all constructs are universal, not all tests can be adapted' (Duarte & Rossier, p. 500), and 'Test validity, especially in cross-cultural contexts, is never attained but always successively approximated' (Tracey & Gupta, p. 535).

All this has extensive implications for the methodologies that can be used in both developing and implementing (whether adopting or adapting) assessment tools, implications that also spill over into the realm of the training of career practitioners: cross-cultural competences are no longer an additional 'option' in our multicultural societies, but rather represent an indispensable component of one's professional profile. As Duarte and Rossier note, 'The challenges of non-discriminatory assessment become an even more acute topic with the increase of migratory flows' (p. 494). What is particularly commendable in these chapters is the effort to move beyond the compulsory rhetoric of multiculturalism in order to engage with the rather more challenging task of developing alternatives to practices that have proved to be insensitive to difference and diversity.

Career counsellors can become more equitable by being more critically aware of the way assessment can be discriminatory along ethnic, class and gender lines, for instance. Their stance can be more exploratory in nature, using a range of different tools and multidisciplinary approaches to enhance the possibility of identifying culture-specific and ecologically meaningful constructs. As Mary McMahon (Chapter 29) points out, this phenomenological stance calls for the legitimation and increasing use of qualitative, informal forms of assessment, such as card sorts, timelines, mind mapping, metaphors, life-space mapping and genograms and occupational trees, all of which have in common the reconceptualisation of the role of the client from a passive *object* of testing to an agentic *subject* that co-constructs meaning associated with life experiences within an empowering and enabling relationship. There are historical antecedents to this approach in the career guidance, but the concern to establish the 'scientific' credentials of the field, reinforced by positivistic views of 'science' reflected in psychometrics, shifted the emphasis to testing, telling and predicting, with constructivism helping to more recently redress the balance by re-establishing the importance of emic perspectives, and the privileging not of 'scores' but of 'stories'.

Another way in which assessment can be discriminatory relates to what can be termed 'ablist' assumptions about clients. This dimension is not often evoked in the literature, and the contribution by Jacques Grégoire and Frédéric Nils (Chapter 28) opens up an important conversation around the relationship between career guidance and the assessment of physical, conative and especially cognitive characteristics of clients. Grégoire and Nils provide an informed and technically sophisticated overview of some of the most prominent approaches to cognitive ability, and while I would have personally liked to have seen a stronger ideological and political critique of the

notion of 'intelligence', particularly in relation to the way it has been defined within the colonial and post-colonial enterprise, there is an acknowledgement of the fact that, in intelligence testing, 'the possibility of … culturally independent measurements is … illusory', and that 'intelligence, even though rooted in individual genetic heritage, is always shaped by culture. It is not possible to reason in a vacuum, independently of any content. Every content is related to human culture and learning' (p. 576). Such convictions ought to have opened the door to an engagement with Vygotsky's socio-historical views of the relation between culture and cognition (only implicitly hinted at through a brief reference to Jerome Bruner, the eminent MIT populariser of Vygotskian perspectives), as this would have served the authors well in making the conceptual link with the theoretical framework inspiring many of the chapters in the volume – constructivism. More importantly, it would have helped problematise even further the whole notion that intelligence can be reliably tested, and that such tests can be predictive of academic and job performance. If we have learnt anything at all about intelligence, it is that there are grave risks in measuring what cannot be measured well, not only in terms of underestimating an individual's 'potential' (which is, in any case, ontologically unknowable), but also in terms of reifying and giving pseudo-scientific validity to decisions made by 'experts' about individuals.

In this sense, then, the chapter by Grégoire and Nils is somewhat out of harmony with the epistemological position adopted by most of the authors in the volume, reflecting a rather more accommodating stance towards positivism and psychometric measurement. There is also less readiness to turn the questions being asked on their head: rather than asking what abilities jobs require, we should perhaps be asking how we can conceptualise the design and organisation of work in ways that acknowledge and promote the development of our abilities, in all their different dimensions, so that we are fully human, fully alive. This is not being facetious, but rather reflecting on the reality best expressed in the volume by Young and Valach, when they contrast 'life-enhancing careers' with those that are 'life-limiting, life-diminishing, and even life-destroying' (p. 649). We must ever keep in mind that globalisation and competition in the 'new capitalism' are increasing corporate control over the labour process, leading to intensification of work, spiralling insecurity in the name of 'flexibility', lack of relational connection, and the deskilling of workers – not the use of their intellectual potential.

The stance adopted in relation to measurement has not only methodological implications, but ethical ones as well. This is brought home by Donna E. Palladino Schultheiss and Graham B. Stead (Chapter 30), who provide a detailed overview of a range of ethical codes and standards, which they consider supportive of ethical thinking and decision-making rather than rule-following (p. 604). Not surprisingly perhaps, many of these codes and standards articulated and promoted by diverse guidance and counselling associations and organisations worldwide are quite similar, drawing inspiration from the American Psychological Association. Several, however, announce overarching principles, hence failing to address testing issues specifically. The authors provide a range of useful reflections in relation to improving the cross-cultural applicability and transportability of tests, identifying elements that promote culturally competent assessment practice. They also highlight relevant ethical issues for assessment practices carried out in a range of contexts (e.g. computer- and internet-based assessment) and with diverse groups of clients (e.g. women, homosexual and bisexual persons, and children and adolescents).

Despite the valuable insights provided, one cannot help but feel that, as with the chapter by Grégoire and Nils, the authors are here working from *within* the traditional paradigm with an effort to improve it, rather than *outside* of it with a view to reconceptualising it. Any effort to make career guidance assessment practices more ethical is to be commended, of course. However, the larger question as to the suitability of the 'testing language' (with both a small and capital 'L') in the whole enterprise should have been carefully and critically addressed, rather than assumed – particularly in a volume such as this.

Evaluating guidance

The final section of the *Handbook*, Part VI, features four chapters that consider different aspects of the evaluation of educational and vocational guidance. The common theme binding these contributors together is a concern with effectiveness, how this is defined in relation to guidance services, and which methodological approaches could be used to generate data that help us measure impact. As Paul Gore and Takuya Minami (Chapter 31) note, vocational psychology 'has amassed a considerable volume of research', and yet 'we continue to ask similar questions with respect to the nature of educational and vocational interests [. . .] and their relation to abilities [. . .] and important academic and career outcomes' (p. 627).

Three of the chapters – those by Gore and Minami, by Jane L. Swanson and Sarah A. Miller (Chapter 33), and by Susan C. Whiston and Ilene M. Buck (Chapter 34) – are concerned with 'how' to carry out evaluative research, while Richard A. Young and Ladislav Valach (Chapter 32) are more interested in addressing the 'why' questions underpinning career research and evaluation. This, in the latter authors' views, ensures that the evaluative exercise represents 'a well reasoned process, not merely a routine institutional response' (p. 643). More importantly, the authors are concerned with articulating evaluation as part of a moral enterprise, and not just a technical accomplishment that is exclusively concerned with 'outcomes'. 'Knowledge' and 'values' cannot, and *should not* be separated from each other, so that any discussion of effectiveness also needs to include a consideration of – and a striving for – what is 'good' in social and political terms; in other words, the age-old search for 'a life worth living'.

Young and Valach are therefore keen to develop an alternative paradigm for research and evaluation, an 'integrative action theory' that stresses the importance of evaluating processes as well, and the need to give attention to how clients understand actions in everyday life, and how meaning is constructed over time to form projects and 'life-enhancing careers'. This stance establishes a clear link with the volume's underpinning phenomenological and constructivist pedigree – a link that is otherwise somewhat tenuous in this section of the *Handbook*. While this chapter is theoretically sophisticated, it leads seamlessly into an account of how the action theory paradigm can be practically applied to career counselling (e.g. through the use of video recordings leading to self-confrontational interviews), thus reflecting their epistemological commitment to a greater degree of convergence between theory and practice.

In the chapters by Gore and Minami, by Whiston and Buck, and by Swanson and Miller, the issue of career evaluation research is framed somewhat differently. Their interest is rather more with identifying 'what works', which is important not only as a guide to improved practice, but also to persuade policy-makers that it is worth investing public money in providing citizens with guidance services. As the OECD

and the various EU reviews referred to earlier have shown, such an evidence base is often weak or missing, and there is therefore an urgent need to intensify research on effectiveness if the attempt to reconceptualise guidance as a service available to citizens lifelong is to materialise. Both Gore and Minami, as well as Whiston and Buck remind us that there is already a great deal of relevant information 'out there', but its potential in building up an evidence base is lost because it has not been put together in meaningful ways. Both therefore see the value of 'meta-analysis' as a method that could prove helpful in imposing order and discipline on the process of systematic research synthesis, allowing us to draw inferences from a body of relevant literature. Gore and Minami give an account of the statistical and methodological procedures that could serve this purpose, with the procedures having the potential 'to bring clarity to conflicted literature, identify important avenues for subsequent inquiry, or inform theory revision and development … Meta-analyses can answer important questions such as what works, for whom, and under what conditions' (p. 639). Their rather technical account is supported by a helpful grounding in some examples of the use of meta-analyses in career guidance and vocational psychology, such as in the study of the validity of employment interviews, of critical ingredients in career choice counselling, cognitive and non-cognitive predictors of post-secondary student success and the stability of vocational interests.

Whiston and Buck, on their part, provide an overview of some of the outcome research that has been carried out in different (western) countries, a review that is especially useful since it considers the effectiveness of different modalities of service provision, including that of computer-based systems. The authors also propose a series of steps that can structure programme evaluation, ranging from the identification of the focus of the evaluation and the formulation of the evaluation design and procedures, to determining outcome measures, gathering programme information, and analysing, interpreting and using this information to make decisions. While there is here a lot of overlap with generic evaluation principles, Whiston and Buck's discussion focuses on a range of issues that are specific to the guidance field, rendering the chapter both more relevant and more engaging.

Especially critical is the authors' warning that data should not be produced for its own sake, but rather with a view to using it and disseminating it: 'The accumulation of information internationally,' they propose somewhat optimistically, 'may contribute to more funds being dedicated internationally to career guidance programs and, thus, more individuals could be helped with quality career guidance' (p. 689). Swanson and Miller underscore the need for evidence, privileging in particular data produced by longitudinal methodologies which, they argue, hold much potential given their ability to consider career development over the lifespan, and to consider such areas as job search behaviour, congruence, stability of interests, career paths, job change, career maturity or adaptability and career commitment. As with the contributions of the two sets of authors just described, Swanson and Miller review some of the more recent longitudinal studies, noting, however, that the guidance field would be better served if some fundamental methodological issues – such as design, sampling, measurement, timing, self-selection, non-random attrition, external and internal validity, use of existing datasets – were properly addressed. They also argue that there is much to be learnt from the methodological sophistication that has been accumulated by developmental psychologists in their long-standing efforts to study phenomena over the lifespan, efforts that have received a new lease of life thanks to

the fillip given to statistical techniques by computer-based software that facilitates complex multivariate analytic strategies.

While the authors' argument for robust longitudinal studies is persuasive, not least because of its potential impact in shaping policy, I found myself wondering about the extent to which, under the current tight-fisted funding regimes and precarious tenures in higher education institutions and research centres, such long-term research engagements are possible. I would have also liked to have seen a rather more reflexive approach to such aspirations as 'prediction', 'validity' and 'objectivity', which represents a view of 'doing science' that sits at odds with the otherwise postmodern tenor of the volume.

A rich, dynamic heritage

The critical synthesis outlined above certainly does not – and obviously cannot – do justice to the richness of the *Handbook*. However, it hopefully does give a sense of the range of themes and issues that the authors broach, and the seriousness with which the editors and their invited contributors have taken up the challenges of showcasing the field's many achievements, of capturing some of its most important debates and of reporting scholarship in ways that signpost future research, policy and practice. In many ways, therefore, the *Handbook* represents the accumulated capital of a field that has just completed its first centenary, if we take 1908 and Frank Parsons's launch of the Vocational Bureau as its official, formal birth date.

As I have noted, there are many things to commend in the volume: the writing is often honest and searching, reflexive and self-critical. Authors acknowledge that they are building on a long tradition, and that even novel ideas and practices have antecedents in some of the classic authors that have shaped the field. Super, for instance, maintains his leading status in the field: he remains the most often cited/referred to author in the volume, with his framework serving as a fundamental stepping stone to several insights, revised and updated to accommodate contemporary times. In many cases, there is a serious attempt to bridge theory and practice, or at least to consider the implications that particular frameworks might have for organising and delivering guidance services. Most conceptualise career guidance not as a mere technical activity, but as a moral enterprise that should contribute to personal and societal fulfilment, in the search for a life worth living. In the best of cases, this humanism is tempered by hard-nosed structural analyses, with strong critical reflections coming through on changes in the sphere of work, their impact on what it means to be human, and on how we develop a sense of self in a runaway, hypercomplex world.

Contributors to the volume do not shy away from asking awkward questions, from probing possibilities and from being tentative in their search for answers. This of course captures the *zeitgeist* of the times, but it is certainly a welcome relief from some of the positivistic, bullish certitudes that have marked – and marred – the field in the past, opening it up to multiperspectival and multidisciplinary conversations that, while disconcerting to some, are the sign not of a crisis, but of an exciting, generative moment when boundaries are tested and transgressed, and new landscapes are charted and explored. While vocational psychology still reigns as the queen discipline in the field, there are clearly many knaves around who, if not yet strong enough to usurp the throne, are making daring forays, helping establish other social sciences as worthwhile and legitimate players.

Despite the range of theoretical frameworks and methodological orientations, the volume succeeds in remaining on track, with different contributors highlighting the need to think beyond their national and cultural contexts, and to bear with the conceptual discomfort that follows when one suspends the belief that one's worldview is the ultimate referent. Culture, thankfully, in most contributions, is discussed in a nuanced manner, eschewing essentialist renderings that would open the volume up to justifiable critiques that difference and diversity are constructed as exotic features of 'the other'. The sheer body of knowledge that is packed in the volume makes it truly a *Handbook* – one that scholars and students of career guidance would do well to keep at hand, even if it is to occasionally dip into it in response to pressing concerns of the moment rather than to read it systematically from cover to cover. While, as will be noted further on, and as the editors themselves admit, there are some important gaps, I found that the *Handbook* does work well as a relatively compact resource, serving as a 'refresher course' in my own professional development. Its usefulness to practitioners in terms of providing pointers towards practice is debatable, but I will not stress this point given my conviction that the presumed divide between theory and practice is ideological and harmful, and that good practitioners are also good theorists.

Imagining a future edition

Despite its many achievements, the editors – and this is to their credit – are aware of some of the *Handbook*'s limitations, and bravely claim that, from the outset, their hope was that 'it would be updated at regular intervals' (p. viii). Let me conclude this review by outlining some of the areas that could be considered when a second edition of this valuable volume is prepared.

First, there are some gaps that, in my view, need to be addressed. This is not to make the volume more 'complete': in the first instance, that task is inherently impossible, and even if it were not, one must not lose sight of the fact that the volume is a *Handbook*, not an encyclopedia. Having said that, some absences cry out louder than others for attention. Given the paradigmatic shift towards seeing guidance as a service that has relevance throughout the life span – a fact that several chapters make it a point to emphasise – it is surprising that there is no chapter on the role of public employment services in providing guidance to adults, not just the unemployed (a particularly relevant focus given the crises in work opportunities), but also for those seeking (or being forced into) a career change. The use of the new technologies in the delivery of career guidance is referred to in a number of chapters – with an extended discussion in Chapter 30 – but it would seem to me that this is rather niggardly given the impact that computer- and internet-based systems have had not only on the ubiquity of guidance services, but in fundamentally transforming their very form and role.

While constructivism, as represented in the volume, is fast becoming the leading theoretical framework guiding career counselling, more attention should have been given to acknowledging critiques of that paradigm, and to situate it more squarely within the broader philosophic, economic, cultural and social contexts that gave rise to it in the first place. More importantly, given that this constructivist logic underpins so many of the chapters in the volume, it is quite remarkable that the client voice is only present as refracted through the representations of the expert/scholar/researcher. This stands in clear contradiction with the spirit underpinning the *Handbook*, and it

would be important, I think, for the next edition to make amends. This might also open the way for what I am increasingly convinced is 'the missing link' in much scholarship on career guidance, one that can probably be best approached through anthropological accounts which represent the worldviews of those whom we wish to serve – *on their own terms*. I have argued for the need of such a development by referring to a superlative ethnography by the Pakistani anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2005), whose study of women in Cairo and their engagement with a 'career' in piety has unexpected but profound implications for our work (Sultana, 2009). Insights such as those by Mahmood should feature more strongly in a volume that purports to take 'culture' seriously – with culture being understood in the tradition of Clifford Geertz (1973/1993) who defined it as a forum for negotiating and re-negotiating meaning and for explicating action.

Another set of comments concern the editorial task itself. Needless to say – and I hope I have made this clear by now – the guidance field owes the editors a debt of gratitude for taking on the task of presenting a multiperspectival portrait of the field, a task that has significantly been attempted by several others in recent years (see, for instance, Arulmani & Nag-Arulmani, 2004; Savickas & Walsh, 1996). Having said that, some issues would need to be addressed in the next edition. Both the introductory and concluding chapters by the co-editors only partially fulfil the role that one would normally expect them to do. In the introduction, rather than a summary of contributions, the editors should have tried to open up conversations between the different authors, identifying themes, making connections, highlighting contrasts, playing one chapter against the other to help the reader better grasp the project that the volume represents.

In the conclusion, it would have been very helpful to outline the main achievements of the volume as a whole, and to relate the historical evolution of the field in relation to those achievements, highlighting trends and indicating pathways for the future. There is an attempt to do so, but it is somewhat disembodied and detached from the preceding chapters, when it ought to have been their culmination. Reference to the contributions would also have given the editors an opportunity to discuss the epistemological and methodological tensions evident in the volume, tensions which could, in themselves, be healthy, representing alternative visions in the field, but which needed to be highlighted and commented upon, not elided. It would also have pushed them to take a more overt and transparent standpoint – something they *do* do in relation to the normative foundations of the field, but not quite in relation to its articulation and practice. We thus read in the concluding paragraphs of the concluding chapter of the volume that the editors, reflecting on the state of the field, rue the fact that 'the horse has bolted and it may well be too late to shut the gate' (p. 708), wondering whether the 'many non-scientific or common-sense approaches [that] have appeared [. . .] well outside the mainstream career development theories' (p. 707) are detrimental to quality provision. They are a bit too secretive about the object of their concerns, leaving me wondering whether they are hankering for the certitudes that positivistic science affords, and which many of the authors in their volume have made it a point to show up as being both false and dangerous, particularly in its aspiration to universalise.

Such comments do not detract from the enormous value of this landmark publication, which does not fail to do justice to the field of career guidance at a particularly propitious moment in its historical development as an object of inquiry and as a public service. *This* particular tiger is burning bright, and Athanasou and

Van Esbroeck are to be heartily commended for bravely daring to seize the fire, and to share it with us in ways that illuminate our daily efforts as scholars, researchers and practitioners.

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