

A Research Agenda for Career Development Learning in Higher Education

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The theme of the NAGCAS conference 2010—*Through the Looking Glass: Career Development in the 21st Century*—brings into focus notions that are inherent in higher education: self-assessment; reflection; surface and depth; the personal ideal that is held in hope, and the reality that is perceived. This paper is an exploration of those notions in terms of career development learning (CDL) and adult learning. Moreover, this paper explicates the correspondence between CDL and theories of adult learning with the intention of formulating a research agenda for CDL in higher education.

The research agenda is premised upon an appraisal of the disciplinary literatures of career development studies and higher education studies, and my reflective practice as a transdisciplinary practitioner—CDP and academic. It is purported that there is a disciplinary and professional crevasse between the two fields' disciplinary literatures. In this way, there is little communication between the two fields, despite both being fundamental to the purposes of education understood from the philosophical perspective of Dewey (1916): that education is growth; that education is foundational to democracy.

Marginal or Central?

The recent *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) highlighted (at least) two important implications for career development practitioners (CDPs). First, despite the extent of career services in Australian universities (Phillips KPA, 2008) their role was not mentioned as vital to the core business of higher education—surely this must stand in stark contrast to CDPs' perceptions of their role in higher education. This is a latent threat that must be addressed vigorously by CDPs. Second, the review asserted that "...to improve access for disadvantaged groups, three precursors to entry need to be addressed: awareness of higher education; aspiration to participate; and educational attainment to allow participation" (Bradley et al, 2008, p.40).

Awareness, aspiration, and attainment are intrinsic to the disciplinary and professional interests, competencies, and objectives of career development studies and career development practice. This can be seen historically in the work of Parsons (1909) and presently in the work of scholars and practitioners (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Diemer & Rasheed Ali, 2009; McIlveen, 2010).

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Therefore, the Bradley Review's objectives for awareness, aspiration, and attainment should be treated as an invitation to CDPs to position career development practice at the core of higher education, and thus guard against marginalisation of career services as being little more than a service to students provided by universities, that may wax and wane depending upon budgetary and political conditions.

CDL can be and should be much more than a supplementary service to education; it is and should be regarded as education. One need go no further than philosopher of education, Dewey, to appreciate that CDL is education: "...identity of interest and understanding is the business of education". All well and good this may seem to CDPs, but do university administrators and academics know and understand the educational potential and rightful place of CDL at the core of higher education?

An Ivory Tower of Babel

Recent applied research demonstrated the educational dimensions of CDL and its alignment with work-integrated learning (McIlveen et al., in press; Smith et al., 2009); however, publications on career development studies are not sufficiently present in the disciplinary literature of higher education studies, and vice versa. This is not a problem in itself, as both fields are rightfully different disciplines with conceptual and empirical traditions. If the literature is thought of as a conversation among people of like interests, then, unfortunately, it is highly likely that the two camps are talking among themselves and not to one another. Is it because they do not talk the same language and do not understand one another?

There is scant evidence of adult learning theory within the literature of career development studies. There are theories that can be subsumed under social/cognitive learning generally understood, such as the social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), but there is no substantive correspondence to established theories of adult learning that have currency in higher education studies.

Toward Correspondence

If CDL is to be known and understood as central to higher education and manifestly inherent to curriculum design and delivery, then there is a pressing need to consider how its conceptual foundations and professional practices may be translated or reformulated in terms of the concepts

and practices of higher education studies, so as to enable communication between the disciplines.

Close inspection of established theories of adult learning, notably that of andragogy (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005), reveal conceptual correspondence with CDL, particularly with regard to students' experiences of learning and the personalised outcomes of learning. Furthermore, there is evident correspondence with a recent extension of andragogy beyond self-directed learning to self-determined learning: heutagogy (Kenyon & Hase, 2010). Given the potential for CDL to change the trajectory of an individual's life, the theory of transformative education (Mezirow, 2000) similarly presents useful dimension of correspondence. In summary, there is scope to formulate a new vision of CDL in which there is a transition from a teacher-centred paradigm of the curriculum-instructed, to student-centred paradigm of the curriculum-interpreted: *transformative career development learning*.

An Agenda

CDL can be translated in terms of andragogy, heutagogy, and transformative education. There are three dimensions to this agenda: (a) conceptual and practical translation, (b) applied research into implementation and outcomes, (c) professional development for CDPs.

Validation of the theories in educational practice is vital to the project's success, and this can be appraised in terms of conceptual generativity and pragmatic delivery. The conceptual translation must lay the foundations for the production of new ideas for theory and practice.

Any good ideas must be amenable to operationalisation in educational practice and thus proven on the basis of the practical application (e.g., curriculum design, delivery, assessment). Pragmatic evaluation could begin with reflective practice studies carried out by individual practitioners, and continue through to larger-scale studies involving cohorts of students participating in conventional research studies.

Beyond conceptual and practical translation, there is a need to communicate and promulgate new models and practices in the literature of higher education studies so as to inform other professionals in the sector. Furthermore, there is a need to prepare CDPs for a revised approach to CDL through systems of professional development and qualifications (Career Industry Council of Australia, 2009).

Conclusion

CDL's contribution to higher education in the 21st century is needed but not assured; it must manifest in the core business of universities: adult learning. Conceptual and practical reinvigoration of CDL as a form of adult learning may provide a vehicle toward its institutional centrality and transdisciplinary legitimisation.

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