

Career and life planning education in Hong Kong: Challenges and opportunities on the theoretical and empirical fronts

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Abstract

This is a reflection paper written from the perspective of a current in-service career guidance teacher in Hong Kong. The challenges teachers can face at both theoretical and empirical levels when implementing career and life planning education at school are reviewed. This paper also highlights a number of issues that curriculum developers should consider when devising a life planning education curriculum. By understanding these challenges, it is hoped that frontline teachers can be better equipped to develop a life planning curriculum that caters to the pragmatic needs of future generations in Hong Kong.

Keywords

career guidance teacher, career and life planning education, curriculum development, career counseling in Hong Kong

Introduction

By making available the Career and Life Planning Grant (Education Bureau, 2014a), the HKSAR government has acknowledged the rapidly changing landscape of the global economy and intends to assist future generations by raising public awareness of life planning and career guidance in all secondary schools in Hong Kong. The grant has largely served as a catalyst to initiate changes in life planning and career guidance

education in Hong Kong, but it is not without its challenges, given the long history of underdevelopment in local education career counseling (Ho, 2008; Leung, 2002).

By showing the perspective of an in-service career guidance teacher in Hong Kong, this reflection paper involves a discussion of how global and cultural factors have helped to shape students' career development needs. The essay is divided into three parts. The first two consist of a literature review of the theoretical and empirical issues that affect the practice of career counseling. Particular focus is placed on discussing what Savickas (1995) refers to as the schisms between theory and practice of career guidance, how these are manifested, and their impact. The final part presents a synthesis of theoretical and empirical issues. The aim of the analysis is to contribute to the development of a career guidance program that can balance theory and practice and that is suitable for the specific pragmatic needs of Hong Kong in the 21st century.

Throughout this article, the terms “career,” “career education,” and “career guidance” are used. To avoid confusion and the proliferation of jargon, the author would like to clarify some specific definitions. First, “career” refers to the different life roles of an individual over his or her lifespan (Zunker, 2002) and to the totality of their lifetime pursuits. Work activities are only a subset of this total (Sharf, 2013a). “Career education” refers to any educational experience aimed at helping clients to set clear career goals and to understand more about themselves (Fung & Wong, 2012). The focus is on the teaching of attitudes, beliefs, planning, and skills in making career decisions (Savickas, 2011). This is a comprehensive educational experience in the school curriculum, featuring a combination of concepts of career development into learning experiences at all levels in all subject disciplines (California State Department of Education, 1974; Curriculum Development Council, 2017; Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters, 2008).

“Vocational education” refers to a similar form of education with a different orientation. It is a form of nonacademic training involving the direct education of practice-oriented or work-based skills for occupations (Georg & Kunze, 1981; Zelloth, 2014). This form of education is often associated with young people from lower social strata (Pahl, 2014) and is also perceived by society as an inferior form with a lower social status (Bosch & Charest, 2010).

Historical Background

When reviewing more than 50 years of development of career guidance in Hong Kong secondary schools, we witness the increasingly important roles played by career guidance and education within the local curriculum. Career guidance first gained attention in the 1950s, with the establishment of the position of Career Master/Mistress in secondary schools (Leung, 2002). Schooling at that time followed an elitist model, in which students

who could not make the grades would be forced to leave the system to find work (Chung, 1977), leading to the vocational guidance nature of early career guidance practices.

In the 1970s, the introduction of mass education (Hong Kong Government, 1978) naturally led to an increase in the demand for career services. Many academically challenged students had left school with few or no qualifications and were clearly not suitable for schooling and therefore needed vocational guidance (Li, 2004).

Despite the increase in demand for career services, career guidance still did not receive much support from schools and was regarded as a low-priority extracurricular activity. The career guidance curriculum at that time was usually managed by teachers untrained in the discipline, and services available were mainly career talks and site visits. Little attention was paid to the developmental needs of the students, which was mainly attributed to a lack of resources and support provided by the school heads (Williams, 1973).

In the 1980s, a number of important policies were implemented concerning the governance and provision of guidance practices in schools (Education Commission, 1990; Education Department 2001:2). However, the main objectives of these guidelines (Education Department, 1986) were to manage pupil's behavior and develop remedial education in schools (Lai-Yeung, 2014; Yuen, 2006). There was little elaboration regarding how career guidance could be better administered. A more succinct contribution to the development of career guidance in school in that period was the announcement of the development of career assessment tools in the Report No. 1 (Education Commission, 1984). This initiated the development of aptitude tests for career guidance purposes.

In general, the effectiveness of the newly introduced policies in the 1980s was partial. Scholars raised questions about the narrow focus of the initiatives, the professional capabilities of guidance teachers, and the lack of governance of the human resources deployment strategies of some schools (Hue, 2017; Ko & Wong, 1990).

In the 1990s, a major change occurred when the Whole School Approach (WSA) was announced in Report No. 4 (Education Commission, 1990). The WSA was a new developmental approach to counseling in schools. It stressed the importance of helping learners to meet the differing needs at various stages of their lives. The traditional vocationally oriented elements within the career guidance curriculum had thus begun to diminish. Policy papers of the time emphasized the necessity for strong principal leadership and support for the WSA to function effectively (Education Department, 2001). To assist in the implementation of the WSA, the Education Department also released a series of guidelines and learning resources (Education Department 1993, 1995, for example) for schools, and later the "Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education" in 2010 (Education Bureau, 2010).

From the beginning of the 21st century, increased public awareness of the need to provide quality career education and guidance to future generations led to the establishment of community initiatives by numerous nongovernmental organizations, including youth service organizations (e.g., the Federation of Youth, the Hok Yau Club, YMCA Hong Kong), charities (e.g., The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust), and commercial enterprises (e.g., McDonald's Hong Kong). These organizations conducted empirical survey studies (see 香港遊樂場協會賽馬會上葵涌青少年綜合服務中心生涯規劃關注小組, 2008; 楊家正、鄭立德, 2003) related to the provision of career services and career education services offered (e.g., 麥當勞, 2005, 2006, 2008) to young people in local communities.

The opportunities for professional training and support offered to front-line teachers in this period were also unrivalled. For example, commissioned by The Career Guidance Services Section of the Education Bureau, the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters devised a 100-hour certificate course in career guidance at local tertiary institutes. Every year, 30 to 60 teachers were trained in the program (Ho, 2008).

The status of career guidance was further enhanced when Hong Kong underwent a major curriculum review (see Education Commission, 2000). The “Applied Learning” curriculum, which stresses developing occupational skills, was introduced (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2006), and in the “New Academic Structure” (NAS) career education was formalized as a main area of learning. To support this newly enhanced status, “Other Learning Experiences” (OLE) was introduced as a form of compulsory cross-curricular instructional activity. Under the OLE curriculum, career education was provided to students under the domain “Career-Related Learning Experiences.” The status of career education and guidance in the NAS curriculum was formalized with the launch of the Career and Life Planning Grant (CLP) in 2014. The aim of the grant was to help schools release manpower and thus allow career guidance teachers to cater for the developmental needs of their own students using the WSA (Education Bureau, 2014b). The grant could also be used to aid the flexible procurement of resources, but relying heavily on external services is not recommended, as teachers best understand the needs of their students (教育局學校發展分部, 2014). The launch of the territory-wide career intervention project entitled CLAP for Youth @ JC in 2015 marked another great leap forward.

Local study

Since the inception of the CLP grant, many government survey studies have reported an increase in both the quantity and quality of career services provided by career guidance teachers (Legislative Council, 2015; 立法會, 2017). However, the problems relating to the provision of career guidance in the 1970s and 1990s can still be found today when the CLP is implemented. First, most teachers are still not sufficiently trained in the implementation

of WSA (Yuen, Leung & Chan, 2014). Ho and Leung (2016) found in their survey research that compliance work in reaction to implementation of CLP policy initiatives at the school level resulted in workload intensification. Coincidentally, their research data reported that career guidance teachers today, as found in the studies in the 1970s (e.g., Williams, 1973), attributed the cause of their problems to the school management's failure in 1) reducing the workload of career guidance teachers (e.g., lesson remission) and 2) using resources legitimately. Another study revealed that front-line teachers are not confident in providing career guidance services to students, further exacerbating the problem, and only 18.9% of the surveyed students claimed that they understood their interests clearly (香港中文大學, 2017).

As a frontline practitioner who has received training in career guidance, the author believes that the above problems can be best understood by first reflecting on the literature and examining the underlying theoretical weaknesses in the theory and practice of career guidance. Then, in the second part of the reflection, the author will critically review several empirical global factors that have helped to shape the current reality.

Part 1 – Fundamental weaknesses within the theoretical foundation of career counseling and life planning education

Here the main career theories are critically reviewed. Important insights are derived in terms of understanding the limitations within the current theoretical framework so that the practice of career counseling can be further refined. The discipline and practice of career counseling originated in the West, mainly in the United States (Chen & Fouad, 2013), and the development of career counseling in Hong Kong is thus heavily influenced by Western ideologies (Leung, 2002; Ng & Yuen, 2016).

A major contributing factor to the emergence of career guidance counseling is to help individuals of different abilities achieve a purposeful life through work (Zunker, 2016:8). Counselors and researchers develop various theories and psychological assessment devices to conduct career intervention to help clients. According to prominent researchers in the field, such as Savickas (1995), Holland (1996) and later Patton and McMahon (2014), despite recent advancements (e.g., systems theories in career counseling) in theoretical development, fundamental discrepancies remain between career theories because they target different aspects of career development. This results in “fragmentation, redundancy, and inconsistency” as identified by the discipline of vocational psychology (Savickas 1995:4).

1.1 Mismatch between theory and practice

To further elaborate, Savickas (1995) explained that the area of vocational psychology has a long history of divergence between theory and practice. This problem has been particularly evident during the development of career theories, which are applied empirically. First, in terms of the development of theories, researchers use different operational definitions to categorize the factors to be investigated in a research study. This is problematic because it makes the comparison of the results across different research studies extremely difficult.

Second, in terms of the empirical application of career theories, psychotherapy theorists and practitioners differ greatly in their views of counseling. The practitioners of psychotherapy argue that career counseling is a redundant subgenre of applied psychology because some evidence suggests an overlap between career and mental health counseling of students (Pace & Quinn, 2000; Savickas, 1995). These practitioners derive their knowledge from field experience and oral tradition, which are proven to be beneficial to clients. Counseling practices developed by theorists and researchers may not provide the same level of assurance in terms of effectiveness because most career theories are untested in formal empirical settings and thus are measured as purely theoretical (Holland, 1996:5). Theorists of career counseling often ignore, or are unaware of, real-world challenges that practitioners often encounter when conducting psychological intervention with their clients. Holland further suggested that many of the dominant theories are not fully supported, and some receive no support at all.

1.2 Mismatch between the theoretical construct and reality: the problem of congruency

As identified by Patton and McMahon (2014), one fundamental weakness within the discipline is that many career theories are prone to the congruency problem. These theories encounter problems of whether a person can fit into the constantly changing labor market and often ignore how sociological and cultural factors have affected the career decision-making process (Holland, 1996:5; Leung, 2008). Two of the most influential career theories, according to Leung (2008), are Holland's Theory of Personality and Work Environments (Holland, 1992, 1997) and Super's Theory of Life Stage Development (1990), and both have received similar types of criticism.

According to the literature, the problem of congruency can be viewed from two perspectives: 1) the fitness between the theoretical and empirical occupational environments; and 2) between the external and internal validity of the theoretical construct.

1.2.1 The fitness between the theoretical and empirical construct

One common criticism of the theories developed by Holland and Super is that their work does not stand the test of time. The constantly changing and volatile contemporary labor market is not fully taken into account. First, in relation to the empirical construct, which is the current labor market, Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996) criticized Holland's theory for assuming stability and rigidity within this market. This can be problematic, because different occupations can be created or made redundant through changes in the economic environment and with technological advancement. Their criticism has reasonable empirical support, such as the report from the International Standard Classification of Occupations developed by the International Labour Office of Geneva. Job classification is reported to be difficult, because not all the tasks or duties of a job are unique and thus it is difficult to specifically fit them with a job classification (International Labour Office, 2012:39).

Second, in terms of human development, Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) further criticized both Super's and Holland's theories (Gait & Asher, 2001) in failing to account for the changes in individuals in response to changes in the occupational environments. In particular they criticized, as did Super himself (Super, 1990), the segmentation of the Life Span theory, stating that it is simply a series of generalized facts that serve little practical use. The Work Values' Inventory (Super, 1968) was also found to be internally inconsistent when used in Hong Kong (Wong & Yuen, 2015).

1.2.2 The fitness between the external and internal validity of the theoretical construct

Super's theory has been extremely influential, and Holland's even more so (Leung, 2008), but their research validity in terms of their explanatory power has stimulated wide research interest and criticism. Super's theory has been heavily criticized for being untested empirically (Super, 1990), and its internal validity is also questionable because it is segmented in nature (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). It also does not address culture and gender issues (Sharf, 1997).

Holland's theory of typology has been found to be generally consistent (Sharf, 2013b), but it has still led to much academic debate over its internal and external validity. For example, Gati and Asher (2001) suggested that first, vocational interests are difficult to define and measure. Second, the relationship between various types of vocational interests is also controversial. Third, there is also a question of whether the number of types of person and environment fit should be fixed or variable. Fourth, the Holland codes may not be sufficiently defined to enable job screening. Finally, they found the theoretical construct of Holland's theory to be too rigid because it assumes that vocational interests are static

and will not change. It ignores the fact that people can change, and therefore, the P-E fit, which is the congruence between an individual's characteristics and the characteristics of his or her chosen occupation stressed in the theory is overemphasized.

Numerous studies provide evidence for the criticisms of Holland's theory. Its central idea of P-E congruence was found to be of low statistical correlation, at below 0.30 (Gati & Asher, 2001) and that there is a need to refine the method and further investigate the congruence issue (Spokane, Meir, & Catalano, 2000). Sharf (1997) suggested that the theory may not be viable in explaining career development because its predictive and explanatory power is questionable (Assouline & Meir, 1987; Tokar, Fischer, & Subich, 1998).

1.3 Summary of Part 1: theoretical implications to career counselors

To summarize, we can see that fundamental deficiencies exist within the theoretical foundations of career counseling. To overcome these challenges, career counselors should become familiar with the most recent developments in the theoretical and clinical aspects of career counseling. Although progress has been made toward reaching a convergence of career theories, the process has encountered many difficulties (Savickas, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 2014). Career counselors must therefore develop a repertoire of skills that encompasses a broad and deep understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different career theories and the related assessment inventories.

Part 2 – Challenges and opportunities within the empirical context

In this part, an overview of the employment market is described through a review of the literature and relevant statistical technical reports to highlight the career development needs of students of the 21st century.

Teenagers from all walks of life, no matter their race, ethnicity, or gender, are facing increasing challenges in making the transition from education to work. Global vocational demands have progressed from the repetitive, labor-intensive mass production that dominated the 20th century, often referred to as Fordism, to a new knowledge economy in which strong technical knowledge (Drucker, 2002) and life-long learning (European Commission, 2012; Schleicher, 2015; Zunker, 2016) are important. Technological advancements have led to increasing interconnectivity. This has helped to create a new 21st century economy that changes rapidly and is volatile. To cope with the demands this brings, students of the 21st century must equip themselves with a completely different skill set to achieve a successful career (New London Group, 1996; OECD, 2013; Pang & Leung, 2008; Schleicher, 2015).

2.1 Reconceptualization of the term “career” in the 21st century

Before we discuss the process of career guidance, it is first important for us to understand how changes in the economic landscape have helped to refine the concept of “career.” Zunker (2006:9) first suggested that the term can simply mean having to work to provide the money to meet financial constraints. However, he added that this traditional view of the concept of career may not be applicable to workers of the 21st century, as many of them may make multiple career changes throughout their lives. His view is echoed by Gothard (2000) who also called for an up-to-date interpretation of the term in the 21st century. A more specific definition of the concept of career is offered by Reardon, Lenz, Sampson, and Peterson (2000). A career is in their view a “Time-extended working out of a purposeful life pattern through work undertaken by the person.” They suggest that the rapid development of technology and the increasing dependence on international trade have had a major effect on the labor market. Hands-on skills such as manufacturing have become largely redundant. Employees in the 21st century are mobile, good at working in teams, and technologically competent. Employers emphasize cost-saving and efficient deployment of resources. Job stability is becoming less common with fewer promotion opportunities. Long-term, stable positions are commonly restructured as contractual or part-time positions managed by independent contractors, freelance workers, and consultants. In some situations, the entire job functions within a company will be outsourced to achieve cost savings (Zunker, 2016:11).

2.2 Challenges to career guidance and life planning education in Hong Kong

2.2.1 Upward mobility stagnation and global youth unemployment

The recent paradigm shift within the employment market has led to an increase in unemployment, particularly among young people (Gothard 2000:3). Upward mobility is further stifled as higher education in Hong Kong has become more widely available (Lee, 2015).

Youth unemployment has become a worldwide phenomenon (HKSAR, 2012) and is a particularly serious problem in many European countries, where many young people find it difficult to make the transition from education to work. The term “NEET,” referring to young people who are “not in employment, education or training” was coined in the United Kingdom and serves to highlight the seriousness of the problem. According to estimates released by the International Labour Organization in August 2016, the global youth unemployment rate has increased from 12.9% in 2015 and is set to remain at 13.1% through to 2017 (International Labour Organization, 2016). The report also revealed the alarming phenomenon of the rise of the class of “the working poor.” According to the same report, 37.7% or 156 million working youth are in extreme or moderate poverty. This

suggests that stagnation in upward social mobility is a chronic problem experienced by young people around the world.

In Hong Kong, although youth unemployment is not a pressing issue, stagnation in upward mobility is a problem that is becoming more evident. In June 2016, the Research Office of the Legislative Council Secretariat released a report entitled “Challenges of manpower adjustment in Hong Kong,” which revealed that due to the recent economic slowdown the future employment outlook is likely to stay cautious. There will be an increasing amount of young people who have attained degree education who must take up positions in lower-skilled occupations due to a slowdown in the supply of high-end jobs. They are also expected to be paid less than their predecessors (Research Office of the Legislative Council Secretariat, 2016).

From a global perspective, there is a significant worsening of youth unemployment in many advanced economies. NEETs can be found virtually everywhere in the world. According to a report compiled by the OECD in 2014 (OECD, 2014), between 2000 and 2012 about 15% of individuals between 15 and 29 years of age were classified as NEET, and a majority were women. This trend has remained stable throughout the period and is expected to persist. According to the same report, as of 2012 for the same age group, the average unemployment rate was 7% and the average percentage of people outside the labor force, that is, those who were neither in education nor seeking work, was 8% among all OECD countries. In another report compiled by the OECD in 2015 (OECD, 2015), the youth unemployment rates of the United States and United Kingdom were recorded as 11.6% and 13.2%, respectively. In some European countries such as Italy, Spain, and Greece, the youth unemployment rates were higher than 40%.

In Hong Kong, similar findings can also be observed. According to official government statistics, the youth (15 to 24 years of age) unemployment rate was 11.6% in the third quarter of 2012 (HKSAR, 2012). Another salient feature of youth unemployment in Hong Kong is that the labor force participation rate in this age group, which measures the proportion of the working age population engaging in the workforce either by working or looking for work, has shown a sustained downward trend from 1986 to 2010. The Hong Kong government reported that young people in Hong Kong had been delaying employment because of the numerous educational pathways provided to them (HKSAR, 2016). In short, we can see that regardless of geographical location, youth unemployment has become a major global issue that not only has triggered the enactment of different government policies as remedies, but also has posed challenges to educators. A very strong positive correlation between educational attainment and success in securing work has been identified and proven (Dietrich, 2013).

2.2.2 Local factors that serve as obstacles to curriculum change in Hong Kong

The above sections demonstrate that a major revamp of our philosophy of education is needed to prepare for future challenges. However, the cultural factors of 1) leadership style and 2) teacher resistance within the Hong Kong educational context can make a paradigm shift in the already “superficial” career education even more difficult (Ho, 2008).

First, at the school leadership level, the literature shows that the success of comprehensive school reform is heavily influenced by the principal leadership (Desimone, 2002; Education Department, 2001). Hallinger, Theodore, and Szeto’s (2013) comprehensive review of more than 15 years of educational leadership research revealed that school leadership in Hong Kong is characterized by 1) a high power distance and 2) a leadership style shaped by Chinese cultural norms.

In times of curriculum change, these two factors can yield mixed results. For example, although principals have been increasingly active in engaging staff in the school management process (Hallinger et al., 2013), this form of staff empowerment may not be welcomed. Lee and Dimmock’s (1999) multiple case study research found that staff members view this empowerment as leading to the development of a “fragmented and easily disjointed” school curriculum, because of a lack of central coordination. In addition, cultural values can be a major obstacle. Influenced by the Chinese tradition of embracing social harmony, staff members may be cooperative on the surface but dissatisfied at heart. If staff make their feelings known to the principal they may feel they are disrupting the social harmony, and thus may become overworked (Careless & Dimmock, 2001). Any type of education reform may thus entail more work and pressure for teachers (Poon & Wong, 2007).

Research evidence also suggests that the chances of successful WSA implementation are very low because a majority of teachers are still not adequately trained for this work (Patton & Burton, 1997; Yuen, Leung, & Chan, 2014). This notion is supported by the observations of Hui (2002). The findings of her study, which involved more than 900 teachers in Hong Kong, revealed that a whole-school approach was not practiced in the majority of the surveyed school. Teachers held different attitudes and beliefs toward the concept of a whole-school approach to counseling.

Second, teachers of different abilities and attitudes manage curriculum innovations differently. There are many examples in the literature of failed attempts due to heavy teacher resistance. The strong examination-driven learning culture in Hong Kong has led to the formation of a product view of assessment and teaching, thereby creating a major obstacle to change. Examples of hurdles encountered in the process of curriculum change in teaching and assessment can be extremely informative and can help us understand how such forces can inhibit curriculum change.

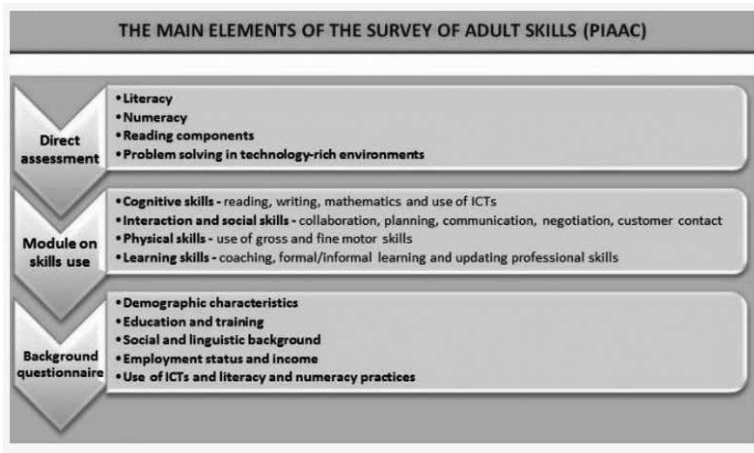
In terms of teaching, a long history of research shows that teachers in Hong Kong may not always welcome policy changes. New teaching approaches, such as the task-based approach and the introduction of the English benchmark examination for teachers, have sparked widespread discontent among local English teachers (Urmston, 2001). How English is taught in the classroom is also a concern, and Lin (1996) reported that code switching is very common, teaching pedagogies are heavily textbook based (McGrath, 2006; Reynolds, 1974; Richards, Tung & Ng, 1992), and over-reliance on the use of mechanical drills and rote learning to prepare students for high stake examinations (Tse, 2017). The newly introduced New Senior Secondary School curriculum has also taken its toll, and teachers have demonstrated a tendency to resist change and revert to the use of traditional approaches (Tong, 2010). This observation is supported by other empirical studies, in which new directions such as the emphasis of the use of formative assessment to promote learning (Lee & Coniam, 2013), the use of school-based assessment to promote the use of formative assessment (Fok, Kennedy, Chan, & Yu, 2006) and the promotion of a constructivist approach to learning (Luk Fong, 2013) have received strong opposition from local teachers. School-based assessment has generated territory wide criticism and is now gradually being simplified (in Liberal Studies, for example) or even phased out (as in Business, Accounting and Finance).

In short, we can see from this section that Hong Kong is now facing many challenges to change at both global and local levels. In particular, questions have been raised in terms of whether teachers and school leaders in Hong Kong have the professionalism to initiate and manage change.

2.3 Opportunities: assisting learners in acquiring 21st century skills

Many national-level educational departments (the OECD, HKSAR for example) have echoed the observations of Dietrich (2013) by suggesting that schools should help learners make the transition from education to work. The OECD has identified a number of “adult skills” (see Figure 1) that are essential for students who are 16 or older to succeed in the 21st century. Proficiency in the use of technology has been identified as a core skill. The Survey of Adult Skills (OECD, 2013), which is an assessment inventory to assess competency in these skills, was later developed. The assessment reported that in most participating countries (30 countries in total), a significant number of adults had very limited technological skills. The report stressed that while connectivity can be an issue, the proficiency of ICT skills is dependent on the level of literacy and numeracy skills. A good level of reading ability is essential for learning, and it is highly likely that information will not be understood or managed effectively without it, thereby affecting the acquisition of ICT skills. In short, if school education does not reflect the current needs of the labor market, it is likely that youth unemployment will persist.

Figure 1 (OECD, 2013)



Part 3 – Discussion and recommendations on career guidance and life planning education in Hong Kong schools

In this part, conclusions made in the previous sections in terms of the theoretical and empirical aspects of career guidance are synthesized into this model, and their implications are discussed. This synthesis can help formulate a situated career education program that is well attuned to the pragmatic needs of the 21st century.

3.1 Theoretical adaptations

The recent development of career theories appears to be limited, which must be recognized from the outset. One factor contributing to this problem is that the research work by Holland and Super was so broad that it is very difficult to develop new perspectives (Sharf, 2013b:4). Efforts should therefore be made to refine the construct portrayed by the theories of Holland and Super, so that career development theories can be more relevant and consistent for empirical use in modern society.

First, one of the main criticisms of Holland's theory is that it is not up to date in terms of the current labor market. It assumes that the employment market is static. This problem can be solved by keeping up-to-date information on job classification (see the International Labour Office, 2012, for example). In Hong Kong for example, the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups and the Home Affairs Bureau have collaborated and developed an online job classification database entitled "Job-tionary," which is a source of information potentially reflecting the current developments in the employment market.

Career counselors can update their career assessment inventories (e.g., assigning Holland codes) by making reference to the database. New jobs becoming available in the job market can be identified, and then suitable Holland codes can be assigned to them. Job roles from Holland's initial classification can also be reviewed to see if their nature or skill requirements have changed. If changes have taken place, new Holland codes should be assigned to reveal their current roles in contemporary society.

Second, to enhance the theoretical foundations of Holland's theory, we should not assume that people are static objects that will do little to change to adapt to the environment. Instead, we should follow Zunker's (2002) suggestion of attempting to negotiate with the client to arrive at a decision and avoid being authoritative. Psychological developmental variables in the second stage of counseling can be identified. For example, we can look at motivational factors, such as vocational self-efficacy, to understand where the client lacks confidence at work (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

Third, career guidance emphasizes the totality of the career decision-making process throughout a person's life. Aspects other than person-occupational fit should therefore also be studied. Other prevailing career development theories can be used in conjunction with Holland and Super's theoretical foundations for career education purposes. For example, Howard and Walsh's (2010) Model of Children's Vocational Reasoning can be adapted to the local context to explain the stages of adolescent career development. Gottfredson's (2002) theory of Circumscription and Compromise, and Self Creation can be used to help guide teachers to understand how adolescents compare alternatives and ultimately are selective, enabling career decisions that are most accessible to them. Finally, the Chaos Theory of Careers (Pryor & Bright, 2011) can be used to show how unexpected events can affect an individual's career development throughout their life.

3.2 Empirical adaptations

As mentioned in previous sections, one main challenge to the youth of the 21st century is the difficulty in making the transition from education to work. It is therefore of the utmost importance for career guidance programs to incorporate elements that can facilitate such a transition. The top priority is thus for schools to help learners develop proficiency in 21st century skills. A number of transnational organizations, such as OECD and the European Commission, have formulated policies to help schools nurture students in developing these skills. Although termed and categorized differently, there appears to be a consensus on the main elements of a 21st century skills set, which consists of the following three core competencies: 1) literacy, 2) digital technology, and 3) math and science (European Commission, 2012; OECD, 2014; Schleicher, 2015).

Essentially, the overarching theme is that school curricula should be able to

familiarize students with the use of technology in problem-solving and communication. In terms of the development of literacy skills, contrary to traditional forms of learning, students in the 21st century should be proficient in both decoding and producing printed and digital texts effectively (New London Group, 1996). In terms of the development of technological skills, being competent in using and applying ICT skills in communication for work and leisure is essential (European Commission, 2012); for example, the teaching of computer programming skills in schools and producing multimodal texts for work and leisure.

In addition, the consistency and congruence of psychological tests can be checked before local empirical use (Leung, 2005), and it is encouraging to see that a number of large scale research studies such as CLAP for Youth @ JC have been launched, in an attempt to develop a career intervention tool that is consistent and congruent with the indigenous culture of Hong Kong. Also, a range of career guidance frameworks (e.g., Ng & Yuen, 2016) and intervention tools (e.g., Chui, 2012; Lee, 2007) have been developed locally. These useful resources can be made available to career guidance teachers for counseling purposes in the future.

3.3 Overall conclusion: What are the challenges and opportunities for career guidance and life planning education in the 21st century?

To summarize, by drawing on the information presented in the above sections, it is clear that a major challenge for career guidance teachers is that it is increasingly difficult for young people to make a smooth transition from education to work. Technological advancement in the 21st century has led to this problem, because it has shaped a labor market that is cost conscious, volatile, knowledge-based, and constantly changing. Young people are more vulnerable to unemployment, but we can see that there are opportunities for career counselors to help. Their work must be supported by a principal who acts as the expert and a leadership spearheading curriculum change. Together with the career counselor(s), the principal can design and devise a school curriculum that can assist learners to develop proficiency in 21st century/adult skills in school, to better prepare them to enter the job market (New London Group, 1996; OECD, 2013; Schleicher, 2015). Counselors can also prepare learners to understand that throughout their careers they need to constantly change and adapt to the environment. They are highly likely to be working in multiple jobs with different natures. The focus of the career education program, therefore, should be to develop proficiency in 21st century/adult skills to facilitate life-long learning and to enable learners to better understand themselves so they can develop flexibility in coping with career changes in the unstable employment market of the 21st century.

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香港的就業輔導和生涯規劃教育： 理論層面和實際推行上的機遇與挑戰

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香港

摘要

本文以一位現任職業輔導老師的角度，反思在香港中學實施就業輔導和生涯規劃教育時，在理論層面和實際推行上遇到的挑戰。此外，本文亦提出一些設計生涯規劃教育課程時應注意的問題。作者希望透過瞭解這些挑戰，可使前線教師發展相關課程以更有效地裝備學生，幫助他們把握未來生涯的機遇。

關鍵詞

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