How does different underlying assumptions of what core elements in CMS ought to be affect the content and organization of career guidance in a school context?

Author

Erik Hagaseth Haug

Assistant Professor and Ph.D.-Candidate

Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences

Erik.haug@inn.no

Type of contribution
Paper

Keywords
Critical Realism, CMS, awareness, underlying assumptions

Relation to the conference theme
The presentation relates to the conference theme by addressing a critical exploration on how different assumptions of the core elements of CMS affects organizational and procedural aspects of guidance. Further, I suggest critical realism as an alternative scientific underpinning for Multi-disciplinary research.

Objectives, theoretical framework and research questions
The aim of the study is to contribute to a more nuanced and differentiated understanding of the concept of quality in career guidance in schools, and to see how the understandings interrelate with theoretical assumptions. I suggest in this project that there is a power struggle between different interests, on how quality ought to be understood in career guidance in a Norwegian school context. In relation to CMS, this can be exemplified by looking at two different definitions of the concept. Based on discussions among the Nordic delegates in ELGPN, Thomsen propose the following

version: 'Career competences are competences for self-understanding and self-development; for exploring life and the worlds of learning and work; and for dealing with life, learning and work in periods of change and transition. Career competences involve being aware, not only of what you do, but also what you could do, and of how individuals are formed by their daily activities and their actions while simultaneously affecting their own opportunities for the future' (Thomsen, 2014, p. 5). On the other hand, ELGPN has the following version: 'Career management skills refer to a whole range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals and groups to gather, analyse, synthesise and organise self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions' (Sultana, 2012, p. 229). In my opinion, these two definitions consists of different underlying presuppositions or assumptions on questions like (1) what is the problem, (2) what is a good career choice, (3) what is good guidance. I advocate for an awareness on these underlying assumptions. Therefore, the research questions are:

- What is the problem represented to be for different stakeholders, users and beneficiaries, and in theories, research and policy documents relevant for school based career guidance services in a Norwegian context?
- What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?
- What effects (organizational and procedural solutions) are produced by this representation of the problem?
- What representations are 'silenced' in the current dialogue about the problem and its solutions?

The chosen scientific theoretical framework for this study is critical realism (CR). The origin of CR is to be found in a criticism of several dichotomous relations in science (e.g. between constructivism/positivism) (Danermark, Ekstrøm, Jakobsen and Karlsson, 2003). The goal was to create a more holistic approach to science, including building bridges between apparently conflicting ontological and epistemological viewpoints of reality and knowledge creation. Archer et.al (1998: xi) sum up the fundamental traits pointing to critical realism as an alternative epistemological and ontological approach to systemic research with the following words: 'critical realism claims to be able to combine and reconcile ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgmental rationality'. The first part of this statement implies that there exists a reality which is stratified, differentiated, structured and

changing. The second part tells us that our knowledge about this reality is always fallible. At the same time, there are some theoretical and methodological tools we can use in order to discriminate among theories regarding their ability to inform us about the external reality. One recommended way of performing this kind of judgemental rationality is through a critical realistic grounded theory approach (Kempster and Parry, 2014).

Research methodology

According to Patton and McMahon (2014: 170), 'The past two decades have been marked by a considerable expansion of research on career development in childhood and adolescence.' In spite of the positive development, Hooley (2014) acknowledged limitations in existing empirical knowledge. Based on an updated review of research findings, Patton and McMahon (2014) concludes that a much deeper understanding of factors and mechanism need to be developed. Critical realism claims that scientific work is to 'investigate and identify relationships and non-relationships, respectively, between what we experience, what actually happens, and the underlying mechanisms that produce the events in the world.' (Bhaskar 1978: 56). To gain this kind of rich insight, Kempster and Parry (2014: 88) advocates a grounded theory approach guided by a critical realistic frame. Key elements of this approach is 'First, clarifying the subject matter in relation to CR ontological assumptions. Second, data collection emphasizing exploring lived experience through interviews. Third, analyzing data based on abduction and retroduction. Retroduction implies a commitment to theoretical pluralism, at least at the outset of an investigation. Multiple theoretical lenses can be considered for what they tell us about the various and stratefied influences that are affecting the things we observe.'

Publications

In my project, three of the articles are used to clarify the subject matter (Haug and Plant, 2015; Haug, 2016a and Haug and Plant, 2016). The fourth article (Haug, 2017) presents the results from focus group interviews with pupils, practitioners and school leaders from secondary and upper secondary schools in a Norwegian county, focusing on their representations of good career guidance. The abductive analysis is provided in a comprehensive final summary of the project (Haug, for assessment). A

comprehensive summary in English is available in the October 2016 issue of National Institute for Career Education and Councelling Journal (Haug, 2016b).

Outcomes/results

My initial conclusion from the 'clarifying of the concept'-phase was an impression of an extensive diversity in representations of good career guidance, especially in the understandings of the preferable goal for guidance. In my opinion, the most essential results from the research, in relation to the conference theme relates to a difference in the understanding of the aim of career guidance.

In both theoretical representations and especially political steering documents and recommendations, an emphasis is put on the importance of preparation for future societal participation (Patton and McMahon, 2014; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2016; ELGPN, 2015; Thomsen, 2014). The implications for practice is a recommendation for a stronger emphasis on developing lifelong lasting career management skills (CMS) through different career learning activities (Hooley, Watts, Sultana, and Neary, 2013; Thomsen 2014). Given this description of policy representations of the preferred goal, I find it interesting that a defining theme emerging from all three participant representations in the focus group interviews (Haug, 2017) sees good guidance as fulfilled when focusing on the next career choice (e.g. from secondary to upper secondary). In the presentation I will discuss different explanations and implications for future research and practice in career guidance services in school

References

Archer, M.S., Bhaskar, R., Collier, A., Lawson, T. and Norrie, A. (eds) (1998) *Critical Realism: Essential Readings.* London: Routledge.

Bhaskar, R. (1978) *A Realist Theory of Science*, Hassocks: Harvester Press.

Danermark, B., Ekström, M., Jakobsen, L., and Karlsson, J. C. (2003) *Att förklara samhället*, Lund: Studentlitteratur.

European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2015) *Guidelines for Policies and Systems Development for Lifelong Guidace. A Reference Framework for the EU and for the Commission*, ELGPN Tools No. 6, Jyväskylä: ELGPN.

Haug, E. H. (2016a) Utdanningsvalg: Kompetanseutvikling for framtidens utdannings- og arbeidsliv, I Høsøien, U. & Lingås L.G. (eds) *Utdanningsvalg: Identitet og danning*, Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

Haug, E.H. (2016b). Can you hear the people sing? Quality-development in career guidance in Norwegian schools: a study on the importance of awareness of different voices. *NICEC Journal*, Issue 37, p.12-19.

Haug, E.H. (2017) Det er fint å være hos rådgiver, hun skjønner oss skjønner du» En empirisk studie av tema som anses som kjennetegn på kvalitet i skolens karriereveiledning. *Nordisk tidsskrift for veiledningspedagogikk. Vol 2, nr 1.* doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.15845/ntvp.v2i1.1161.

Haug, E.H. (unpublished) *Quality in career guidance in Norwegian schools*, Thesis, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences.

.Haug, E.H. and Plant, P. (2015) The potential role of career guidance and career education in combating early school leaving, *Nyelvtudományi Közlemények*, (3), p. 5-15.

Haug, E.H. and Plant, P. (2016) Research-based knowledge: researchers' contribution to evidencebased practice and policy making in career guidance. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 16, 1, p. 137–152. DOI: 10.1007/s10775-015-9294-6.

Hooley, T. (2014) *The evidence base on lifelong guidance: A guide to key finding for effective policy and practice*, Jyväskylä: ELGPN.

Hooley, T., Watts, A. G., Sultana, R. and Neary, S. (2013) The 'Blueprint' Framework for Career Management Skills: A Critical Exploration, *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 41, 2, p. 117-131. DOI:10.1080/03069885.2012.713908.

Kempster, S. and Parry, K. (2014) Critical realism and grounded theory, in Edwards, P.K., O'Mahoney, J., and Vincent, S. (eds), *Studying organizations using critical realism*, p. 86-108, Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Official Norwegian Reports (2016) Norge i omstilling – karriereveiledning for individ og samfunn, Oslo: Kunnskapsdepartementet.

Patton, W. and McMahon M. (2014) *Career Development and systems theory. Connecting theory and practice*, (3rd edn) Rotterdam: Sense Puplicers.

Sultana, R.G. (2012). Learning career management skills in Europe: a critical review. *Journal of Education and Work*. 25:2. DOI: 10.1080/13639080.2010.547846

Thomsen, R. (2014). A Nordic perspective on career competences and guidance – Career choices and career learning. NVL & ELGPN concept note, Oslo: NVL