

Research conference: Transitions, career learning and career management skills. Multi-disciplinary and critical perspectives

Stockholm University - October 2017

Abstract

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Type of contribution

Paper

Title of proposal

Career guidance in lower secondary schools – a focus on choice

Keywords

Youth career guidance, educational choice, learning

How the contribution is related to the conference theme

The presentation both relate to transitions, career learning and career competences - The focus is on how transitions for students in lower secondary school are supported by the youth guidance and how the work for supporting career competences could be developed.

General description

In Denmark, compulsory education begins in pre-school grade (approximately age 6) and ends after ninth grade (approximately age 16). Tenth grade is optional. Students then choose between vocational and upper-secondary education. Guidance practitioners employed by youth guidance centres (Ungdommens Uddannelsesvejledning/UU) provide guidance in relation to this transition. The guidance activities are a part of the mandatory activities for the students in the school. In lower-secondary school, there are various mandatory career guidance activities, such as information about the educational system, 'bridge-building activities' in which the students visit educational institutions, and some optional activities, such as short internships.

At the conference, I would like to present results from my research into career guidance in grade 9 and 10.

The research focuses on the way youth guidance is practised in Denmark and the way it is received by and makes sense to the students. The research questions are:

- How does youth career guidance unfolds in practice in Danish lower secondary school?

- How does youth guidance make sense to the students and support increased influence upon the conditions of their life?

The theoretical basis for the research is critical psychology. The critical psychology was founded in Germany by e.g. Klaus Holzkamp and is further developed in a Danish context. Within the area of career guidance by Thomsen (2012) 'Career Guidance in communities'.

Critical Psychology places an emphasis on understanding social practices from the standpoint of the subject. Participation, self-understanding, standpoint of the subject, conduct of everyday life, action potency, conditions and learning are central concepts. Moreover, in critical psychology it is a central issue that people both are determined by their conditions and at the same time seek influence upon and seek to change their conditions. Critical psychology is characterized as psychology from below and from practice emphasizing the voice of the users, e.g. young people – this in order to provide a basis for continued development of practice. This theoretical approach forms the basis for practice research.

The research on which the presentation will be based seeks to contribute with insight into first-persons-perspectives and reasons for actions. Additionally to get insight into social and material conditions in order to understand the significance for the individual.

The methods used are participant observation of guidance activities, lessons and students' breaks and interviews with students and career guidance practitioners as well.

The research was conducted in two ninth-grade classes on selected days spread over the whole school year. The classes were in two different schools connected to two different youth guidance centers. Students, career guidance practitioners and teachers were included in the research.

Results

The youth guidance comes about as a service that focuses primarily and narrowly on the students' choice of vocational or upper-secondary education. This emerges in the legislation, in the way the youth guidance practitioners and the teachers justify the guidance activities to the students and their parents and in the students' perception of the aim of the youth guidance.

The meaning the students ascribe to the youth guidance activities plays an important role for their participation in the activities.

Before the students have made an educational choice, they generally ascribe a positive meaning to guidance activities and to examine the educational choices they consider as well as related educational options.

Most of the students find it irrelevant to examine, visit and reflect on educations and jobs which they do not find interesting or which they do not consider relevant for them. The same is the case for most of the students when they have made an educational choice. This is based on their understanding that youth guidance activities should primarily help them to make an educational choice. Some students do not participate and other participate but mostly wait for the programme to end so they can go home.

I argue that a primary focus on educational choice narrows the perspective of the student. In addition, I argue that youth guidance activities are also important after students have made their educational choices. The choice of what to do after lower-secondary school is only the first of a range of career related choices during life. Therefore it is important that students continue to develop their career competences and take part in career-guidance activities even though the student have already decided what he or she wants to do after finishing lower-secondary school.

This indicates that to support the students to find it relevant to participate in youth guidance activities after they have made an educational choice, or in activities which they find does not closely relate to what they consider as relevant for them, it is important that the youth guidance – and the legislation – help the students to ascribe other meaning to the activities in the youth guidance than only to support the first educational choice. In addition it is of course important that the activities are organized with a view to supporting career learning in a broad sense and not only focus on choice making.

Publication

The research will be presented in a ph.d. thesis.

Please also see:

Skovhus, R. B. (2014a). At udnytte potentialerne i de aktiviteter der foregår. Unge på Tværs.

Retrieved from <http://ungepaatvaers.dk/wp-content/uploads/at-udnytte-potentialerne-i-de-aktiviteter-der-foregaar2.pdf>

Skovhus, R. B. (2014b). Fra valg til læring - potentialer i at skifte perspektiv. Unge på Tværs.

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Skovhus, R. B. (2016). A focus on educational choice has social justice consequences - an empirical study informed by Sen's capability approach. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC)*, 36(1), 54–60.

Thomsen, R., & Skovhus, R. B. (2016). Karrierekompetence i skolen. In *Utdanningsvalg - identitet og dannning*. Gyldendal Akademisk.