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The Symposium: *Social justice in Career Guidance and Counselling as a requirement to navigate a fast-paced world* at the 17th EARA Conference – *Adolescence in a rapidly changing world*, 2–5 September 2020

Western societies have experienced complex cultural, socioeconomic and political transformations over the last forty years, which have led to various individualised forms of socialisation, community fragmentation, fast-paced social changes and ways of living. Additional transformations in the professional world include uncertainty/risk, competitiveness, and precarity in the labour market. Despite increased productivity, these transformations have contributed to social inequality in developed and developing countries. Therefore, young people develop their life/vocational projects within an increasingly complex, demanding and uncertain world. This symposium sought to propose a reflection on how social justice might become central to the field of career guidance and counselling (CGC) research and praxis so that it truly helps young people navigate the world of work, which is characterised by rising levels of inequality. The papers presented are all concerned with vulnerable populations that suffer the consequences of socioeconomic inequality, and whose life/vocational projects and professional experiences (i.e., precarity and unemployment) are undermined.

The European Association for Research on Adolescence (EARA) seeks to promote the understanding of the experiences that are central to adolescence and youth as a developmental phase, as well as the inherent challenges faced in this

population group, from a multidisciplinary research perspective. EARA organises biannual conferences to promote knowledge sharing, discussion and networking in order to encourage research and intervention. The last conference was organised by the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto (FPCEUP), Portugal, from September 2 to 5, 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time, the conference was held online. The efforts and hard work of the organisation committee allowed an enriching and smooth experience for participants.

EARA conference 2020 fostered crucial reflections for understanding the role of research and intervention specifically aimed at adolescents as a target group, and discussions of how parents and practitioners could aid adolescent career development pathways. The conference included multidisciplinary psychosocial research projects that stress the relevance of dialogue between research, practice and policies; debates on the role of political education so that researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and adolescents and youth can collaboratively tackle the current challenges faced collectively, such as: climate change, social inequality, populism, career issues such as unemployment and precarity, among so many other current issues. In the current paper, we wish to reflect on the experience of the symposium "Social justice in Career Guidance and Counselling (CGC) as a requirement to navigate a fast-paced world" (organised by Lucas Casanova and Joaquim Luis Coimbra), and the discussions and future recommendations for research and praxis this symposium generated.

This symposium sought to foster reflection and discussion about the relevance of a social justice standpoint in CGC and how social justice could become a strategy to tackle issues of social inequality to help the youth to cope with the socioeconomic and political challenges brought about by rapid social transformations in western societies, at the same time alerting them to the dangers of CGC's contribution to the reproduction of the status quo (Bauman, 2001; Prilleltensky, 1994; Sennett, 1998; Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012). Despite the theoretical points of view and research results that inform this article, its aim is an experiential one, presenting reflections on the debates and discussions this symposium stimulated.

The symposium was composed of four papers, which were all based on qualitative research methodologies. Two of these papers were focused on the challenges faced by adolescents from geographically vulnerable locations. Based on research in the British islands of Orkney and Shetland, Alexander focused on how young people aspiring to enter higher education from these communities imagine highly mobile futures, and yet their lived experiences demonstrate constraints on this mobility. Thus, she highlights the role of space and place as crucial considerations in CGC in order to challenge the normalisation of mobility. Toiviainen and Albien presented a cross-cultural exploration of the experiences of disadvantaged youth from regional rural Finland and metropolitan marginalised areas of South Africa. Their research emphasises the hidden influences of spatial inequality and the

neoliberally informed naturalisation of mobility needed for career development. They present reflections on the young people's experiences of belonging, in terms of the dimensions of geographical places, social relationships and the historical moment in time. Thus, the sense of connectedness of these young people to communities and the social context of marginalised youth is brought to the forefront.

The last two papers focused on an analysis of practices of CGC that may integrate concerns of social justice. Bilon reflected on social justice through a narrative analysis of a group of Polish practitioners, who seemed to demonstrate resistance to the role of social justice in their practices. The participants' inconsistency in reflections on social values, social justice and the demands created by inequality, as well as on the role of advocacy, are interpreted through a consideration of socio-cultural and political conditions that account for specificities in Polish society. Casanova and colleagues (FPCEUP) presented the results of a focus group discussion with Portuguese practitioners that, based on the results of a quantitative study that explored experiences of precarity and unemployment, discussed socially just practices and how the labour market is "an aggressor". The hegemonic psychological discourse was identified – a discourse that reflects neoliberal values of individualism and meritocracy, which standardise/normalise individuals, making them responsible them for their disadvantage and suffering, while commodifying workers.

The discussion of these papers by Paixão allowed a reflection on the commonalities and specificities of these papers, while emphasizing the path these authors are taking towards the fast-growing critical perspectives on CGC, within constructivist and social-constructionist frameworks (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/1971; Gergen, 1996; Parker, 2015). Based on the dominance of neoliberal values in CGC, which reflect the discourse adopted by policymakers, she offered an analysis of CGC practices and how this kind of research can contribute to changes in policymaking and intervention, moving beyond the current status-quo, promoting individual subjectivity and agency for navigating an uncertain world through reflection and reflexivity. Moreover, she established crucial connections between the results of these studies and the role of CGC in contributing to the construction of decent and sustainable work, namely through advocacy.

We would like to finish this reflection with the debate elicited by the question posed to us by the PhD candidate Dom Weinberg (Utrecht University), specialising in socio-economic impacts on adolescents' well-being:

> *How we, as researchers, face those (i.e., colleagues /and or fellow researchers) who want to depoliticise our work, by removing the historical, political, ideological context and who think advocacy for marginalised people is not the role of researchers?*

In order to address the core of the question posed, part of the discussion focused on the value of an approach to research and analysis that demonstrates the social construction of reality and individual experiences and so highlights the effect

of socioeconomic and political circumstances on people's lives. Therefore, some authors shared the relevance of discussing these issues with the colleagues who may not see the political dimension in their research and emphasizing the possible social or psychological effects of depoliticized research or practice. This also entails demonstrating how we, as individuals, researchers, practitioners, are political beings, with individual experiences influenced by socioeconomic, cultural and political circumstances, which then influence our life experiences, viewpoints and research work. Therefore, it is impossible for any individual and any researcher to be neutral, even though we may believe ourselves to be. Only by becoming aware of the impact of the social and political contexts we are embedded in, can we understand the sociopolitical impact of our research and practice. Without this awareness, researchers or practitioners are unintentionally negating the sociopolitical origins of inequality, thus contributing to the reproduction of the status quo. As such, no science is value neutral. This, though, may be a difficult path for researchers and so connecting with people who share interests may be helpful for building a community and facing the challenges of value-laden research.

An additional consideration was the researcher's subjective positioning through reflexivity. This was discussed as a crucial element for understanding our relationship with our research, the participants or clients in CGC, and the impact of our own values on them. Moreover, it became apparent that it was crucial to consider the history of the theory of CGC as grounded in Western societies, mainly the United States of America, and how these theories were developed for middle-class white people, assuming stability in life projects and career paths. Nowadays, stability is not a given and CGC must be made accessible and answer the needs of *all*, especially vulnerable population groups. However, this entails considering the historical and social context that constrain and/ or shape people's experiences and decisions. Advocacy for improving conditions of marginalized people is considered an integral part of the role of CGC practitioners. In this discussion, advocacy and professional activism were voiced by some as "an obligation", described as a need that goes beyond research, publication and intervention, but also infuses into other roles, intervening in the community and engaging with policymakers or other stakeholders.

In conclusion, these research studies and reflections highlight how CGC should foster an analysis of socioeconomic and political environments that may help young people (i.e. adolescents and/ or youth), not only in decision-making, but also in understanding the social context, their place in the world by promoting critical consciousness through conscientization, and how they can have a role in transforming the environment through collective forms of agency, so that a more equal and just world can be co-constructed by all (Freire, 1970/1972). Only through an emancipatory CGC can young people successfully tackle the challenge of transforming the world as part of their own life projects (Hooley, 2018; Hooley, Sultana, & Thomsen, 2019). Indeed, the discussion in the symposium also allowed us to point out how

a research focus on social justice has also had specific implications for us in terms of conceptualising our own roles as researchers, and our research practices, as well as practitioners.

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