

Nordic Research in Educational and Vocational Guidance

Peter Plant^{1*}, in association with Lone Lønne Christiansen², Anders Lovén³, Gudbjörg Vilhjálmsdóttir⁴ & Raimo Vuorinen⁵

¹ Danish University of Education, Tuborgvej 164, 2400 Copenhagen NV, Denmark; ² Norwegian Board of Education, Norway; ³ Malmö University, Sweden; ⁴ University of Iceland, Iceland; ⁵ University of Jyväskylä, Finland (* Author for correspondence, E-mail: pepl@dpu.dk)

The Nordic countries have followed slightly different, yet complimentary paths in terms of research in guidance. The balance between studies in guidance based on sociology, psychology, and even ethnology and philosophy varies according to the research focus and tradition of each of the Nordic countries. This article covers main Nordic guidance research issues with characteristic examples from the various countries¹.

Crossroads

The field of educational and vocational guidance research is a crossroads of interests. In some cases, research questions arise from practice: for example, which guidance methods are appropriate, how should ICT (Information and Communication Technology) be used in guidance, and what actually happens in guidance interviews? Often, however, external interests aim at conducting research and evaluations of guidance from a policy-making perspective, posing questions such as: is guidance efficient, what is the impact of guidance, and do present guidance structures support cross-sectoral co-operation? Research in cost-benefit and labour market related issues fall into this category.

Nordic research in the guidance field is in a number of cases carried out by research experts with little or no expertise in terms of guidance. This is particularly true of the growing number of external policy-oriented evaluations of guidance carried out by private companies on a contract basis. Guidance research conducted by experts within the field often forms part of formal studies on the Master's or PhD level, or as part of, for example, projects funded by the EU. Thus, research interests within the field mostly concentrate on gaining a better understanding of the nature and quality of guidance, whereas the research interests of external bodies often focus on structural and economic issues. The difference lies in the focus on the aspect of

¹ This article draws upon Plant, P. et al (2003). Research in Educational and Vocational Guidance in the Nordic Countries: Current Trends. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2003, pp. 101-122. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

understanding on the one hand and that of action on the other. In some exemplary cases these two perspectives go hand in hand, as depicted below.

A few researchers have aimed at understanding the nature of guidance from an historical point of view. Mattson (1984) depicted Swedish guidance since the 1940s as soft public policy intervention related closely to labour market issues. A further highly personal Swedish account along the same lines was given by Vestin (1991), based on her 50 years of experience in the field. Plant (1996) analysed the shift and its underlying societal forces in the focus of Danish guidance from the German inspired test-oriented psychometric tradition dating back to the 1880s to the educational and client-centred tradition of the 1960s extending into the 1990s. Finally, the Danish political rhetoric used to both legitimise and criticise guidance over the last 50 years was analysed by Plant (2005).

The following sections, under the headings of Structures (based on sociology, in which the bulk of studies are found), Contents (based on psychology; mostly studies on guidance methods), and Values (a small example of an ethnology-based study and a growing interest in a philosophical approach to guidance), illustrate some main features of Nordic guidance research since the 1970s. The imbalance between the three categories reflects the research interest in the different aspects of guidance in the Nordic context.

Structures

Using methods derived from sociology, a number of studies into guidance, its structures and linkages, and its possible effects have been conducted in all the Nordic countries. Much research in this category is quantitative, yet some interviewing and other qualitative research methods are used.

Maaløe (1995), for example, approached guidance from a holistic viewpoint, linking guidance and the broader societal situation of Danish youth. The values, goals and priorities of Danish guidance workers were documented in comprehensive research across guidance sectors in the 1980s (Jørgensen & Plant, 1986). Other examples include extensive studies into the goals and roles of Swedish educational and vocational guidance in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Åsemar, 1977; Åsemar, 1978; Åsemar, 1980; Åsemar, 1985; Franke-Wikberg & Lundgren, 1980; Franke-Wikberg & Jonsson, 1981). This was the time when Swedish guidance professionals focused on *Kompensatorisk vägledning*, i.e. guidance as societal compensation. This was backed by governmental goals and guidelines, and was reinforced by a radical and wide-ranging set of ethical guidelines (www.vagledarforeningen.org). These guidelines urged (and still do) Swedish career guidance professionals to fight injustice and inequality, to be proactive and to stand up for the weak and the vulnerable in Swedish society. Guidance as social engineering is the key concept here, but does not always correspond to reality. The distance between rhetoric and

reality was and continues to be considerable (Borhagen & Lovén, 1991; Skolverket, 1997).

The Swedish guidance research of this period was sociologically and politically motivated to legitimise and support equity/equality policies. On this basis, it was critical towards the laid-back version of Rogerian counselling (Rogers, 1951). The researchers did not abandon the client-centred approach as an appropriate method in a democratic and equality focused society, but they did view this model as inadequate and perhaps even somewhat naïve, as guidance is so much more than a person-to-person relationship. It involves societal issues such as family background, personal networks, ethnicity, gender, cultural competencies, and, in particular, economic and social conditions. The point was (and is) that these factors are important and should not be neglected in a Rogerian-inspired focus on the individual and the counselling relationship. Moreover, based on the idea of guidance as a compensatory tool, the guidance role emphasised advocacy, which implies speaking on behalf of the clients, especially the weak and vulnerable. In modern policy terminology, the emphasis was on social inclusion.

Thus, the Swedish research of the 1970s and 1980s underpinned the argument for the pivotal role of an extended guidance concept in terms of societal/policy development, recognising that guidance is much more than a face-to-face interview, as noted in a more current list of the wide range of guidance activities (Ford, 2001, p. 2): Informing, Advising, Assessing, Teaching, Enabling, Advocating, Networking, Feeding back, Managing, Innovation/Systems change, Signposting, Mentoring, Sampling work experience or learning tasters, and Following up.

In particular, the points of enabling, advocating, networking, feeding back and innovation/systems change, all point to the highly proactive guidance role illustrated above. This is sociology in action. It couples the research interest with the social change aspects. The downside, however, to this social compensating role was that, in practice, individual guidance professionals had severe difficulties in living up to the expectations and societal goals. This dilemma still haunts Swedish guidance. Moreover, cultural clashes between teachers and guidance experts (Studie- och Yrkesvägledare) create difficulties for the integration of guidance in Swedish schools, as depicted by Henrysson (1994). This point was repeated in an evaluation of guidance activities in publicly funded schools (Skolverket, 2005) which painted a rather gloomy picture of Swedish (decentralised) guidance focusing on its disparity in terms of resources and goals.

Norwegian careers guidance teachers (Rådgivningslærere), on the other hand, have struggled with an overburdened guidance role encompassing personal counselling, social work, and psychological support on top of careers education and guidance, all on a rather fragile professional basis (Teig, 2000).

Finnish research (e.g. Pirttiniemi, 2000) indicated that in assessing school effectiveness, personal guidance and counselling were rated positively by the

students. Where criticism occurred, the students stated that they did not receive enough attention, that their opinions were not listened to, and that they did not receive enough personal guidance. Interestingly, the students who rated guidance most positively were those who were likely to fail in the application process for secondary school. These findings indicated that more emphasis should be placed on enhancing the counselling skills of all teachers when improving the effectiveness of primary school education. The data to support this argument indicated that students have negative school experiences in many respects; especially negative were the boys' experiences of teachers. Even though the students' school experiences were significant for their future after completing comprehensive school, the social background factors were even more significant in terms of e.g. unemployment in the family or problems with family relations.

A recent study (Honkanen, 2006) focused on the extent to which students with special needs were supported in their transition from comprehensive education to vocational education and later to the labour market. She found that there is a gap between policy and practice: work experience, for example, has only weak linkages with career development issues. Thus, the transition from vocational education to the labour market or further study was insufficiently supported. According to the results there is a need to promote cross-sectoral and multi-professional guidance provision and provide more in-service training for teachers. Another Finnish researcher, Onnismaa (2003), pointed to the unstable foundations of society, using Giddens's work as a framework for understanding the changing nature of guidance in professional terms.

In Iceland, Vilhjálmsdóttir (2003; Vilhjálmsdóttir & Arnkelsson, 2003) has carried out research on *habitus* groups in relation to adolescence, and on the relevance of this approach to career development. These studies continue research done in Finland (Motola, 2000) showing that Bourdieu's habitus concept can be valuable in explaining career development phenomena among youth.

Research and Policy Making

A further Danish example of guidance research based on sociology was found in the preparation and follow-up of Education for All, an educational concept of the mid-1990s which emphasised the social inclusion aspect of education. Education for All was a multifaceted range of policies, which included new flexible and individualised forms of basic vocational training, known as EGU (Erhvervsgrunduddannelse), and the highly flexible and tailored Open Youth Education, known as FUU (Fri Ungdomsuddannelse). The latter comprised a variety of educational components, such as formal learning, informal learning, self-formulated projects, and studies or work experiences abroad over a period of two-three years. Even the time spent in FUU was flexible. Interestingly, the main societal

control and contact mechanisms in both programmes (EGU & FUU) were the counsellors who entered into a personal contract with the students. Individual action planning was the hub of the guidance activities in these programmes (Plant, 1999a), and heavy emphasis was placed on guidance in terms of close and personal follow-up. FUU in particular turned out to be such a success that it became a threat to mainstream education. With a flow of 16,000 students during its seven years of existence, it questioned the traditional educational planning and rationale to a dangerous degree. It was one of the first programmes to be axed by the right-wing government that came into power in 2001. One of the inspiring aspects of FUU was that it did not stigmatise the participants as educational losers as so many dropout schemes have done. It attracted both resourceful and more vulnerable youths (Plant, 2000a). The educational narratives of FUU students tell a story of revitalising the joy of learning for highly different individuals (Sørensen, 2001), as the students had regained the crucial ownership of their life as an ongoing developmental project. Likewise, narrative approaches have been used in other studies on guidance and the concept of career as life project (e.g. Jonsson, 1999) and the cross-pressures of the career decision-making process (Hutters, 2004).

Before implementing the Danish Education for All policies, however, extensive studies in terms of the reasons for educational drop-out and failures were scrutinised and coupled with statistical material on the social and economic conditions of students, along with broad studies into teaching techniques, didactic approaches, guidance and other forms of student support: mentoring, tutoring, coaching. The point was that educational and guidance measures were implemented after serious research had been conducted. Policies were then put in place with a large guidance component and then evaluated (Andersen, 1997; Andreassen et al., 1997a; Andreassen et al., 1997b; Jensen et al., 1997). In many other cases the political process is reversed: if any evaluation at all is made, the research process aims, sometimes implicitly, to legitimise already implemented policies. No critical questions are asked.

Open Youth Education, Denmark

One of the most exhaustive follow-up studies in terms of Education for All was, in fact, the one on Open Youth Education, FUU (Hansen, 2000; 2001), which was conducted by a private company. It comprised massive questionnaires given to students and counsellors, focus group interviews, etc. over a period of three years. It concluded that “FUU hit the target group, but unevenly” (Hansen, 2001, p. 34). This was a remarkable statement, insofar as the target group was initially categorised as everybody who either dropped out or did not fit into mainstream education, with no upper age limit. In terms of guidance, the main finding was that most FUU students were either very satisfied or satisfied with their counsellor. In the cases where they were dissatisfied, students had been forced to change counsellor along the way (due to e.g. their counsellor changing jobs). This pointed to the importance of the highly

personalised counselling relationship, and to the value of comprehensive and continuous guidance support (Hansen, 2001).

Marginalised

A similar pilot research policy procedure was implemented in the early 1990s, where a variety of different unemployment and activation measures were piloted under the headings of Educational Offer (UTB, Uddannelsestilbud) and Employment Offer (ATB, Arbejdstilbud). Unemployed people were thus given job/training/education offers (Aarkrog et al., 1991; Jensen, 1991; Høgelund, 1992). In some cases, no doubt, this was perceived by the clients as “an offer they couldn’t refuse”. Guidance was an integrated part of such schemes, but interestingly most clients did not recognise that they had been offered guidance at all, and if they did, guidance was not valued to any significant degree. On the basis of the evaluations (and under changing labour market conditions), the labour market reforms of the late 1990s put more emphasis on motivating unemployed people through closer follow-up, including guidance, and through reduced unemployment benefits.

Research into the causes and effects of segregation and marginalisation of minority groups has been carried out, in particular, by Jensen (2004; Jensen & Jørgensen, 2005), who has also taken an interest in youths who break away from their social background and stigmas (Jensen, 2003). In both cases guidance plays a major role in terms of social inclusion.

Sociological perspectives have prevailed in Norwegian research in the guidance field. As in the Danish and Swedish cases, examples include a number of studies on inequalities in educational choices (e.g. Edvardsen, 1991; Edvardsen, 1993; Edvardsen, 1995). A major educational reform in 1994 stimulated research on study attainment and mismatch issues between educational choices and perceived labour market needs, including gender and guidance perspectives (Sandberg & Vibe, 1995; Støren, Skjærslie & Aamodt, 1998). Likewise, the gender aspect was a focal point of the research by Christiansen (1996) and Arnesen (1997) on career choices in a gender segregated labour market. Conscious career choices were the focal point of Hatlevik (1999), and the project on Conscious Career Choices (Bevisste utdanningsvalg, 1997-2000) was followed closely by researchers (Buland & Havn 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001a).

The research methods in these studies were mostly qualitative, including interviews with students, teachers, guidance professionals, and project leaders. Among the conclusions was a renewed interest in the gender perspectives of educational choices, and, thus, in guidance. This project also included a study on career choices in the 10th grade in Eastern Norway (Nyhus & Fauske, 1998), which confirmed that career choices are often made on the basis of vocational preferences, and are strongly linked to the social, educational and vocational background of the family. Incidentally, students rated careers guidance in schools positively.

ICT

The impact of ICT in school-based guidance (for example, the impact of the congruence-theory inspired Veivalg programme from A-etaten, the Public Employment service) was analysed in Norway by Hatlevik (2002). One of the findings was that this type of interest/self-assessment programme was in demand among students, and that the programme, in fact, to some extent was used by a broader audience than the initial target group (the clients of the employment service). Further studies into the guidance component of Norwegian public employment services (PES) have been conducted by the A-etat (the Norwegian PES) itself (Arbeidsdirektoratet, 2004).

Focused & Trojan

The Norwegian project on Separate Counselling Services (Delt Rådgivningsansvar) included a strong research component (Buland & Havn 2001b, 2001c, 2002a, 2002b, 2004a, 2004b) on the impact of new guidance structures and more specialised guidance roles. Qualitative research methods (interviews) as well as questionnaires sent to students (N = 520) in the project schools formed the backbone of this research. These studies conclude that a more focused vocational guidance effort, as opposed to a more disparate focus on personal and social guidance is preferable. The students in the project schools (where vocational guidance was emphasised) seemed to rate guidance more positively than students in non-project schools.

Further research with a sociological perspective in Sweden includes the work of Kim (1983, 1998) who questioned the concept of career choice. In Denmark, Skov (1995, 1996, 1998), using massive questionnaires, examined the career choices of youth in the 1990s and the impact of school-based guidance in this respect. The social inclusion aspect of guidance activities has frequently been one of Skov's focal points (Skov, 2002). One of his main findings was that guidance does play an important role in these terms, but that parents, too, play a major role in career choices: kitchen-table (family and peer) guidance often plays a more significant role than formal guidance in schools. This point recurred in comparative Danish-Norwegian qualitative and quantitative guidance research (Jørgensen, 1993). Pupils and students were satisfied with the guidance activities in schools (interviews, work experience programmes, lectures), but they did not rely solely on this type of input. Again, the research showed that parents and friends played a major role in their career decisions. Many research reports have focused on social inequalities and the role of guidance in preventing drop-out: the Norwegian Baklien, Bratt & Gotaas (2004) and Hansen (2005) are examples.

Finally, Plant (2005b) introduced the concept of the Trojan Horse in guidance, thus pointing to the sometimes subversive nature of guidance policy making in institutions that may have other goals than guidance on their agenda.

Quality Issues

The quality of guidance in its many forms is a focal point in most countries (Plant, 2001). Measuring and quality assurance issues are on the agenda and national evaluations of the state of guidance are carried out continuously in the Nordic countries. An example of this kind of research was conducted in Finland (Numminen et al., 2002), involving an evaluation of guidance in compulsory school, upper secondary school, vocational education, and in transitional stages of education. The project was based on the Finnish Board of Education's model of evaluation concerning the efficiency of education. It focused on guidance as a vehicle for growth and development and for study skills, and on vocational orientation and guidance to further education, including the availability of guidance, guidance in transitional stages of education and prevention of education dropout. The evaluation comprised inquiries and interviews with students in compulsory schools, upper secondary schools and vocational education (N = 8 147), tutors (N = 502), principals (N = 460), organisers of education (N = 138), and administrative boards and parents of school pupils (N = 4 050).

The study revealed a growing need and demand for careers guidance, which is a result of changes in working life as well as factors that have increased the flexibility of the school system and enhanced the opportunity for creating individual study paths. The availability of guidance was evaluated, inter alia, by assessing the student/counsellor ratio. On average, in compulsory school, the student/counsellor ratio was 245:1, in upper secondary school, 288:1, and in vocational education, 510:1, with significant variations. Thus, there are deficiencies in the availability of guidance, and not all students receive the personal guidance or support they need in their studies and development. The study also found significant differences in the actual realisation of guidance in different sectors. Guidance related to further education was efficient, whereas guidance in terms of study skills was least efficient, and guidance in terms of vocational orientation was problematic. The evaluation revealed a great need for information on working life and professions. Moreover, principals and decision-makers seemed to be unaware of the need for guidance. This deficiency was seen as especially problematic when implementing and assessing preventative dropout guidance activities.

The evaluation covered three pivotal transitional stages of the Finnish educational system, which were studied from the viewpoint of the individual and that the educational system. Schools attend to the transition from the sixth grade of basic school to the seventh grade carefully, and the pupils and their parents are familiar

with the studies at the next level. However, depending on the subject, between one third and more than half of the parents considered the information they had been given on their child's transition to the seventh grade insufficient.

Throughout the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades, the pupils are prepared for the transition from compulsory school to upper secondary school or vocational education. The evaluation shows that in school, the pupils applying for secondary education were taken care of, but that many groups of pupils apparently have not been given sufficient support, since they were unable to make decisions concerning their education. Three such groups emerged from the evaluation: 1) those who lacked any further plans; 2) those who moved to upper secondary school without a clear plan to allow themselves more time to make vocational choices; and 3) those who, after entering vocational education, interrupted their studies or moved to another field because of a "wrong" choice. These groups are also in greater danger of dropping out of education and withdrawing from working life at this stage.

The inequality between upper secondary school and vocational education was clearly shown in the evaluation: compulsory school guidance co-operated much better with upper secondary school than with vocational education. The school-based counsellors lacked sufficient knowledge of vocational education. The pupils' parents claimed that they had been better informed about upper secondary school than vocational education.

Questions on the transition from upper secondary school or vocational education to further education and/or work include clarification of further plans. The evaluation showed that the organisers of education, the principals and the counsellors, thought that the students were well aware of the further education alternatives, but less than half of the students considered themselves to be so.

In 2002–2005 the Finnish National Board of Education also evaluated guidance services in adult education. According to the results there is a need for a strategic planning of guidance provision in adult education institutions, and guidance should be a more integrated part of learning and teaching process. Only 9 % of staff members in charge of guidance activities had relevant training or certificates in guidance. In adult education institutes 80 % of staff members who had part-time responsibilities in guidance had no training at all in guidance (Numminen, 2005)

The results of these studies paint a rather gloomy picture, which leaves room for improvement in terms of professionalisation. However, the links between evaluations of guidance and policy making are in fact close in this case. Thus, the Finnish Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education have taken concrete steps in the light of such evaluations. One example was the contracts for 2004 – 2006 between the universities and the Ministry of Education in which the universities were required to present a specific plan for how to improve guidance provision. Additionally, they had to have a strategy for how to promote guidance issues within new study programs. According to the new legislation for polytechnics (2003) and

universities (2005), the institutions must have procedures in place to support students in making individual study plans based on a portfolio approach, taking into account both learning and career management skills. The Ministry of Education supports the implementation of this approach with national pilots and in-service training for faculty members (<http://www.w5w.fi/> and <http://www.hamk.fi/oped-exo/>).

Manuals & training

In 2004, Danish legislation introduced similar quality assurance approaches, including detailed manuals on how to conduct quantitative research and documentation in one's own guidance unit (Rambøll, 2004a; 2004b). In terms of studies into the level of professionalisation among guidance staff in the Nordic countries, diversity prevails, as depicted by in the Danish case by Plant (1992). Since then, Denmark has upgraded formal professionalisation considerably through a 30 ETCS programme (from 2007: 60 ETCS) with a common curriculum for all guidance professionals to replace the former patchwork of disparate courses. In addition, a Master's Degree in Career Guidance is also available in Denmark (60 ETCS). Currently, Norway is on its way with a similar approach (from 2006). Finland upgraded their counsellor training for educational settings in 1998. All full-time practitioners must have 60 ETCS in guidance either integrated into a Master's programme in counsellor training (300 ETCS) or as a postgraduate certificate. For many years, Sweden was seen as one of the most professionalised countries because of its three-year bachelor programme in Careers Guidance (SYV). However, even the Swedish situation was criticised in a governmental report, which (as a forerunner to new legislation) introduced new guidance concepts with an emphasis on career (Karriärvägledning) rather than on educational and vocational guidance (SOU, 2001), thus criticising the current focal points of Swedish guidance activities. As yet, Swedish legislation and future guidance policies building on this analysis have not materialised. Similarly, Norwegians have been promoting the idea of *career* guidance (rather than educational and vocational guidance (Jørgensen, 2004), as well as the concept of coaching (Kvalsund, 2005).

Different studies with a structural focus have repeatedly been carried out in Denmark and Sweden, including studies on quality in guidance (Undervisningsministeriet 1992), on the links between guidance and public policy (Plant, 1999b; RUE, 1999; Plant & Kofoed, 2002), on outreach youth guidance (Mehlbye, 1996), on One-Stop Centres (RUE, 2000; Lindgren & Franzon, 1995), on HE-Information centres (RUE, 1998), on linkages and cross-sectoral co-ordination (Oxford Insight, 2002), on the role and position of guidance in decentralised governmental systems, influenced by New Public Management (UVM, 2005a; Skolverket, 2005), and on the role of parents in the guidance process (UVM, 2004; 2005b). Most of these studies focused on structural framework and policy issues rather than everyday guidance activities.

European Activities

With a view to adult guidance and a more labour market oriented and European focus, several studies were carried out as part of the Eurocounsel project, which was a Pan-European action-research based study on the impact of guidance in reducing long-term unemployment (Plant, 1992-1995). Concepts of Peer Guidance, and Guidance in the Informal Economy were introduced in the Danish reports made in connection with this project. Earlier, transnational aspects of European guidance initiatives were depicted by Plant (1990). Further examples of European research and development projects with a focus on guidance and social inclusion aspects (with Danish, Swedish, Icelandic and Finnish participation) include studies within EU's Leonardo programme, such as Access to Vocational Guidance (www.gla.ac.uk/avg), which links guidance with a Social Inclusion agenda. This programme developed and delivered a web-based accredited training module for barefoot (with low formal qualifications) guidance workers in four European countries. Based on a similar design, Workplace Guidance (www.gla.ac.uk/wg) has dealt with the social partners and guidance in the workplace for low-paid workers, using as illustrations, for example, the Danish Guidance Corners (guidance on the actual shop floor, even during shifts), and peer Educational Ambassadors (roughly equivalent to Learning Advisors in the UK) (Plant & Turner, 2005; Plant, 2006). Other European research projects with Nordic partners focus, for example, on studying the use of ICT in guidance (e.g. EGA (European Experiences in the use of ICT in Guidance for Adults; see www.guidanceforum.net). Furthermore, pan-European collaborative research projects such as EGRF, a joint European Guidance Research Forum with the aim to strengthen links between guidance practice and research also include several Nordic partners (see www.europe-guidance.org).

Research into the issue of third-age guidance (for older workers) has been pursued in recent years (Plant, 2000; 2003). With a growing number of older people in, and, in particular, on the edge of an ever more dynamic and versatile labour market, older workers over 55 years of age find it increasingly difficult to retain a foothold in the labour market. This is reflected in current EU projects such as TAG (Third Age Guidance, www.gla.ac.uk/tag).

Most such projects are co-funded by the EU Commission (Leonardo da Vinci projects), but a number of other transnational projects are funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). This is the case of, for example, the project Gender, Ethnicity and Guidance (GEG; www.celi.dk), which deals with the role of guidance in relation to combating gender inequality in relation to ethnicity. Its forerunner, Guidance, Youth and Career, based on interviews with guidance teacher and students, coined the concept of Genderblind Counselling (Lehn, 2003) as a result of research into the role of gender in career choices and guidance in schools. Gender was also the focus of

research into career interviews, which proved to have a heavy gender bias, both in terms of constructing and deconstructing gender stereotypes (Juutilainen, 2003).

Contents

This section illustrates the more psychology-oriented approach to guidance research that forms part of the laboratory of guidance (Swedish and Danish examples). It will reflect on what goes on in guidance and on the issue of the application of tests from other cultures in the Nordic context (Icelandic examples). An overview of links between guidance theories and practice has been developed by Skagen (2004).

Guidance interviews and career education

Most Nordic guidance research in this category focuses on the guidance interview and/or careers education in schools. Pedagogic and educational issues are thus interwoven with psychology in this kind of research. In this category, most research is based on qualitative methods, such as individual interviews, focus groups, and video observations, but psychological tests also occur.

Two evaluative research projects have been conducted in Iceland. One project was a process study of school-based guidance in one school (Vilhjálmsdóttir, 1992) and the second one was an outcome research study on careers education programmes in the 10th grade of the compulsory school, with 297 pupils, aged 15-16 (Vilhjálmsdóttir, 2000). The main result of these studies was that careers education was effective on a number of points, yet more efforts could be made to achieve its official goals.

In 2005, Danish youth researchers used interviews and questionnaires to look into careers education, the role of parents in the careers guidance process, the role of peers, etc. (Pless & Katznelson, 2005). One of their main results was that youth these days find it increasingly difficult to make what they think of as crucial decisions concerning their future; they feel under pressure, both from parents and from guidance professionals to make rational and far-reaching career choices at an early stage in their lives, but find it hard to get an overview of educational and vocational options when they are still on their way to discovering who they are.

The Swedes, in particular, have scrutinised guidance interviews down to their smallest components. One such example is the research of Lindh (1997) which was based on interviews with and observations of seven counselees and their six counsellors. Lindh went to painstaking details to demonstrate power issues and interaction in these interviews, using the concept of project, which means the intentions that both the counsellor and the counselee might have before and during the guidance interviews. Interaction and intentions were uncovered through video and

qualitative research methods, mostly personal interviews with the parties involved. Based on this restricted sample, Lindh pointed to the conflicts between intentions and reality in the guidance interviews, as did Lovén (1991) in his detailed research on work-related guidance for adults.

Lovén (2000) similarly depicted the anticipations of students in terms of their contacts with counsellors in schools, again using video for observations, along with before-and-after interviews, later follow-up interviews, and questionnaires. In this study, originally dating back to the late 1980s and early 1990s, counsellors and students from four schools participated in 20 guidance sessions and 26 interviews. Lovén concluded that, looking back at the guidance offered in schools, the students really wanted answers to questions they were unable to formulate then; an interesting dilemma, which the counsellors often would try to overcome by giving the students massive amounts of information. The students, too, expected a great deal of information on educational options from the counsellors, but they were not able to make fruitful use of it in many cases. Thus, information overload, unclear information and irrelevant information was passed on in these guidance sessions, whereas the self-awareness component was lacking. Using the DOTS model (Law & Watts, 1977), there was a heavy emphasis on Opportunity Awareness, less on Self Awareness, and almost none on Decision Learning or Transition Learning. These findings were mirrored in a recent study by Vuorinen (2006) on how counsellors perceive their role when using the Internet in the guidance process. Juutilainen (2003) also noticed that while career counselling conversations at upper secondary schools are informative and individual, the conversations deal with the student's life and future from the perspective of the school and its subjects. There are many descriptions of the student's experiences and actions, but little processing of personal life issues (Honkanen, 2006).

Tacit

Thus, the counsellor-client relationship is mostly based on a mutual and tacit assumption that guidance equals information. This point has been examined closely in Finnish research on the relationship between the partners of the guidance interview (Vähämöttönen, 1998), who analysed a few guidance interviews in great detail from a constructivist perspective. Previous research based primarily on meticulous analysis of observations of careers education in schools revealed a picture of great variations in the learning that supposedly took place in the timetabled careers education lessons in Finnish schools (Eskelinen, 1993). Kjærgård (2005) looked into the idea of personal action planning: does it work and for whom?

Helander (2000) focused on the learning aspects of solution-oriented counselling, as concrete real life experiences and ways of action emerged during the counselling sessions. The results indicated that it would be useful for some clients to focus the guidance process by dealing with one dimension at a time.

Similarly, Swedish researchers have pointed to the disparity of client groups. Nilsson-Lindström (1999), for example, identified three types of client behaviour: the Patients (passive), the Clients (need personal attention), and the Colleagues (proactive). Other Swedish researchers have focused on the importance of a sensitivity towards the diverse needs of basically different client groups with divergent values and needs: the Fetchers (who pick up information on their own), the Choosers (who want limited contact with guidance experts), and the Inquisitive (who want personal guidance contact) (Listerman, 2001).

Finally, individual career trajectories and subjective experiences in terms of career paths have been the focal point of two Norwegian Master's theses: Svennungsen (2005) from the career counsellors' perspective, and Haug (2006) from the students' perspective. Both looked into career choices from a Q-methodological base, finding that individual and sociologically based career patterns are closely interwoven.

Intercultural guidance

Diversity was the key concept in the research on intercultural guidance carried out by Højer (2002) in Denmark. Using qualitative methods, including video recordings, as the basis of her research, she analysed guidance interviews between Danish guidance workers and three counsees from Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan, with a focus on intercultural issues, power issues, the positions (using cognitive, behaviour, affective as categories) of counsellor and counsee in the interviews, and their efforts to find common ground. So far, intercultural issues have seldom been the focal point of Nordic guidance research on guidance methods. Some recent EU-funded projects with Nordic participation, however, focus on guidance in relation to migrant workers and refugees (e.g. Refugee Guidance, www.gla.ac.uk/rg).

Matinheikki-Kokko (1997) from Finland, however, studied the challenges of working in a cross-cultural environment. Three empirical studies were carried out with a focus on the social and guidance workers' social awareness, cultural awareness, interpersonal and intergroup relations, and the psychological welfare of immigrants. One study analysed the Finnish State authorities' awareness of refugee needs. Policy programmes were in many cases based on the view that refugees and immigrants were the passive audience of settlement programmes rather than active contributors to them. Another study examined the policy-related awareness of refugee needs among local settlement workers (N=283). An awareness scale containing 35 statements concerning refugee welfare policy was constructed. The results indicated significant systematic differences in cultural awareness among staff. Teachers in adult migration training constituted the most culturally sensitive and flexible group in meeting the needs of refugees. The third study examined how teacher-counsellors manifested their awareness of the needs of immigrants in case-reports of successful

(N=42) and unsuccessful (N=41) resolutions of conflicts with immigrants. The teacher-counsellors also assessed their own behaviour in these interactions using a self-assessment inventory. The interpersonal and psychological conflicts of the clients evoked critical subjective reflection and self-assessment among the teacher-counsellors about the quality of their own performance during the counselling process.

Cross-border

Crossing Russian and Finnish borders, Finnish Kasurinen (2002) studied adolescents and how they coped with societal changes in Joensuu, North Karelia, Finland, and in Petrozavodsk, in the Russian Karelia district across the border (N=276 in Finland and N = 341 in Russia, aged 14 to 16). Both groups were in a transitional phase of their lives. The study was a part of a cross-cultural research project “Youth and Social Change in Karelia”, the aim of which was to study the future orientation, everyday life and political orientation of young people living in Finnish and Russian Karelia. The concept of personal future orientation was studied within a framework in which (career) plans, interests, and personal future orientation were related to personal future perspectives and attitudes (optimism/pessimism) towards the future. Gender issues transpired across borders. Academic attainment influenced the way both the Finnish and Russian girls planned their future lives and felt when thinking of the future, whereas school success was not considered a significant factor by the Finnish and Russian boys. Thus, the profound social and economic changes in Russia influenced the personal future orientation of the young Russian people. The insecure circumstances caused the Russian adolescents to be more pessimistic and unsure compared to Finnish respondents. The Russian girls seemed to cope better than the boys. On the basis of the results, a model has been developed for counselling young people at school, based on constructivist approaches in terms of innovative guidance methods. Finally, Launikari & Puukari (2005) have compiled an anthology on multicultural counselling with a number of Nordic examples.

Test-oriented research

Some Icelandic researchers have followed a more test-oriented tradition. They have put emphasis on tests and inventories, mostly originating from the USA, and their applicability in the Icelandic context. The main Icelandic research interest has evolved around John Holland's Congruence theory, the Strong Interest Inventory, skills and job analysis, evaluative research and research on social influences on career decision making.

The Strong Interest Inventory (SII) has been translated and adapted for use with Icelandic clients. Several studies have evaluated the cross-cultural validity and

applicability of the inventory in Iceland. Konráðs did a validation study of the lawyer and engineer Occupational Scales of SII (Konráðs, 1987): the two scales were valid in Iceland. Konráðs & Haraldsson (1994), in a study of the Occupational Scales, came to the conclusion that US norms were useful in predicting the educational and vocational choices of Icelandic college students. Icelandic students also tended to score highest on the respective Holland type (RIASEC) in their field of study.

Recently, Ægisdóttir & Gerstein (2000) used an Icelandic translation of Holland's Self-Directed Search (SDS) to explore the relationship between personality types and counselling expectations in Iceland and the US. The distribution of Holland codes was similar in the Icelandic and American samples, and the expectations did not vary as a function of vocational personality type in both countries. In their study of the cross-cultural structural equivalence of RIASEC models across 18 countries, Rounds & Tracey (1996) evaluated the suitability of Holland's model in Iceland. A small sample of Icelanders who had lived in the US was used and the results indicated a good fit with Holland's theory.

The applicability of Holland's and Gati's models and translated interest inventories was also tested using a more representative sample of Icelandic college students (Einarsdóttir, Rounds, Ægisdóttir & Gerstein, 2002). In this study, Icelandic translations of the SII and the SDS were used. Again Holland's and Gati's models both fit well in the Icelandic samples. In a recent study, Einarsdóttir (2001) used methods based on item response theory. Half of the items differed in the Icelandic sample compared to the US sample. Interestingly, close to two-thirds of the items worked differently for women and men in both cultures. The gender differences were similar in both countries. The results indicate that a gender-type dimension may influence the responses of men and women to the items in the Strong Interest Inventory.

Lerkkanen (2002) examined career choice problems in Jyväskylä Polytechnic, Finland. A Cognitive Information Processing model and a Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI), both from the USA, were used on a sample of students who started their studies at Jyväskylä Polytechnic in 1998. The data were collected from the register of studies (N=956), and by questionnaires completed by students at the beginning of their studies (N=666), after two years of studies (N=145), and by students who dropped out (N=90). Three types of career difficulties were found: difficulties in committing to career choice, difficulties in beginning the choice process, and dependence on others. The results are in accordance with the findings of studies of students in the USA. In the report, the use of the CTI in developing the counselling service at the Polytechnic are discussed, emphasising the need for instruments to evaluate the individual student's need for guidance as well as the quality of the guidance process.

Values

With this backdrop in terms of examples derived from the field of psychology, this section turns to some examples of ethnology and philosophy as the scientific base for research with a guidance element. Ethnology as a scientific base for guidance is rather uncommon in most countries, yet it brings understanding of, for example, work values directly into careers guidance (Plant, 1998; 2000b). It also, in a few cases, adds a further dimension to web-based career development tools, as used, for example, on the Finnish website Careerstorm (www.careerstorm.com).

Precious little research has been done in this field. Thus, the examples of concrete research are few. To illustrate the nature of guidance and work-value relevant research in this category, some findings are outlined below. Research based on ethnology is grounded in lengthy field observations, including meticulous registration of social patterns and local customs, photography documentation, tape recording of interviews and conversations, attending local meetings, taking part in local celebrations, etc. In short, the method requires immersion in the local culture. In the case of Danish researcher Højrup (1983), such studies were carried out in rural Northern Jutland over a period of several years. On this basis, in terms of work values, the researchers distinguished three categories:

- Careerist

In the careerist's life, work plays a central role. Work is an instrument of self-expression and has a key role in personal development. Work is the careerist's passion and she/he tries to develop in it constantly. To get new perspectives on work, the careerist keeps up with the latest information available in newspapers, magazines, TV, radio and on the Internet. Lifelong learning is a way of life. There is no distinction between work and leisure time. The careerist does not follow regular office hours, but he/she is always working. Yet work is not a burden, but rather a source of inspiration and energy. The unemployed careerist is like a fish out of water, since she/he does not have an outlet for self-expression and self-development.

- Entrepreneur

The entrepreneur always wants to run his own life. She/he likes to take risks and accepts that controlling the risks will take much time and energy. The entrepreneur's goal is to make things happen. He/she feels that strict rules are impediments for effective working. As an employee the entrepreneur is difficult, because of a strong inner motivation to implement new ideas. If the entrepreneur is not given freedom and responsibility in an organization, she/he will not stay very long. The entrepreneur has an abundance of ideas and there is never enough time to put them all into practice. Unemployment does not worry the entrepreneur. He/she will come up with something else to do, maybe start a new business.

- Wage earner

For the wage earner, work is not all there is to life. Work is mainly a way to make a living, while the wage earner's real life thrives outside the job. There is a clear distinction between work and leisure time. The wage earner is not interested in working overtime, apart from the money, and does not bring work home. At work he/she considers new challenges carefully in order to keep his/her workload manageable. Although the wage earner likes to have meaningful work, she/he does not want to think about it during leisure time. Leisure time is real life.

Unemployed, the wage earner loses part of his/her social network, but nothing more. In the end, work is just work.

The careerist, entrepreneur and wage earner values are appropriate in different life situations. Each of these values has its strengths: the careerist's passion for work, the wage earner's balance between work and leisure time, and the entrepreneur's flexibility. This theoretical framework has been put to use in careers education and guidance by Plant (1999c; 2002) in course books for careers education in Danish schools, linking research in ethnology with guidance activities in practice (drawing occupational family trees, interviewing grandparents concerning their work values, or establishing work value based work-shadowing programmes), thus pointing to the importance of work values in career choices.

Also dealing with values, philosophical and even existential approaches to guidance have been introduced in recent years. Thus, Hansen (2000, 2003, 2005a & b) has conducted research into the use of Philosophical Counselling and Socratic Groups of Dialogue in guidance. Such efforts reflect the growing recognition of the importance of values in careers and, indeed, life choices.

Conclusion

Nordic research in guidance has focused mainly on the sociological aspects of guidance, its societal links and possible impact. Some attention has been devoted to more psychological aspects in recent years, yet the psychometric tradition was the predominant one during the initial years of modern career guidance in the early 1990s (Plant, 1996). Characteristically, most new guidance and counselling methods based on psychology have been imported from the USA with the ideas of the client-centred approach (Rogers, 1951) and from Canada with the constructivist (Peavy, 1998) and activity-based (Amundson, 2001) methods in recent years. So far, less attention has been devoted to ethnology and philosophy as the theoretical basis for guidance.

The Nordic countries have followed different traditions in terms of research in the guidance field, first with a heavy input from Germany and England, and more recently based on theories and practice from the USA and, in particular, from Canada. The Nordic community of researchers in guidance is very small and relies on

mutual co-operation and contacts with scholars from other parts of the world.
Linkages are vital.

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