

Exploring career learning and social justice through action research

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Background

Despite a substantial body of literature on the relationship between career education and social justice, there is a dearth of practical examples of how ideas might be implemented in context. This action research was undertaken as a small step towards remedying this.

I designed a career development learning workshop through a process of triangulation, drawing on my own experience as a careers professional, a number of key sources and student input via a consultation. This was delivered as an extra-curricular session to a group of 16 students at the University of Reading in June 2018.

Student consultation

Students were questioned on their understanding and experience of social justice in relation to career learning and the world of work. Key themes identified included:

- Diversity – the importance of relatable role models;
- Lack of information and tools as a barrier to action;
- Negative perceptions of employer attitudes;
- Focus on individual responsibility to take action;
- Interest in acting for the 'greater good'.

Key literature and concepts

- *A critical pedagogy of work education* (Simon et al., 1991)¹
- *Socio-Political Ideologies in Guidance* (Watts et al., 1996/2016)²
- *Career Guidance in Communities: A Model for Reflexive Practice* (Thomsen, 2017)³
- Hooley's framework for emancipatory career education (2015)⁴
- Mignot's conceptual framework for anti-oppressive practice (2001)⁵

"We're just given the resources to go into the world how it is, we're not given the resources to change it..."

"Oh, ok... where's all the females? Aren't I supposed to be inspired to be like you, but... there's no-one like me there."

Workshop title: I want to make a difference! Social justice and your career

Aim: To increase understanding of social justice as it relates to career, and inspire action to promote it.

Learning outcomes:

1. Interpret two contrasting narratives about the labour market;
2. Discuss the potential impact of these narratives on themselves and others;
3. Apply strategies of individual or social change to a labour market problem;
4. Compare the strengths and weaknesses of these strategies;
5. Propose actions they can take to promote social justice through their career.

Activities included:

- Comparing contrasting news stories on the gig economy;
- A debate on approaches to tackling the gender pay gap;
- Identifying specific actions (examples below).

Look into HeForShe and Lean In. Have a discussion with my friends, (especially male friends) about social justice and gender equality.

Find out the gender pay gap in the property industry. Watch TED talk

What local pressure groups are available in promoting socio-economic justice (e.g. pro investment, anti-austerity?)

Evaluation

- Creation and delivery of an enjoyable and relevant workshop as evidenced by participant feedback: **100% reported engagement, 93% reported relevance.**
- Students really valued the **collaborative approach** to learning, and benefits of **peer-to-peer** learning were observed.
- Learning outcomes were met, as evidenced by observations and session materials. Some **evidence of behaviour transfer** (Praslova 2010)⁶ collected through follow up emails.
- Challenge for facilitator to harness the **affective dimension** of learning and the extent to which **personal politics** have a bearing.

"The session was engaging and the debate was a great strategy to promote participation from the students. It encouraged creative and critical thinking."

Wider applications

- Co-creation and delivery of this material with existing communities;
- Incorporating material into PSHE curriculum at KS 3 and 4;
- Beyond formal education – with charities, public and private sector, in response to increasing interest in 'human centricity'⁷.

References

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6. Praslova, L. (2010) Adaptation of Kirkpatrick's four level model of training criteria to assessment of learning outcomes and program evaluation in higher education, *Educational assessment, evaluation and accountability*, 22, 3, 215-225.
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