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Social justice perspective for guidance - redesigning guidance interactions



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What is guidance

- A set of **institutional, collaborative** activities
- Which promote and foster **processes** that are meaningful for the client(s)
 - those of learning, growth, emancipation, work, decision-making, life-planning, leisure or other activity.
- This is done in such a way that the **participants' agency and participatory sense** are strengthened.
- The focal processes are viewed simultaneously as **biographical, social and societal**, and understood intersectionally

(Vehviläinen, 2014; 2021; Vehviläinen & Souto 2021)

- Guidance aims at systematic support of agentic participation in a relevant social context (such as school) and a biographical context
- This movement towards stronger agency may manifest in changes in
 - **individual dispositions** (abilities, interests, motivation, self-efficacy, resilience, skills, understanding);
 - **social participation** via authorship, responsibility, creativity; and
 - **critical awareness**, activity, and activism.
- These changes are unique to individuals and their situation, but they are not treated as individualistic phenomena.
- Guidance is fundamentally a relationship of pedagogical nature. **Participants of this relationship seek to understand what is true about the world and themselves as part of it: asking how they have been shaped by the world—and how the world is shaped by them and others. = Participatory sense**
- Guidance aims at deepening and strengthening the participatory sense. This applies to all parties of the guidance alliance.

(Vehviläinen, 2014, 2021; Alhanen 2019)

Social justice approach to career guidance

- *"To care about 'social justice' in these neoliberal times, i.e. when our very desires and notions of what it means to be human are shaped by the master discourse of competitive and possessive individualism, requires a firm understanding of how hegemony works, and why it is important to resist."*

Hooley & Sultana 2016, 3

- *"Career guidance as we know it in the West distils within itself the fundamental premises that underpin our often unexamined, taken-for-granted views of what it means to be human. It does this by prioritising notions of a free, autonomous, independent individual seeking to fulfil him/herself through choices made, and to design life projects for oneself"*

Hooley & Sultana 2016, 4

- Over the last two decades, the **social justice movement** has strengthened considerably, particularly in the field of educational and career guidance
- It emphasizes the risk of guidance being used as a tool and space for neoliberal education policies to reproduce inequalities.
- the social justice movement seeks to actively build an alternative, imagine a different future, and make it a reality
- Guidance is viewed as a potentially emancipatory practice

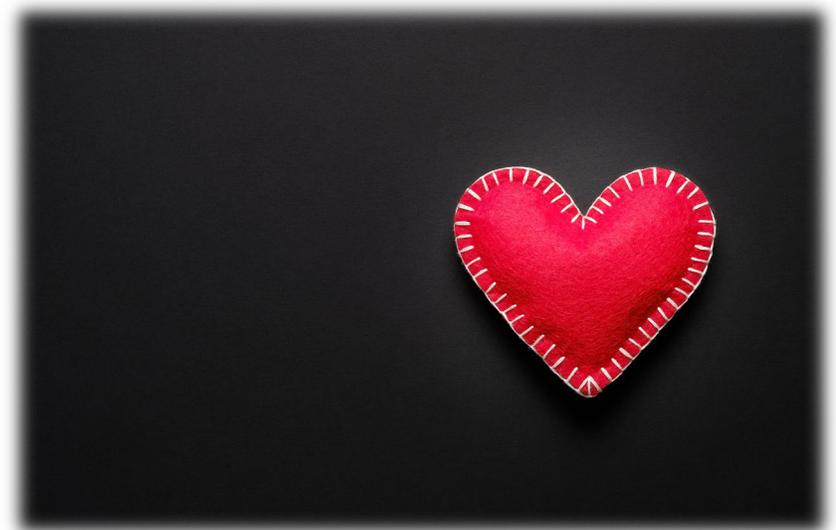
(Hooley et al., 2018, 2019)

- Guidance activity should be based on both the “good of the individual” and the “common good”
(Vehviläinen & Souto, 2021)
- Both “internal” (psychological) and “external” (societal) obstacles or hindrances to the client’s agency need to be identified and addressed
(Leiman, 2015)
- Guidance avoids hopelessness and the lack of vision, while also refusing to “psychologize” societal problems
(Korhonen & Komulainen, 2021)
- The purpose of guidance is not only to equip individuals for “survival” or even “fulfillment”, but also to support the collective action that groups, teams, and networks undertake to shape their circumstances. Guidance is about acting together, not just about setting individuals “on the right track”
(Hooley et al., 2018, 2019)
- The subject in guidance activity is seen in the light of his/her individual life history, as well as in his/her societal context and circumstances
(Vanhalakka-Ruoho, 2015; Toiviainen, 2019)
- Guidance practitioners must not only observe and hear out the opinions, preferences, emotions, and concerns of their clients but also consider their social situations and the world in which they live.
Given this, guidance is a site and a process of learning for all its participants.

Thus:

- Social justice approach is a way of rethinking and “upsetting” our theories and practices of guidance
- changes in
 - The focus
 - The subject
 - The methods of guidance

How does this help us rethink our guidance interactions?



Orientations of guidance interaction

Problem-solving orientation	Inquiry orientation	Supportive orientation
<p>Main orientation is to identify the client's problems and solve them using expert knowledge</p> <p>Problems are barriers and they need to be removed</p> <p>Main tool: client's tellings of troubles, professionals's advice, instruction and recommendations</p>	<p>Main orientation is to understand; to gain a richer, more analytic, and diverse understanding of the issue at hand</p> <p>The nature of the problem is not taken for granted: deeper understanding is a value in itself</p> <p>Main tool: Client's narration, professionals' interpretive summaries and comments</p>	<p>Main orientation is to facing the situation "as it is"</p> <p>Professional conveys attention, interest, emotional availability, tunes into what the client has to say</p> <p>Professional facilitates focusing on the shared situation and task</p> <p>Main tool: Nonverbal and verbal signs of attention, concentration, presence, and affiliation, also meta-talk</p>

Examples: How guidance may reproduce social inequalities via micropractices

- The busy tempo of daily work: no time to stop, **not being present** -> resorting to unhelpful routines and stereotypical thinking
- **Overemphasis on the problem-solving orientation:** the professional selectively focusses on issues that are “fixable” and in their own professional comfort zone
- The **individualistic premises of guidance**
- The **language, spaces and “genres”** of guidance may exclude clients
- **Societal “blind spots”:** guidance professionals are not aware or not ready to face societal realities of some clients/pupils/students
- **Shallow client-centeredness:** “ if they do not mention it, it does not exist to us”
 - For instance the experience of racism at school or in work placements

(Vehviläinen & Souto 2021; Vehviläinen 2021)

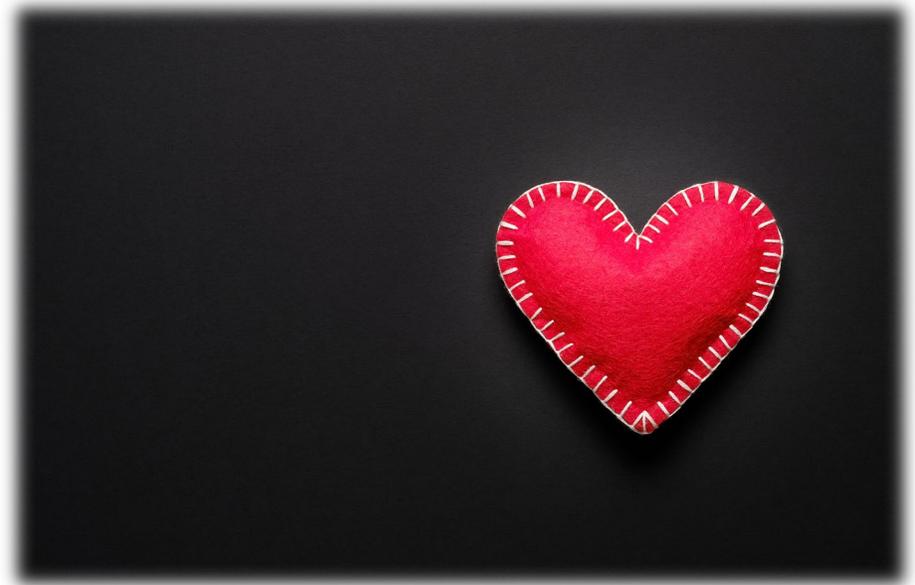
Examples: Practices of guidance that foster its emancipatory potentials

- Calm and respecting manner, **concentration** and friendliness
- **Organising the encounter** so as to provide space for supportive and inquiry orientation prior to any problem-solving
- *Meta talk* about guidance and the shared work – **not to assume shared understanding but building it mutually**
 - Invitation to collaboration
- **Creative use of language, spaces and “genres”**
- **Peer interaction as a space for exploration** of societal issues and positions
 - How guidance professionals build group spaces and foster safe spaces
 - School class or training group as a relevant social space
- Guidance professionals learn about societal inequalities and support each other in this

To summarize

- Socially just guidance is about creating and re-creating spaces of dialogue
- Mutual learning from each other
- Readiness to explore outside the professional comfort zone
- Collegial support among guidance professionals necessary for this!
- Professionals also need safe spaces for learning!

- Thank you for your attention – let us discuss!



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