Professional advocacy as a key competence in career guidance education in Denmark, Norway and Sweden

Authors:
Andreassen, Inga H., professor, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences
ihan@hvl.no

Poulsen, Bo Klindt, associate professor, VIA University College, Denmark bokp@via.dk

Wikstrand, Frida, associate professor, Malmö University, Sweden frida.wikstrand@mau.se
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Abstract
In this paper, we explore the concept of advocacy and whether and how it is present in the curricula for education programmes of career guidance and counsellor professionals and related policy documents in three Nordic countries. There are long traditions for advocacy and social engagement in the Nordic public sector, including the career guidance services, and the ideas of equality and social justice lay as a foundation for the Nordic welfare model and people’s self-understanding. Currently, the model is challenged by globalisation, both economically and politically, and inequality and differences between groups are increasing in the Nordic countries, thus highlighting the need for advocacy in career guidance. The advocating role of career guidance professionals is emphasized in the NICE handbooks on academic training of career guidance and counselling professionals. However, not much is known about whether or how competences for advocacy are anchored in the education programmes, thus the objectives of the study is to provide a first insight.

Keywords: Professional advocacy, professional agency, social justice, counsellor education

Relation to the conference theme
The focus of this paper is the competences for the advocating role of the career counsellor and how advocacy and professional agency are reflected in career guidance and counsellor education programmes curricula in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Competences for advocacy and agency are strongly related to the promotion of social justice.

General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework
For career guidance counsellors (CGC), the abilities to advocate and act for their profession are important core competences and should therefore have a clear place in career guidance and counsellor education. The advocating role of the career guidance counsellor is emphasized in the NICE handbooks on academic training of career guidance and counselling professionals (Schiersmann et al., 2012; Schiersmann et al., 2016) as well as in IAEVG’s ethical guidelines (IAEVG, 2017).
In the NICE handbooks (Schiersmann et al., 2012; Schiersmann et al., 2016), advocacy and agency are mentioned frequently but the distinction between the concepts is not clear. It is necessary to look closer into the two concepts to see how they differ and how they relate to each other.

Definitions of advocacy are varied, but there are common threads that provide general conceptualisations. Advocacy is a key for change and the concept of professional advocacy includes seeking change, securing and promoting social justice, systematically influencing decision making at system levels and shaping social and political outcomes (Mellinger, 2014). Agency refers to the capability to act (Eteläpelto et al. 2013; Mellinger, 2014) and is practiced when “professional subjects and/or communities exert influence, make choices and take stances in ways that affect their work and/or their professional identities” (Eteläpelto et al. 2013, p. 61). Agency refers to both personal and organisational agency, i.e. the personal capability to act lying with the individual practitioner, but the organisational agency is framed by the institutional and legal conditions.

Based on our belief that advocacy should be one of the core roles of career guidance counsellors in the Nordic context and that it is strongly related to agency (the capability to act), we consider it of utmost importance that developing competences for advocacy should be a part of the career guidance counsellor education. We will analyse relevant documents as a beginning of mapping the situation and by that provide a knowledge foundation for further work on this.

Preliminary research question:

How are competences for the advocating role of career professionals present in the curricula for career guidance and counsellor education programmes and related policy documents in Denmark, Norway and Sweden?

Method

This is an ongoing research project. Through qualitative document analyses of curricula and relevant policy documents from CGC education programmes in three Nordic countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The paper will shed a light on how CGC education programmes in Denmark, Norway and Sweden prepare their students for the role of advocating, including professional agency and the capacity to act for advocacy, as reflected in the curricula and policy documents. The core data are all curricula carried out in the study year 2018-19 by the CGC education programmes in the three countries. They were downloaded from the websites for the higher institutions providing the education. A purposeful sample of relevant policy documents is another important part of the data used in this study, to explore whether or how they provide guidelines or directions on the advocating role of career guidance professionals for promoting social justice.

By skimming, reading and interpreting the documents, elements of content analysis and thematic analysis will be combined. Information identified and organized into categories of
meaning (Glaser, 1978) will then be thematically related to central research questions of the study.

**Results**

The analysis will be carried out during spring and summer of 2019, and the results will be presented for the first time at the Nordic Research Network on Transitions, Career and Guidance’s conference in Copenhagen 2019. The aim of the researchers is to rewrite the conference presentation into an article, published internationally. Moreover, the findings of the analysis will be the basis for an application for funding of a larger, joint study of how competences for advocacy can be developed in education and practice.

**References**


IAEVG Ethical guidelines (2017). https://iaevg.com/Resources#Ethical_S

