Type of contribution
Paper

Title
Manufacturing Content: Exploring Critical Perspectives on the Production of Labour Market Information

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Abstract and 3 – 5 keywords (up to 150 words)
This paper is primarily concerned with understanding how labour market information and its production can be investigated from a social justice perspective. Bimrose and Barnes (2006) have argued for the importance of labour market information in career guidance something which echoes the careers theories of Parsons (1909), Holland (1973) and Gatti (1996). Crucially these approaches ignore the ideological nature of labour market information. Using Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen’s (2017) work around career development and social justice, this paper will explore the challenge that social justice creates for how we understand labour market information. Using Herman and Chomsky’s “manufacturing consent” (1988) we will argue that the production of labour market information, even when it meets rationalistic standards, involves a system supporting function which needs to be critically investigated from a social justice perspective.

Keywords - LMI, information, Chomsky, social justice

Relation to the conference theme (up to 50 words)
This paper will be rooted in concerns about social justice and career by exploring the forces behind the use and production of labour market information. We will challenge assumptions that information is strictly objective and supports rational, independent decision making, instead, we will problematize the agenda behind the production of labour market information.

General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework (up to 600 words)

Debates around the place of careers information in careers work have tended to focus on the importance of presenting individuals with quality careers information. Bimrose and Barnes (2006) have argued that providing careers information is a key marker of quality careers work while Yates (2013) has argued that careers work should be careful not to focus too much on information as part of careers interactions and instead focus on the self-
awareness and decision making capacities of individuals. This debate has largely focussed on how LMI is delivered whilst what LMI actually is has not been sufficiently critically investigated.

Mollerup (1995) has argued for a set of quality marks of information as needed to underpin effective careers work. These refer to rationalistic conceptions such as accuracy, bias, comprehensiveness and specificity which imply that sufficient knowledge can be arrived at to underpin realistic decisions. This conception of the place of information being linked to rationalistic choice goes back to Parsons (1909) and Holland (1973) and continues to this day through for example through the work of Gatti et al. (1996) and Germejs and Verschueren (2006). This takes on the assumption that if labour market information meets a set of rationalistic thresholds it is of sufficient quality.

In response, this paper will present a critical literature review to problematize and respond to this rationalistic approach. Methodologically, this research will particularly make use Alvesson and Karreman’s (2011) idea of mystery as a method. This will involve looking to understand the underpinning metaphors in a field of study and problematizing them to develop new understandings. The main research questions will be as follows.

- How has the relationship between the labour market information and career development been discussed in career development theory?
- What metaphors and assumptions underpin these understandings?
- What alternative theories and assumptions could be used to open up new understandings (particularly looking at Herman & Chomsky’s work (1988))?
- How can these understandings be related to social justice?

Through this we hope to explore theoretical alternatives to the rationalistic views of LMI quality we have discussed above and look at how the production of labour market information can be criticised from a social justice perspective. To this we will particularly look at Herman and Chomsky’s “manufacturing consent” (1988) as a critical lens. This will be used to interrogate LMI as a form of propaganda that maintains control and normalises forms of work and employer/employee relations. This analysis will be used to explore the importance of understanding LMI especially from a critical social justice perspective as outlined by Sultana (2014).

**Methods/methodology (up to 300 words)**

Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) recommend a five-stage process to look at how to develop novel and interesting theoretical insights in an area. This process is as follows;

1. Identify a domain of literature
2. Identify and articulate the assumptions of the literature
3. Evaluate these assumptions
4. Develop alternative assumption(s)
5. Consider the relationship to the audience

This paper will make use of these ideas to explore how new understandings of the place of labour market information and its production. Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) are particularly
useful for looking at how a critical literature review can be constructed as they do not require empirical data to be looked at as part of their process. The hope of this will be to develop new theoretical understandings in this area.

This method will be used to explore three types of literature which will later be summarised into the domain as set out in the process above. These will be:

1. Academic writing on labour market information
2. ‘Grey’ literature in practitioner focussed publications (blogs, magazines, etc.)

Through doing this we will develop an understanding of the key metaphors that support how we understand what labour market information is. We will then attempt to problematize this mainly by thinking about issues related to agency and social justice. The work of Herman and Chomsky (1988) will form a starting point for this. This will look at information which is produced even though it may strictly speaking be accurate (i.e. adhere to rationalistic standards) it is still constructed from an ideological point of view in favour of maintaining hegemony and the place of powerful actors in society. From a career point of view this will be explored in terms of how labour market information tends to look at the world of work as a neutral space which is safe for individuals to participate in it but which obscures how the world of work can be seen to be ideologically charged and a potential site with injustice and inequality.

Outcomes/ expected results (up to 200 words)

The hope of conducting this critical review will be to problematize some of the existing understandings of the labour market. Especially the hope is to look at how different actors have an interest in how the labour market is presented and this transcends traditional accurate/ inaccurate divides which focus on individuals being able to use their agency to understand the world around them. We hope to look at how this creates a situation where the labour market information can become a site of contestation where inequalities and privileges are created and preserved. This is of concern for both career development and social justice and by exploring these critical tensions we hope to explore new ways of theorising career and labour market information.

References


Germeijns, V. and Verschueren K. (2006), High school students’ career decision-making process: development and validation of the Study Choice Task Inventory
Journal of Career Assessment, 14, pp. 449-471


