Social Justice Competencies and Career Development Practices
Compétences relatives à la justice sociale et pratiques en développement de carrière

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ABSTRACT

The recent focus on social justice issues in career development is primarily conceptual in nature and few resources account for the challenges or successes experienced by career development practitioners. The purpose of this article is to report the results of a research study of career practitioners in Canada regarding the competencies they use to address the barriers experienced by their clients from nondominant cultural groups, as well as the competencies that that they would like to strengthen. Recommendations follow for supporting career development practitioners to translate the concept of social justice into active practices directly with clients and with the systems that influence service delivery.

RÉSUMÉ

L'intérêt récent pour les questions de justice sociale dans le développement de carrière est avant tout de nature conceptuelle, et peu de ressources constate les défis et les succès rencontrés par les praticiens du développement de carrière. Le but de cet article est de signaler les compétences identifiées lors d'une recherche chez un échantillon de praticiens d'orientation de carrière au Canada, des compétences utilisées à surmonter les obstacles rencontrés par leurs clients issus de groupes culturels non dominants ainsi que des compétences que l'on souhaite développer ou renforcer. Afin de mieux soutenir les praticiens de développement de carrière, plusieurs recommandations servent à mieux appliquer le concept de la justice sociale dans des pratiques actives directes avec les clients et les systèmes qui affectent la prestation de services.

Social justice has strong historical roots in vocational psychology, dating back to the work of Parsons (1909). During the early years of the last century, Parsons advocated for youth, women, and people who were poor, to help them secure employment as a means to improving their lives. More than a century later, it is

important to acknowledge Parson's work as laying a foundation of social justice for theoretical and practical advances in the field of career development (Blustein, 2006; Fouad, Gerstein, & Toporek, 2006).

The topic of social justice has resurfaced in the career development literature, focused on the ways that resources are differentially distributed in society and how social, economic, and political barriers impact people's career development (Arthur, 2005; Toporek & Chope, 2006). There is a call to support people in our society who are marginalized because of poverty or other social conditions that limit their access to education or securing meaningful and sustaining employment. There are also concerns about differential access to career development services and the effectiveness of services for meeting the needs of all people who live in our local communities (Sampson, Dozier, & Colvin, 2011). Specific concerns have been expressed about the limitations of career counselling practice for supporting access and mobility in education and employment systems for people from nondominant populations (McMahon, Arthur, & Collins, 2008a), who are disproportionately represented in the ranks of early school leavers, the unemployed, and the under-employed (Bezanson et al., 2007).

Although recent literature substantiates a continued focus on social justice issues in career development, the focus is primarily conceptual in nature and only a few resources account for the challenges or successes experienced by career development practitioners (Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2009; Barham & Irving, 2011; Irving, 2011). As Blustein, McWhirter, and Perry (2005) pointed out, it is time to move from a denunciation approach to an annunciation approach, in which the principles and processes for embracing social justice in career development practices are articulated.

The purpose of this article is to explore how a sample of career practitioners in Canada reported implementing social justice practices with clients from nondominant cultural groups. We will report on a subset of data from a larger study on social justice competencies, with some ties to other elements of that study reported elsewhere (Arthur et al., 2009; McMahon, Arthur, & Collins, 2008a, 2008b). The central aim of this component of the study was to address two research questions: (a) What competencies (attitudes, skills, and knowledge) do career practitioners use in addressing the barriers individuals from nondominant cultural groups experience in trying to access career resources? and (b) What competencies do career practitioners identify that would strengthen their capacity to offer social justice interventions?

We begin this article with a brief overview of diversity and social justice competencies to set the context for the current study. Next, key competencies identified from participants' practice examples are highlighted. Finally, we highlight the implications for the professional education of career development practitioners to translate knowledge about social justice into practice with clients who experience barriers related to their career development.

DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMPETENCIES

Career practitioners' roles in assisting individuals from nondominant groups to overcome career-related barriers have been recognized at both national and international levels. For example, the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners (National Steering Committee for Career Development Guidelines and Standards, 2004) included competencies focusing on recognizing and responding to diversity. These competencies have recently been updated to provide a stronger emphasis on action that addresses systemic barriers adversely impacting people's career-related issues. The International Association of Educational and Vocational Guidance developed competency-based standards of practice, and linked advocacy and leadership to the core of career development practice (Repetto, Malik, Ferrer-Sama, Manzano, & Hiebert, 2003). This is an important example of how social justice can be moved to the forefront of practice guidelines. However, more resources are needed to consider what it means to be competent for engaging in social justice action (Toporek & Chope, 2006).

There have been concerns raised that competencies directed at diversity have remained focused on interpersonal skills and working with individual clients without paying sufficient attention to ways of addressing social, political, and economic forces that influence people's career development (Arthur, 2005, 2008; Toporek & Williams, 2006). The relevance of the term *career* and related *career* practices has been contested with the aim of refocusing on the role of work as a means of survival in many people's lives (Blustein, 2006). There is concern that career practitioners may be serving the status quo and engaging in oppressive practices (Irving, 2011; Watson, 2010) when they are constrained by policies, serving in roles that support people to adjust to difficult conditions, or when career education is overly focused on serving market needs. Attention to diversity is important; however, career practitioners are challenged to expand their base of competencies to impact environmental influences that are negative or debilitating for people's career development (Vera & Speight, 2003). This also means shifting from working with clients who are adapting to existing employment conditions to fostering empowerment of individuals and community groups regarding their career development needs.

MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social justice is represented in multiple ways in the career development literature. Many authors assert the importance of social justice without clarifying the meaning or implications for career development practices. Watson (2010) reviewed the literature on social justice and career psychology and suggested that social justice refers to actions that are directed toward increasing equal access for all members of a particular society or nation. In a just society, opportunities, resources, and worth are distributed equally and fairly, with no individuals

or groups holding particular advantages or disadvantages in access or advancement (Fouad et al., 2006). Social justice has been defined as "collaborative, action-oriented, socially relevant, community focused and initiated" activities (Helms, 2003, pp. 205–206) that seek to eradicate inequities in society (Vera & Speight, 2003) and enhance the health of marginalized groups. Social justice is a key concept because access to and attainment of education and work provide a central means for ensuring social equity (Fouad et al., 2006; Hargrove, Creagh, & Kelly, 2003).

However, our research with career development practitioners (Arthur et al., 2009) suggests that social justice may have multiple meanings and be acted on in many different ways through career development practices. As part of the larger study, career practitioners were asked about their views of social justice and what it meant for their practices. Approximately two thirds of respondents indicated that they were familiar with the concept of social justice; however, only one third had pre-service or in-service training related to social justice. The most common themes that emerged from practitioners' self-generated definitions of social justice were advocacy, equality, consideration of contextual influences, self-fulfillment, equal opportunity, and inclusion (Arthur et al., 2009). These core meanings are reflected in the practitioners' choice and description of critical incidents in practice that are explored in this article. It is also important to note that social justice is viewed from the perspective of both client experience (i.e., equality, inclusion) and practitioner action (i.e., advocacy, consideration of contextual influences). What will become evident from the data presented in this article is that the bridge between awareness of the clients' experiences of social injustice and the practitioners' skill level in taking action to facilitate social justice is not as solid as these practitioners would like it to be.

A main point raised here is that standards of practice and associated competency frameworks need to go beyond recognition of cultural diversity to address issues of social justice. It is important to consider how cultural diversity is linked to disproportionate access to education and employment, as well as mobility within a full range of occupational fields. Beyond recognizing the systemic barriers that are faced by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, career practitioners need to be informed about social justice and prepared with competencies to address multiple levels of career development interventions (Arthur, 2008). At the same time, practitioners' views about their experiences of working with clients need to be incorporated into the conceptualization of social justice and related competency frameworks. It is important to extend the dialogue about social justice so that theory and concepts can inform practice, and, at the same time, consider how practitioners' experiences can enhance the conceptualization and applications of social justice (Irving & Malik, 2005). The current study sought to include career practitioners' views about social justice competencies and how they incorporated them into their work with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds.

METHODOLOGY

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the three universities where the researchers are affiliated. In this portion of the larger study (Arthur et al., 2009; McMahon et al., 2008a, 2008b), participants were asked to provide examples from their practices in career development related to social justice. The survey was advertised through provincial associations in Canada, whose memberships comprise individuals working in various areas of career development. The notice for the study provided an invitation to participate in the study and the link to the consent form and the Social Justice and Career Practice Questionnaire (SJCPQ).

The original construction of the SJCPQ was based on a review of the career development literature and identification of concepts related to social justice. Next, a draft of the questionnaire was circulated to 10 content experts for review, including academics known for their expertise in career development and practitioners who work directly with clients. The revised questionnaire listed attitudinal, knowledge, and skill competencies. Participants were asked to rate the importance of each item and their current level of expertise for each item. Previous results from the study, including details regarding the survey construction, have been published (Arthur et al., 2009). Career practitioners were also asked to provide examples from their work pertaining to how they incorporated social justice into their practices with clients. The discussion here focuses on the results from the practice examples and the kinds of competencies that career development practitioners reported. To reiterate, the focus was placed on two areas: (a) the competencies reported by career practitioners for addressing the barriers faced by clients from nondominant cultural groups in accessing career resources, and (b) the competencies identified by career practitioners that would strengthen their capacity to offer social justice interventions.

Practice examples were collected from career development practitioners using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954). CIT is associated with the case study method in which the specific behaviours of people are examined through open-ended inquiry about the qualitative and subjective descriptions of people, situations, and interpretations of experiences (Pedersen, 1995). Critical incidents are brief descriptions of real events that people remember as being meaningful in their experience (Brookfield, 1995) and have been used in cross-cultural research, including studies pertaining to educational and employment experiences (i.e., Amundson, Borgen, Jordan, & Erlebach, 2004; Arthur, 2001).

Participants were provided with the following prompt: "Think of a recent session or interview that went particularly well/did not go well with a client whose career issues were influenced by social justice issues (i.e., lack of resources, inequity, discrimination)." This prompt was used as a reference from which career practitioners could decide which incidents to select and report on from their career practices. Practitioners were then asked to answer the following questions using the critical incident they selected:

1. Describe the presenting career issues.
2. Describe how these issues were related to social justice.
3. Identify the competencies (attitudes, knowledge, and skills) that facilitated your choice of career intervention.
4. List any additional competencies (attitudes, knowledge, skills) that might have supported your work.
5. Describe the outcomes of the intervention.

The results from Questions 1 and 2 have been previously published (Arthur et al., 2009). Our focus in this article is on the competencies that were derived from Questions 3 and 4. Data were analyzed to identify the social justice competencies that career practitioners used and those that they identified as potentially supportive for their work. This comparison was incorporated to identify gaps that practitioners noted between how they were currently practicing and areas where they recognized they would benefit from enhancing social justice competencies.

To enhance rigour, the data were analyzed through a method of constant comparison, followed by coding review of 10% of the critical incidents (Ronan & Latham, 1974). As a means to check content validity, 10% of the critical incidents were withheld from the analysis process. When the process was complete, these remaining 10% of the incidents were analyzed to determine if any new categories emerged. If no more than two new categories appeared, it was assumed that a sufficient number of incidents had been collected.

Twenty-five percent (13 of 50) of the critical incident transcripts were given to an independent coder who determined whether or not to classify the incident as being critical, based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The researcher and independent coder reached 100% agreement that the selected practice examples represented critical incidents. In total, 50 critical incidents were provided by 32 participants in the study (it was possible for more than one critical incident to be reported by a participant). Next, a process was established to determine interrater reliability of the themes, derived from the critical incidents. During the interrater reliability process, some of the definitions of the themes were clarified for the independent coder.

For competencies used by practitioners, several changes were made to the definitions of these themes to produce clarity for the independent coder or to fit a theme better under another category. Two exchanges took place between the researcher and the independent coder for each theme before 80% interrater reliability was reached. The principle of saturation was used to decide when the data had been thoroughly reviewed. When reviewing the data for competencies that practitioners stated they used in the critical incidents, saturation was reached for attitudes, knowledge, and skills when 6% of the data was coded. No new categories emerged with the addition of the final 10% of the data. For competencies desired by practitioners, saturation was reached for attitudes, knowledge, skills, and resources when 12%, 24%, 77%, and 35% of the data was coded, respectively. No new categories emerged with the introduction of critical incidents from the final 10% of data.

<center>RESULTS</center>

Demographic Information

All participants were Canadian and were at least 18 years of age. Participants came from nearly every territory and province, with the majority of participants coming from Alberta (31%), British Columbia (19%) and Ontario (19%). Over 75% of the participants were between the ages of 30 and 59, and 75% of the participants were female. There was also a wide range of work experience amongst participants, with 47% having between 3 and 10 years of experience and 47% having 11–20+ years. The majority of participants identified their ethnicity as being Caucasian Canadian (97%). Participants worked in a number of organizations and institutions with a mandate for providing a range of career development services; the majority worked for career and employment centres (19%), nonprofit organizations (16%), and public universities (13%).

Social Justice Competencies: Active and Desired

The critical incidents were analyzed according to the descriptions of competencies that career practitioners used in real-life scenarios with clients. In some of the critical incidents, practitioners directly listed the competencies that they used. In other critical incidents, competencies were extrapolated based on the descriptive details provided by participants. Selected examples from the critical incidents are found in Table 1.

Table 1

Social Justice Competencies Used and Desired by Career Practitioners

Type of competency	Examples
Attitudinal competencies	
Supportive	U. "First, one needs to care enough about a client to want to see him succeed. Next, one needs to be optimistic when others are not. It requires creativity to see hidden talents and personal qualities that are important, but taken for granted."
Nonjudgemental	U. "Attitude: being nonjudgemental, believing that everyone has strengths to work with, accepting people for where they are at vs. forcing my expectations on them." D. "Openness—originally when I heard that she had started a lawsuit against an employer, I started to develop a mindset of the type of personality but quickly changed my view when I got to know her."
Striving for equity	U. "Attitude of compassion and injustice of a situation beyond client's immediate control and the importance to make changes without compromising the values of the specific person we were serving. Everyone deserves effort and advocacy from career practitioners."
Passionate	U. "My attitude was one of 'there has to be a way' and this is so unfair. My own children were not 'independent' at 19, so why should someone with a physical brain injury be expected to be independent?"

Type of competency	Examples
Knowledge competencies	
Systematic knowledge	U. "Knowledge of services offered in the area and knowledge of the economy in general—I find it's very important for career practitioners to know and understand their own economy. If they do not, they pass along many myths to their clients."
	D. "Knowing how to implement action at the institutional, systematic, and legislative levels (beyond writing letters)."
Clients' concerns	U. "Knowledge of the impact of self-awareness—with an understanding of the impact of gender, culture, and so on—on personal/career decisions and plans. Understanding the pressures she felt from her family (and how that may be different because of her culture) and the desires she had for herself and the impact of now being in Canada."
	D. "This community has just experienced its first real influx of immigrants; *as a result, this is new territory for us.* We lack knowledge and experience working with different cultures, especially African cultures. There is no source available to teach us other than a web search which is what I used to study the Muslim food rules."
Career development practice	U. "I used my counselling background, portfolio development training, and career development knowledge to adapt the program for her needs. Knowing that she had acquired a great deal of her learning in nonformal ways, I thought portfolio development would be a great way to validate this learning and show her skills."
Skill competencies	
Counselling skills	U. "Provided client with assurance that he could discuss any or all issues with me and be assured of total confidentiality. Attended to client, good listening skills."
	D. "The skill to make a client feel valued and understood and appreciated as different—to work with the client to learn more about the difference and impact of their differences."
Communication skills	U. "Skills: Communication skills in terms of motivating and presenting ideas is relatively good. This was useful in speaking to ESL agencies and employer."
	D. "Skills to work with new Canadians with language/cultural issues and the attitudes of employers and how to manage interactions with employers to minimize effects of even subtle discrimination."
Intervention skills	U. "Skills—the ability to problem solve, generate various resolutions, and implement the decision made."
	D. "More knowledge of social justice issues and effective strategies for helping clients to overcome barriers (lack of resources, discrimination, inequity)—training and development of staff in these areas."
Career development skills	U. "Competencies included strong assessment and skills, including but not limited to personality/career assessment—with an understanding of the effect of a range of factors such as age, gender, culture, ability of personality assessment, and the accuracy of any assessment tool."

(U = Used; D = Desired)

For the purpose of organizing the results, the competencies were assigned to the competency domains of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Even though these are not mutually exclusive domains in theory or practice (Collins & Arthur, 2010), they were used for conceptual clarity in the original critical incident questions and fit with the domains emphasized by career practitioners. Results illustrated in Tables 2, 3, and 4 indicate the percentage of participants who indicated competencies in each of the categories. The percentages in any one domain—that is attitudes, knowledge, and skills—may exceed 100% as there was no restriction placed on the number of competencies that could be reported by the participants.

Attitudinal competencies. When career practitioners wrote about the different attitudes and beliefs they used when incorporating social justice into career development practices, four main categories emerged: (a) Supportive (b) Non-judgemental, (c) Passionate, and (d) Striving for Equity. Career practitioners reported having a passionate attitude, being supportive and nonjudgemental, and believing in a sense of equity. The emphasis on understanding client needs was paramount, as career practitioners tried to be supportive of clients' situations and the surrounding circumstances. There was an expressed passion about the importance of considering many clients' circumstances in light of social justice and locating clients' career issues within their broader life situation and surrounding contexts. Career practitioners recognized the importance of equal rights and also acknowledged that some clients needed additional supports to enable them to realize their career goals, exhibiting strong motivation to address equity issues in career development.

The theme of being nonjudgemental was recognized as a key attitudinal competency, but it was also the one competency area that was identified as requiring strengthening through practice. There appeared to be a gap between acknowledging the importance of being nonjudgemental about clients and their circumstances and career practitioners' awareness of how practitioners' personal biases may come into play. The attitudinal competencies used in the practice examples and the attitudinal competencies desired by career development practitioners are presented in Table 2.

Knowledge competencies. When practitioners wrote about the different areas of knowledge they used to incorporate social justice into practice with clients, three main categories emerged: (a) Systems Knowledge, (b) Client's Concerns, and (c) Career Development Practice. Career practitioners emphasized the influences of various contexts/systems on both clients' presenting issues and the choice of interventions. They noted the connections between some clients' presenting issues and the lack of systemic support. Their view of client issues expanded to place the individual in the context of available resources, which in many cases were reported as inadequate to meet client needs. Career practitioners noted how their understanding of macro-system issues, such as legislation, immigration policy and credentialing, and labour market fluctuations, helped them to see their clients' issues through a systems lens. They also noted examples where their interventions were

focused on helping clients navigate through formal systems to build a better foundation of security or resources for clients to take action toward their career goals.

Table 2
Attitudes Used and Desired in Career Practice

Used in practice	Desired in practice
1. Supportive (100%) Caring, compassion, empathic, client-centred, sympathy, hopeful, positive, supportive, encouraging, empowerment, togetherness	Nonjudgemental (100%) Respect, no bias, openness, nonjudgemental, lifelong learning
2. Nonjudgemental (61%) Respect, no bias, openness, nonjudgemental, lifelong learning	
3. Striving for equity (45%) Justice, systems, equality, morality, ethical, honesty	
4. Passionate (27%) Motivation, willingness, determination, passion, sense of importance	

Career practitioners also discussed the key role that networking and referral played in helping them to support clients adequately. They recognized the importance of connecting clients to other systems and resources that might help clients directly with career-related issues, or community-based resources to address other areas in their life so that clients would have more energy or personal resources to dedicate to their career-related needs. Most of the career practitioners in this study claimed that they held strong knowledge competencies related to foundations of practice, including career development theory and job search processes.

The examples provided in the social justice knowledge competencies domain showed how career practitioners viewed their client work as more than working with the individuals; rather, they saw strong connections between individual needs and action required at different levels of systems. Although career practitioners used the systems knowledge to help their clients achieve their career goals, they also expressed the need for additional knowledge related to systems and their clients' career needs. There was a clear delineation between identifying client issues in their connection to social justice and having a knowledge base from which to enact social justice actions or interventions in career development practice.

The results showed that some career practitioners wanted core foundational knowledge, such as more counselling and/or foundations of psychology knowledge, as well as specialist knowledge related to client issues, such as addiction, to help them formulate relevant interventions. Career practitioners simultaneously recognized the need to move beyond direct interventions with the client and acknowledged that they lacked knowledge about advocacy, understanding of advocacy interventions, or frameworks for addressing systemic change. Although career practitioners identified how clients' issues were linked to other circumstances in their lives, some participants felt that they lacked a knowledge base from which

to tackle client issues in a way that would address the larger systems influences that were adversely impacting them. Some career practitioners explicitly noted that they required a better understanding of how cultural diversity impacted their clients' lives. They recognized its importance, but felt stuck in terms of a knowledge base that would help them to design relevant and culturally responsive career interventions. The knowledge categories and themes that participants implemented, and wanted to strengthen, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Knowledge Used and Desired in Career Practice

Used in practice	Desired in practice
1. Systematic knowledge	1. Systematic knowledge
a. Systems (39%) Different systems from micro to macro, funding process, referral process, policies and procedures	a. Implement action (30%) How to implement action, advocacy
b. Community resources (39%) Available resources, community resources, technology, access resources	b. Government (20%) Federal and provincial levels of government
c. Labour market (32%) Labour market, economy, networks	c. Labour market (20%) Business sector, private sector, networking
2. Client's concern	2. Client's concern
a. Client's concerns (63%) Client's specific challenge, possible barriers, client's background, crisis intervention, client's situation	a. Mental health (35%) Symptoms of mental health and street drugs
b. Client's rights (32%) Client's rights to have access to information and to be treated equally	b. Understanding Diversity (25%) Understanding about diversity
	c. Counselling (30%) Professional culture of psychology, counselling knowledge
3. Career development practice	
a. Career development (51%) Career development training, interview process, resume writing, elements of career theory, assessment tools	

Skills competencies. When practitioners wrote about the different skills they used in connecting their career practices to social justice, four main categories emerged: (a) Counselling Skills, (b) Communication Skills, (c) Intervention Skills, and (d) Career Development Skills. In reviewing the specific themes that emerged in each of these categories, we noted a strong connection between the knowledge and skills required to work as a career practitioner. Although not all of the participants were career counsellors, many felt that their base skills in counselling served them well in addressing social justice issues with clients. The skill competencies appear as generic skills that career practitioners use to work with clients presenting many unique career issues. Recall that the focus of this study was on identifying the competencies

for addressing social justice issues in career practice. When the skills reported by participants were reviewed, it appeared that they are not fundamentally different from generic practice, and participants felt that these core skills could be used to support clients in overcoming their perceived career-related barriers. Although career practitioners used counselling, communication, and intervention skills to assist clients, they also felt they could benefit from strengthening these same skills.

The most evident gaps in skills competencies were related to more specialist skills for implementing social justice interventions. One of the key gaps noted was skills for working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Again, participants could identify that diversity was relevant for career interventions directed toward social justice, but they reported a lack of skills for implementing interventions. Skill gaps were also particularly noted for working with clients who presented with significant mental health challenges.

The themes under the communication and intervention skill categories show a similar pattern. A high number of participants noted that they had good foundation skills, but felt they could also develop additional competencies in these areas. Some of the skills highlighted, such as advocacy and problem-solving, appear to be keys for implementing interventions that address social justice concerns. Yet, many participants acknowledged that they required additional competencies to effectively implement interventions. The skills categories and themes that participants connected to social justice and career practices, as well as skill areas that they wanted to strengthen, are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Skills Used and Desired in Career Practice

Used in practice	Desired in practice
1. Counselling (90%) Counselling skills, responsible caring, active listening, reflection, open ended questions, positive feedback, positive environment	1. Counselling (33%) Skills in working with diverse clients including mental health
2. Communication (66%) Communication skills, motivational skills, facilitation skills not better accounted for by counselling skills, e.g., diplomacy, mediation networking, advocacy, writing	2. Communication (83%) Communication skills, diplomacy skills, advocacy skills, teaching skills
3. Intervention (39%) The explicit mention of problem-solving, interventions not better accounted for by career development or communication skills, decision-making, creativity, group brain-storming, role play	3. Intervention (17%) How to problem solve effectively and implement social justice
4. Career development (34%) Career development, portfolio development, career assessment, developing computer skills, occupational research	

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that career development practitioners identified a range of competencies that they use for addressing social justice in career interventions. At the same time, they recognize that there are gaps in their competency base that, if filled, would help them to translate the concept of social justice into interventional planning and implementation.

According to the participants, maintaining a supportive attitude and remaining nonjudgemental are essential components in developing a strong working alliance. This becomes more important when working with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, as clients may be more likely to respond to career practitioners who seem open to learning about their worldview and their conceptualization of career-related issues (Arthur & Collins, 2011). Several competency frameworks emphasize the importance of self-awareness as a foundational domain from which to build competencies related to knowledge and skills (e.g., Arredondo et al., 1996; Collins & Arthur, 2010). What this means, according to the participants, is that career practitioners need to be reflective about their views of diversity and social justice and how their personal worldviews impact the ways that they conceptualize client issues and possible interventions. The career practitioners in this study underlined the importance of being nonjudgemental; however, several of the critical incidents indicated that participants felt perplexed about how to manage perceived differences or potential biases. It appears that they could use additional support to move beyond the professional edict to strive to be nonjudgemental, to working with their personal reaction and potential value conflicts while attending to client needs.

Knowledge competencies evident in the critical incidents showed that career practitioners were viewing clients and their career issues within a larger systems context. They listed examples of how their clients were responding to events or ongoing conditions in the surrounding environment. According to the participants, these knowledge competencies helped to conceptualize client issues in the context of their life conditions; subsequent intervention planning included working directly with both individuals and other systems. Career practitioners discussed the importance of networking and referral and noted that knowledge of contacts and local resources were key aspects of their intervention planning. There was evidence within the critical incident examples that the career practitioners in this study felt knowledgeable about career development theoretical foundations and ways to use that knowledge for framing client issues.

In essence, knowledge competencies were strongly expressed as knowing what would support social justice through career interventions. These results demonstrate that career practitioners see themselves as being able to gain and use knowledge specific to their individual clients and regarding specific policies and procedures as established by various systems. These findings may in part be explained by the emphasis that is placed on the individual in traditional career development theories. Professional training has typically not placed adequate focus

on enhancing the competency of practitioners to address systemic-level change or to engage in the roles of advocate, social activist, consultant, and so on (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Toporek & Williams, 2006). With a primary focus on the individual, career practitioners are not trained to focus on the systems external to the individual that may influence the trajectory of their clients' career path (Patton & McMahon, 2006). A parallel Australian study mirrored the finding that career development practitioners primarily intervened at the individual level with clients and seldom intervened at broader systems levels (McMahon et al., 2008b).

Exposure to systems approaches in career development theories and career counselling models would support practitioners to consider the impact that larger systems can have on career development. Taking a *person in context* perspective, as suggested by systems approaches (e.g., Arthur & McMahon, 2005; Patton & McMahon, 2006), opens up possibilities for intervention at multiple levels of clients' systems (i.e., individual, familial, organizational) and for the career practitioner to assume alternative roles (i.e., advocate, consultant). In addition, by taking a systemic view, clients may gain a holistic understanding of their situation and of the broader influences that may contribute to it (i.e., labour market conditions, policy, social service entitlements). In relation to social justice, the depth of understanding of clients' situations and the broader range of possible interventions enabled by systems approaches enhances the likelihood of career practitioners intentionally undertaking socially just interventions.

Consistent with the findings of a similar study conducted in Australia (McMahon et al., 2008b), the most frequently mentioned skills that career practitioners used were basic counselling skills, such as active listening and reflection. These core skills are critical for working with all clients, in order to build a strong working alliance. This finding supports other research that suggests that foundational counselling skills can be applied in a number of roles, such as consultation and advocacy (Moe, Perera-Diltz, & Sepulveda, 2010). This is consistent with the way in which the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners (National Steering Committee for Career Development Guidelines and Standards, 2004) are organized. Even though not all career practitioners will specialize as counsellors, there are core skills that cross over specializations and roles of practitioners, such as assessment and employment interventions directly with individual clients, group programming, or community-capacity building.

Counselling skills were noted in both the knowledge used and knowledge desired. This finding may be partially explained by the diversity of individuals who enter the profession of career development with a wide range of knowledge and skills (Arthur, 2008). In an unregulated profession, some practitioners may rely on life experience to guide their work when they enter the field, whereas others have obtained doctoral degrees with a specialization in career development and/or career counselling. With such a wide range of entry-level skills, it is likely that there will be a range of needs for knowledge and skill development. This point is emphasized by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2002), which notes that many career practitioners receive no thorough grounding

in basic theories of career development and that the qualifications of practitioners in many public agencies is often at a low level.

Individually focused communication skills, such as information giving and resume writing, have been taught in a number of career training programs (Amundson, 2003). However, communication skills that are aimed at communication with larger social institutions and organizations are absent in most training programs. Practitioners mentioned a specific desire to obtain communication skills related to diplomacy and negotiation. The need for different communication skills may underlie practitioners' reluctance to engage in roles outside that of working with individuals, as many of the other roles require specialist skills (Arthur et al., 2009).

Career practitioners in this study had a desire to strengthen the same skills they already used in their daily work, particularly when working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. It seems that they recognized the importance of building on core skills to strengthen their capacity for diversity and for social justice. It is here that a gap seems to appear between *knowing what* and *knowing how*. Career practitioners may recognize the importance of environmental and systemic influences on the lives of their clients, but they also recognize that they often lack training about how to implement related interventions.

The possible gap between skills and knowledge may be partly accounted for by the absence of curriculum designed to offer practice models and ways to incorporate social justice into career-related interventions. Fassinger and Gallor (2006) suggested that we expand our traditional models from the "scientist-practitioner" to the "scientist-practitioner-advocate" to emphasize the inclusion of training for social justice roles in both pre-service and continued professional development training. One of the key priorities identified at a think tank on career education in Canada was curriculum content to address broader social and structural issues (Burwell & Kalbfleisch, 2007). Even though there have been recent theoretical advances in systems approaches to career development—such as the Systems Theory Framework (McMahon, 2011; Patton & McMahon, 2006), Chaos Theory (Bright & Pryor, 2011; Pryor & Bright, 2011), and the Ecological Approach (Conyne & Cook, 2004)—there are few resources available to guide career practitioners about how to translate theory to practices that address social justice concerns. Beyond identifying structural barriers that impede people's career development, curriculum needs to intensify skill development for roles such as advocacy, consultation, and community-capacity building.

The challenge for many of the participants in this study was recognizing that they lacked knowledge and skills for engaging in broader systems change. Participants specifically noted they would like more information about advocacy, what it means, and how they could use it to address client needs. This may include working directly with clients, advocating on behalf of the client, and/or addressing structural barriers that persist for groups of clients (Arthur, 2005). More examples of how career practitioners implement social justice action through advocacy roles (Neault, 2009) would help to open up discussion of ways to address the barri-

ers that clients face and the barriers and conflicts that practitioners face in their work. It is important to extend the dialogue about social justice in ways that more intensively encourage academics and practitioners to discuss and learn from each other about the meanings of social justice, how theory informs practice, and how practice can enhance theoretical developments (Irving & Malik, 2005).

CONCLUSION

The participants in this study represent a small sample of Canadian career development practitioners. The voluntary sample may not be representative of all practitioners, and the topic of the study may have attracted practitioners who have a particular interest in social justice. There was also a range of background preparation in terms of participants' roles in the career development field and their exposure to social justice within their professional education. Despite the heterogeneity of the participants, the results of this study suggest that career development practitioners identified how the career concerns of clients from nondominant cultural backgrounds were linked to social justice issues. In turn, the participants in this study identified key competencies in the domains of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that supported them to work directly with individual clients, provide appropriate resources, and address systemic barriers. The scope of the study was on practice examples directly involving clients, and did not inquire about other roles that practitioners may assume connected to program planning, evaluation, or communication with policy-makers. These areas deserve additional study, as they may be linked to ways for improving service access and delivery.

The call for social justice needs to be more intensively matched by adequate preparation of career practitioners. However, the call for social justice in career development practices involves more than curriculum reform. Beyond personal barriers such as lack of background information to support social justice practices, career practitioners in Canada have reported that they themselves are impacted by many systemic barriers (Arthur et al., 2009). The best-trained career practitioners may face lack of funding, time, and support within organizational structures, as well as limiting mandates about how services should be organized and delivered. When funding mandates have a specific focus such as job placement, with few resources, it is unlikely that career practitioners are going to be able to take the time to address larger systemic barriers that impact employment access and mobility. The issue becomes what counts as effective service delivery when career practitioners, according to the narrative of participants, face high demand for working with individuals and/or groups of clients, without adequate support to use key competencies such as advocacy, community-capacity building, or prevention and education skills. In summary, according to the participants, the professional education of career development practitioners must be matched by negotiation with funders, policy-makers, and managers who oversee public and private agencies to consider where and how the value of social justice could be incorporated into service delivery.

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