Editorial

10.20856/jnicec.5601

Exploring how ethics, philosophies and principles (EPPs) impact policy and practice in career development

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To cite this article:

Artess, J. (2026). Exploring how ethics, philosophies and principles (EPPs) impact policy and practice in career development. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *56*(1), 4-9. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5601

Introduction

Welcome to edition 56 of the NICEC Journal. The NICEC Journal is a bi-annual publication comprising articles, book reviews and news. Recently the structure was amended to reflect three types of article: research, conceptual and short:

- *Research articles* will be expected to include strong academic content and should be based on new empirical work, or use an established methodology.
- *Conceptual articles* will be expected to include strong academic content and should be based on new theoretical work or on detailed and analytical discussion of key issues, existing theories, new policies or other important issues.
- *Short articles* are intended to attract diverse submissions such as: rapid updates on policy developments; reporting an evaluation of a new service; reflections on practice; and points of views.

In each edition, readers will find articles are identified by type and where there has been a call for a special edition, articles will be categorised under that heading. In edition 56 readers will find articles of all three types.

In making the call for this themed edition we aimed to explore how ethics, philosophies and principles (EPPs) impact policy and practice in career development work. EPPs underpin career development practice, as well as theories and policies, and may be manifest formally in professional development standards, or more broadly in deeply held assumptions or beliefs about the nature of career making and ways to best help clients make progress in

their life and work. It is intriguing to consider whether each of us defines what is ethical, philosophically-appropriate or principled from within the career development context in which we operate, or whether there is a broader consensus. Sometimes the terms 'ethics', 'philosophies' and 'principles' are used interchangeably. However, the reader will be reassured at this point to learn that this brief editorial is not about to disappear down the rabbit hole of definition, but instead offer some reflections to set the scene.

Whilst there may appear to be consensus amongst communities of practice, such as the Career Development Institute (CDI, 2024) it is likely that from different historical, social or cultural traditions, EPP may be viewed very differently. I recently listened to a presentation about generation theory, and whether you identify as a baby boomer, millennial or generation zee, the idea that each generation holds different beliefs about the nature of career and career development sounds plausible to me. Career development practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers are inevitably influenced by what they see happening around them, particularly in the world of work, and this changes significantly over time. The apocryphal story, attributed to Heraclitus, that one cannot step into the same place of a river twice, reminds of constant change in ourselves, our environment and our clients. What was true of the career guidance needs of people in the pre-digital age of the early 1990s is very different from that of the Copilot era of 2026. Our personal and professional philosophies are likely to have been shaped as much from our historic, lived experiences of careers work, as from research-led analyses.

Education, training and continued professional development for careers work is also likely to have had an influence on our sense of ethics and philosophical stance. As someone trained in the traditions of *unconditional positive regard* and *client-centredness* (c.f. Rogers, 1951) I assimilated that the gold standard of principled practice was to be non-directive and facilitate the client to make their own decisions, and use their free will, unimpeded by a practitioner's information-rich views. Knowledge of what clients may actually face in their career journeys introduces an ethical tension into non-directive practice and challenges values learned in training. Many practitioners will recognise the dilemma of aiming to be non-directive when they see a client embarked on a futile trajectory; can it ever be ethical to be directive in such circumstances and how can a practitioner know with certainty what a futile trajectory is? Apparently impossible career dreams do come true.

A less often discussed ethical career guidance practice is that of being an advocate on behalf of individuals or groups of clients. UDACE (1986) listed the activities of guidance, interestingly as verbs not nouns, and included not only *informing, advising,* and *counselling* which might be expected, but also *enabling* and *advocating*. This acknowlegement of a more agentic aspect foreshadowed increasing professional interest in the role of careers work as a catalyst in the promotion of social justice, equity, diversity and inclusion – see also NICEC Journal, edition 55 – and acted as a counter to the passivity of the practitioner in wholly client-centred philosophies.

Another gold standard in ethical careers work is *impartiality*. Impartiality is a well-established goal in both practice and policy and yet it is not easily achieved. Universities that discourage employer presentations from the fossil fuel industries; practitioners opposed to war who avoid discussion about careers in the armed forces; schools and colleges with financial imperatives to recruit students; are simple illustrations of the day-to-day difficulty of making impartiality happen in the real world. Hooley (2023) argues that impartiality is poorly defined and weakly theorised. He describes challenges to the aspiration of impartiality including:

ambiguity, alignment with career theory; and tensions with other ethical values. Impartiality, like non-directiveness, is perhaps more easily observed in its absence; career information, advice and guidance that is partial, or not independent of the interests of other stakeholders, is unlikely to serve the best interests of clients. One solution suggested is that the profession undertake continual examination of biases, preconceptions and prejudices, in order to make those explicit and subject to public scrutiny.

The (CDI's ibid) Code of Ethics, which includes impartiality, was purposed to guide or define ethical behaviour in career development work. It also acts as a form of public accountability and standards setting and contributes to operational policy. In the UK the code has teeth; CDI members who breach the Code will be subject to a disciplinary procedure.

The Code articulates principles such as trustworthiness and fitness to practise alongside competence and [commitment to] continuing professional development. It is interesting to note that the items listed are described as principles. They are:

- Equity, diversity and inclusion
- Accountability
- Autonomy
- Confidentiality
- Competence and continuing professional development
- Duty of care to clients
- Impartiality
- Transparency
- Trustworthiness
- Fitness to practise

Ethics, philosophies and principles are complex to practise, nuanced in policy terms, and probably inter-dependent. It is important to try to make explicit what or who the architects really are. Does a clear consensus of what is philosphically right precede the identification of ethics and principles, or do ethics and principles lead to deeper philosophical understandings? Rigorous, research- and practice-informed commentary has much to do to disentangle EPP in career development.

The authors in this edition grapple with this complexity well and in doing so contribute to what we hope will be an on-going debate about what aspects of EPP can be taken for granted and what should be kept under review. Consensus might be more illusive than we first thought, but all the more interesting for that.

Special collection, ethics, philosophies and principles

In the first article, **Poulsen**, examines the purpose of career education and guidance and how it can be distinguished from ethical principles embedded in professional identity. Writing from a Danish perspective and drawing on Dewey's philosophy of education he argues that the purpose of career guidance can be understood in light of democratic and and educative principles.

The next article from **Borgen et al**, presents a case study from Canada of how a code of ethics was developed, disseminated and renewed as a tool to strengthen ethical fitness. Using a learning model that places emphasis on moving users of the code toward 'unconscious competence' and replacing previous strategies to embed ethical practice described as 'print, post and pray' with a more systematic approach to the challenges of raising and embedding ethical awareness in career development work in a non-regulated context.

A country context is foregrounded in **Post** and **Woldendorp's** account of the tensions between individual freedom of choice and societal collective need in a changing labour market in the Netherlands. Taking both historical and contemporary approaches, they reconceptualise what is a 'good career' and propose that a new balance is achieved between the individual and the common good. Career guidance as a value-driven practice is well placed to facilitate 'responsive career pathways'.

In the next article, **McIlveen** takes a deep dive into the nature of narrative career counselling and vocational psychology viewed through a philosophical and ethical lens. He argues that narrative approaches rely on the co-construction of meaning, and do not confer predictive truth. Writing from an Australian perspective, McIlveen proposes the concept of 'pragmatic idiographic truth' in which counsellor and client build a pragmatic truth that can form the basis of action. Career counselling therefore may not be neutral or value-free and challenging questions remain unanswered.

If the article above is thought-provoking in relation to the client-counsellor relationship, the next one will similarly encourage reflection. Here **Freeman** explores power-sharing and the student voice in careers work. Drawing on a review of literature, Arnstein's Ladder of citizen participation, ethical pragmatism and participatory action research, she proposes a new model of careers work that centre-grounds social justice. Freeman argues that if there is to be movement from student representation to student participation there needs to be a redesign of career education, information, advice and guidance.

In the first of two 'points of view' in this edition, **Colley** provides a thought-provoking article as she re-visits research undertaken at the time of the Connexions career services in England in the UK. She describes how the ethical labour invested in the provision of career advice and guidance with disadvantaged young people during a period of 'austerity' compromised advisers' sense of professional ethics and their personal well-being. Colley draws out lessons relevant to today and challenges us to resist the 'narrowing' pressures of marketisation and government policy.

In the second 'point of view' **Wilkinson** provides what has been described as a love letter to Bill Law. As many readers will be aware, Bill Law, along with Tony Watts, was a founding Fellow of NICEC. Wilkinson uses the well known DOTS model to encourage reflection on professional integrity by raising a series of challenging questions. In this article integrity includes building trust, taking risks, and stepping outside ones comfort zones and doing what we ask of our clients. One particularly provocative question is 'Should I be taking advice from you?'

Next follows an article by **Stevens** who continues to encourage us to focus on guidance interactions. Building on earlier work on existentialism in careers coaching (Stevens, 2023) Stevens reports upon his action research about how one-to-one appointment length and

awareness and use of guidance models helps us to understand the 'black box' of career guidance interventions in higher education in the UK.

Moving now to Sierra Leone, the next article provides a practice-based ethical analysis of a pilot to introduce career counselling into secondary schools. Here **Edenberg** describes a 'small state' where resources for career education and guidance are constrained and practitioners' ethical challenges are intensified by structural as much as professional considerations.

As has already been suggested, the education and training of career practitioners confers fundamental, core values and is significant in shaping the sense of EPP in practice. In the next article, **Frigerio et al** report on a survey of the practice and philosophy of providers of initial training in the UK and some other countries. The project arose from work on the Career Development Handbook (Hooley, et al, 2024) and draws upon several frameworks for practice. Findings suggest consensus but also a good deal of epistemic and philosophical difference around the role of career theory and its relationship with practice.

A potentially urgent ethical issue for the training of guidance practitioners concerns whether matters of global concern should form part of practice; climate change and the provision of 'green guidance' being one such issue. In a ground-breaking piece of research **Lucas Casanova** and **Hooley** report on an extensively statistical validation of two instruments to measure practitioners' attitudes, and their perceptions of their clients' attitudes, to green guidance. They contend that the development of these instruments will enable practitioners to reflect upon their own attitudes and competence in the context of the increasing importance of environmental sustainability and the attendant consequences for occupational choice.

General articles

The articles in this section feature practice-led research and development in different contexts; the first three are case studies.

The first article authored by **Bainham** provides a case study of early evidence from the evaluation of the Rise High programme to enhance the career development skills of disadvantaged, under-represented young people in a rural area of England. Findings indicate the programme is effective with many positive outcomes for participants. The model offers insight into the design of collaborative, place-based outreach work in rural settings.

In the second practice-based case study, **Mohammed** and **Wijemuni** report upon the provision of 'meaningful experiences of work' in secondary schools in England, and introduce the PERE (prepare, execute, reflect and evaluate) model as a framework to operationalise governmental guidance (Department for Education, 2025) and the Gatsby Benchmarks (2025). Based on the work of Kolb, the PERE model combines experiential learning, social constructivism and reflective practice.

In the third case study **Mehta** describes a leadership programme in a research intensive university in the UK. The programme, aimed to support the inclusion of under-represented employees, is designed as a career development intervention and demonstrates how career progression is enhanced by inclusive leadership and psychological safety.

In a quantitative, cross-sectional analysis **Michael** reports upon the relationship between, parental attachment, age, academic progress and vocational identity (the dependent

variable) in undergraduate students in higher education in the USA. Using both literature and regression analyses, Michael shows that younger students are more vocationally clear than their older peers, and that secure parental attachment, particularly in relation to fathers, has a strong association with vocational identity.

The last article in this edition concerns career development support for people in the age group 60-80 years. **Taylor** draws upon psychological theory and empirical research and proposes ThriveSpan as an integrative, meaning-centred framework to support wellbeing. ThriveSpan focuses on 're-orientation' towards what matters now, and reassuringly for those in this age group, does not characterise ageing negatively, but as a distinctive, dynamic condition.

Finally, the issue finishes off with books review from Michelle Stewart of Carolyn Parry's new book *Supporting achievers to unblock sustainable career success* and Claire Nix's review of third edition of *The Careers Leaders Handbook* and a report from Nicki Moore about NICEC's fiftieth birthday celebrations.

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