Authentic education for meaningful work:

Beyond 'career management skills'

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Abstract

This paper focuses on work education in schools and explores how it can be conceptualised so that it contributes to the flourishing and wellbeing of students in a democracy. It first provides an overview of the recent developments in 'career learning' worldwide, noting the increasing importance that it has been given as a contributor to enhanced competitivity in knowledge-based economies. The paper notes that the centrality of work in the curriculum is justified: despite major societal and technological transformations presaging a 'post-work' world, 'meaningful work' maintains its importance as a source of fulfilment and wellbeing, and the hallmark of a flourishing life. Much of the work that is available in neoliberal economies, however, is increasingly the cause of distress, hardship, exploitation and abuse. A case is made for an authentic career education that helps students understand the nature of meaningful work, to aspire to it, and to decode the causes that frustrate access to it. It is argued that, as with all truly educational enterprises, authentic work education should provide the intellectual tools and encourage the moral resolve to imagine more socially just and fulfilling ways of living together, and to gain a measure of individual and collective control over the forces that shape lives.

Introduction:
Situating career development work

Across Europe and in many countries worldwide, note several authors, there has been an increasing policy emphasis on aligning formal education with the 'needs' of the labour market, and to prepare students for the 'world of work' (Grubb & Lazerson, 2004; Kuhn & Sultana, 2006; Mazawi, 2007; Vally & Motala, 2014; Allais & Shalem, 2018). While such global-level policy priorities and discourses are mediated by local context, they nevertheless powerfully shape education, and exert a homogenizing influence (Mundy et al., 2017). The story line that is often presented – by national governments, supranational entities (such as the OECD, the European Union, and the World Bank), influential think tanks and 'policy entrepreneurs' – is that in a knowledge-

based economy young people need to develop a range of 'career management skills' that will help them navigate complex, non-linear and unpredictable transitions between learning and earning, where the traditional boundaries between the spheres of education, training, working, and leisure have become increasingly blurred (Sultana, 2012a). An important if somewhat contradictory part of that narrative is that we actually do not know much about what 'the real world of work' will look like in the future, and what skills will be needed – other than the disposition and commitment to 'learn how to learn' in a lifelong process of self-creation in response to constant changes brought about by technological innovation, including automation and artificial intelligence (Hooley, 2018).

Some present such a scenario as being exciting, taking humanity to the cusp of a 'brave new world'. Others express grave concerns about the ability of schools – whose formal and informal curricula hark back to the Fordist mentality that shaped them as much as it shaped mass production systems – to prepare the next generation for what is to come. Both hopes and fears have brought wholesale reform efforts in their wake, including what Sharma (2016) calls the 'STEM-ification' of curricula, with increasing importance being given to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. It is these subjects, it is argued, that will provide the knowledge and skills base on which innovative technologies can be developed, and which will therefore give countries and regions a competitive edge over others. Schools are also tasked to further buttress this curricular core with a bevy of scaffolding '21st century skills' and dispositions – such as entrepreneurial attitudes and competences, digital literacy, innovative and critical thinking, communication skills, and self-regulated learning – all of which will make the next generation job-ready and 'employable' in the new economy (Kuratko, 2005; Griffin, McGraw & Care, 2012; van de Oudeweetering & Voogt, 2018).

Benefits of career learning

It is easy to see how, in this narrative, the issue of providing 'career management skills' and 'career guidance' to students is bound to gain traction, for it promises to help young people navigate through the vicissitudes of life, to steer them towards relevant curricular streams, to encourage continued commitment to further education and training thus improving the 'human stock' of required skills, and to develop particular orientations to, and connections with, the labour market. Since the experience of being 'mismatched' can be damaging in all sorts of ways to the economy and the individual alike (Kalleberg, 2007), the claim can be made that career development work with citizens is more likely to lead to a happier and therefore more productive workforce, and less wastage of public funds due to attrition.

Students who choose their educational and training pathways wisely and who develop a life project are less likely to change courses or drop out, and are more likely to engage purposefully with learning, to remain motivated, and to achieve more highly. Research evidence that confirms the economic and educational benefits of career guidance work (*inter alia* Killeen & Kidd, 1991; Hughes et al., 2002; Bowes, Smith & Morgan, 2005; Hooley & Dodd, 2015), and that it is therefore both a private and a public good, together with national and regional preoccupations with economic performativity, have led to a remarkable resurgence of policy interest in career education and guidance (CEG), with international reviews of services covering over 55 countries across both the global North and South (Watts, 2014).

Much guidance work involves helping students think about the world of work, about their current understanding of it, and about their future relationship to it. Work education – also referred to as 'career development learning', 'transition learning', 'career management skills' and 'school-to-work curriculum' – generally aims to make students more aware of

themselves and of the work environment, and to develop a range of meta-cognitive skills, all of which help them make life-related choices, plans and decisions. In the best of cases, such work-related learning and guidance encourages students to become aware of the influence of such factors as social background, gender, and ethnicity in limiting their 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai, 2004).

This can lead to a greater understanding of the way one's 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996) have been socially constrained and curtailed, increasing the likelyhood that 'adaptive preferences' (Nussbaum, 2001) are duly challenged. In these and other ways, therefore, career-related work can also claim to advance the social justice agenda (Sultana, 2014; Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2018a).

International developments in career learning programmes

The international interest in the potential benefits of CEG has led several countries to take initiatives to broaden access to services, by, among others, embedding career learning more formally in curricula, from primary (e.g. Magnuson, 2000; Welde et al., 2016) right up to higher education levels (e.g. Foskett & Johnston, 2006; Frigeiro, Mendez & McCash, 2012; Rott, 2015). Initiatives have included introducing or reinforcing work-related teaching in the curriculum through 'new' timetabled subjects (such as 'Career Education' or 'Personal and Social Education'), through ensuring that established subjects connect to work-related issues and 'career management skills' (e.g. teaching successful job interview techniques in the creative arts lessons; writing a job application letter or c.v. in a language class), through the promotion of entrepreneurial skills thanks to setting up mock companies under the tutorship of seasoned business mentors (such as the Young Enterprise Scheme), through organising work shadowing and work experience placements, and so on.

Attention has been given to questions relating to the 'what' and 'how' of career learning: i.e. what a career education curricular framework should include (e.g. Hooley et al., 2013; Thomsen, 2014; Education Scotland, 2015), and how best to teach and assess 'career management skills' (e.g. Law, 1999; Sultana, 2013). Career learning curricula may exhibit various degrees of sophistication in relation to rationale, content, learning theories and pedagogical and assessment approaches, but ultimately their main preoccupation seems to be in reiterating the three aims of self-development, career exploration and career management, as expounded in the DOTS model (Law & Watts, 1977; Law, 1999). Important texts have been published in this regard (e.g. Barnes, Bassot & Chant, 2011; McCowan, McKenzie & Shah, 2017), as well as handbooks, web-based and digital material, and a plethora of resources, including guidelines as to how CEG services in schools can be improved (Gatsby Charitable Foundation, 2014; NCGE, 2017; Sultana, 2018a).

The international reviews referred to earlier have also noted that, in many contexts, school-based career education has evolved from being a one-shot intervention, aimed mainly at one or more key transition points, to being more developmental in scope; from being aimed at adolescents, to an appreciation of the fact that one should start laying the building blocks earlier, at least with older primary school children; from targeting individuals, and especially those experiencing difficulties, to a programme that is more universal in orientation, engaging whole classes and year groups; and from focusing on career information and educational guidance, to looking at education for the working life and citizenship more holistically and critically (Simon, Dippo & Schenke, 1991; Pouyaud & Guichard, 2018; Irving, 2018; Midttun & McCash, 2018).

All this 'busyness' around career education and guidance – which has seen the setting up of

transnational networks focusing on policy (e.g. the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network; the International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy; CareersNet), and practitioner training (e.g. the Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe) – is both significant and revealing. Descriptive accounts of these initiatives abound and are often presented to illustrate 'examples of good practice'. They tend to be highly valued by practitioners due to their concreteness, promissory benefits to students, and direct relation to action. However, they should not replace analytical and evaluative study, which carefully examines wider contextual relations. It is to a consideration of this that we now turn.

What is the problem that career learning is an answer to?

A powerful way of seeing the links between policy initiatives and trends and the wider matrix of power relations, including the complex interplay between the local and the global, is to ask: what is the problem that a specific policy, or raft of joined-up policies, is an answer to? As the critical policy analysis tradition reminds us, asking what the 'problem' is represented to be, and how such representations effect the kinds of policies and practices developed, can help us avoid becoming trapped within the assumptions of the particular field, policy context, or practice being studied (Simons, Olssen & Peters, 2009; Bacchi, 2009).

Asking these sorts of questions is especially important in the case of career education and guidance because its attraction to policy makers is also ideological, in the sense that it provides a narrative that serves to mask system failure, or to lay the cause of failure at the wrong door. In a context where the presumed 'cure' to economic recession – increased investment in education and training – is giving diminishing returns to youths and adults alike (Collins, 2000; Tomlinson, 2008; Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2010; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2017), CEG can serve to reinforce the neoliberal agenda of 'responsibilisation' (Kelly, 2001; Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2018b), whereby structural, *systemic* problems like graduate unemployment and underemployment are represented to be problems with *individuals*, who only have themselves to blame for their misfortune (Savelsberg, 2010). If only they had better 'career management skills', if only they had made better educational and occupational choices, if only they had edited their *curriculum vitæ*, their manners, their looks even (Hakim, 2010; Yates, Hooley & Kaur Bagri, 2016) – then they would have got the job. In this narrative, then, CEG promotes the notion of the individual being an 'entrepreneur' of the self (Peters, 2016; Irving, 2018), involved in a process of 'life design' (Savickas et al., 2009), with career learning carving a role for itself both in schools, and in public and private employment services.

In many countries, deficit narratives that pathologise both schools and young people abound, with the former being presented as out-dated institutions unresponsive to the 'needs' of industry, and the latter as being 'deficient' in character, competence and commitment, and thus to blame for their protracted transitions and marginalisation in the labour market (Brunila, 2013; Brunila & Ryyännen, 2017). With the problem defined in this way, career education and guidance tends to adopt a 'technocratic' rationality (Sultana, 2018b), with practitioners seeing their role largely in terms of tightening the bonds between school and work, of helping students develop those qualities that are presumed to be lacking, thus rendering them more attractive to employers. If, on the other hand, the problem of difficult, delayed and truncated transitions is located in the way the economy is organised, and in what it gives most value to, then career education and guidance is more likely to take on a different, 'emancipatory' role – one that contributes to the overall educational enterprise of helping students

make sense of the world they live in, including the world of work. That would include helping them understand how, despite permitting the state to confine them between the four walls of institutionalised compulsory or near-compulsory schooling during the best years of their life – in principle as a preparation for independent and productive living – society fails to offer them access to decent livelihoods. A case in point is the UK, where in 2017, half of recent graduates were officially classified as working in a non-graduate role (Beckett, 2018).

The contention in this paper is that work education of the latter type – that is, a form of authentic career education that helps students decode what is happening around them, and equipping them with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to aspire to, and help bring about, a world in which all can flourish and attain wellbeing – is important, possible and necessary. In the sections that follow I will first outline why I think it is important for the world of work to feature prominently in school curricula. I will then make a case for the critical career education that is necessary if the 'flourishing' and 'wellbeing' of all students were indeed the goal and *raison d'être* of our schools.

Schooling and the world of work

The argument that school curricula should give importance to the world of work is, in many ways, an easy one to make: work remains central to human flourishing, providing for such human needs as shared experience, a structured experience of time, collective purpose, and status and identity, besides livelihood. Veltman (2016) provides an impressive and wide-ranging, interdisciplinary overview of the place of meaningful work in our lives, making a number of claims which I paraphrase and synthesise in *Box 1*.

If meaningful work is such a quintessential aspect of our life, it is to be expected that education prepares the next generation for it. Indeed, as Collins (2000) has noted, humanity has, unsurprisingly, always been preoccupied with preparing the young to take on the task of making the wheel go round. It is just that historically and anthropologically – i.e. across time and space – cultures have adopted different ways of inducting the young into work, according to a typology that includes *socialisation* (through close daily mimetic interaction between the young and initiated adults, often in community settings), *apprenticeship* (which, as a form of learning, is inscribed in the Code of Hammurabi in 18th century BCE, but which assumed its character as a craft guild in 12th century Europe, and which is currently enjoying something of a comeback in many countries), *professional accreditation* (which tied esoteric knowledge in theology, law and medicine – and later in the so-called 'new professions' – to licensure), and *bureaucratic schooling* (with its hierarchy of grades, examinations, and certification, all hallmarks of modern education systems worldwide). The nature of the mix-and-match between these Weberian 'ideal types' depends on the interplay between local context and global ideologies and trends.

If work is so central to human flourishing, it should follow like night follows day that an education predicated on the goal of promoting and facilitating such thriving will prepare all its students for it, so that they enjoy as much of the benefits accruing from it as possible. But herein lie at least two major problems: firstly, the nature of work in the contemporary world; secondly, the nature of work in the world that is yet to come. The first suggests that work is far from meaningful for vast swathes of the population; the second predicts that automation will render human work obsolete. Both have major implications for the kind of work education to be implemented in schools, as we will note below.

Box 1: Why meaningful work is necessary for human flourishing

Work:

- gives access to a livelihood, and under the best circumstances, provides security and independence, and defines adulthood, giving an individual a title, role, and status, and supporting (or undermining) a sense of autonomous agency;
- typically takes up a large percentage of our waking lives, such that our fulfilment or frustration in it spills over into – and strongly impacts – other aspects of our life; habits and orientations developed at work also impact on non-work, including leisure;
- exercises and makes demands on several of our capacities as human beings – whether intelligence, emotions, character, competence, or creativity – and it thus shapes us in profound ways;
- helps us develop several aspects of the self, going well beyond job-related skills to include a whole range of life skills that can help us flourish in other spheres outside work;
- provides us with a context in which we put into practice the knowledge and skills we have acquired, thus becoming a source of enjoyment and fulfilment; meaningful work is a prime vehicle for creative self-expression, through which we contribute in the collective task of building the world, reciprocating the benefits of social cooperation by putting ourselves at the service of our communities;
- generates respect from those around us, who acknowledge the effort that has been invested in developing and enacting competence. This heightens our feelings of self-worth;
- seems to be vital for developing a positive sense of one's own identity, to the extent that the lack of work achievements renders the latter difficult if not impossible; in many cases, humans define themselves with reference to the work that they do;
- influences our physical and psychological health in all sorts of ways: dissatisfaction leads to a range of ailments, negatively impacting mood, well-being, and positive self-regard; lack of work, or of decent work, gives rise to contexts where social tensions are more likely to be present;
- provides us with the opportunity to develop and to reinforce such personal values as honour, pride, dignity, and self-discipline;
- helps satisfy two key sources of human happiness: a sense of purpose, and connection. When the work we do is experienced as meaningful, we benefit from a third source of happiness, arising from a passion for what we do.

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The dark side of work

When Veltman (2016) celebrates the importance of work in people's lives, she is of course talking about *meaningful* work. She spends a good portion of her book noting that for many, work is far from meaningful or fulfilling, and indeed argues that, given the complex division of labour in contemporary societies, it is tragically not possible for meaningful work that supports human flourishing to be available to all people, even when the work they do is socially necessary. This does not detract from her claim that work is nevertheless central to our lives as humans, to the extent that most of our experiences of exploitation can be traced back to it, be this in the form of unfair compensation, lack of respect, or siphoning off of the results of one's energies and efforts to the disproportionate benefit of those who already enjoy higher levels of power, status and wealth.

The task of describing the contemporary labouring world is a challenging one, given that one's experience of work varies greatly depending on what one does, and where. Even so, if we had to paint with a broad brush, we would be justified in arguing that work in the 21st century is, for many, a bane: a Gallup study carried out in 2013 and involving 230,000 full-time and part-time workers in 142 countries reports that only 13% of people feel engaged and fulfilled by their jobs. Citing this report, Schwartz (2015) concludes: "Work is more often a source of frustration than one of fulfilment for nearly 90% of the world's workers. Think of the social, emotional, and perhaps even economic waste that this statistic represents. Ninety percent of adults spend half their waking lives doing things they would rather not be doing at places they would rather not be" (p.3). The International Labour Organisation reports (1999, 2016), which present fine-grained portraits of the experience of work in the global North and South, echo such a pessimistic conclusion. ILO data regarding 'decent work' across the world are increasingly negative for an ever larger number of people, in terms of the four indicators of employment, social protection, workers' rights, and social dialogue, leading to world-wide disillusionment arising from people's own experience of work, whether exclusion from the labour market, poor working conditions, low wages, exposure to vulnerability and insecurity, and job quality (Ryder, 2017, p.1).

A synthesis of the characteristics and trends that mark the contemporary labouring world makes for depressing reading: Work, in many contexts, is hard to find and easy to lose. It calls for ludicrously long periods of study, while doing its utmost to automise skills, either rendering humans obsolete, or driving them to work ever harder to compensate for lost earnings due to labour-replacing technologies. It demands loyalty but gives little if any back. It is increasingly marked by intensification, by insecurity, by short-to-temporary-to-zero contracts, and by informal Uber-like arrangements that circumvent labour laws and unions. It often pays below-subsistence wages, giving rise to a new class of 'working poor'. Workplaces have roped in the new technology to install disciplinary and surveillance regimes based on micro-management strategies that shackle with a smile. Workers are expected to smile back: one of the new work trends reported by *The Economist* is management's efforts to regulate employees' psychological states, "turning happiness into an instrument of corporate control" (2016, p.1).

We are primed to depend practically and emotionally on work, only to find jobs (if we're lucky) that are simply too small for our spirit – not surprising given that jobs all too often jobs are designed with efficiency targets rather than human flourishing in mind. We are schooled into being creative and sociable but spend our days in jobs that are devoid of reciprocity, mutuality, and conviviality. Citizens are constantly exhorted and admonished to find a 'work-life' balance, as if this were an alien aspiration that needed prodding, when the very right to 'disconnect' has long been lost. Youths desperate to find a job after indebting themselves for years to come in order to pay for their studies, relentlessly edit their c.v. and self, and go through all the hoops and hurdles – including accepting that newest form of exploitation, unpaid 'internships' – in order to improve their 'employability'.

All this might sound rhetorical and even melodramatic. But one only needs to consult the recent spate of books about the nature of work in neoliberal times to sink one's teeth into the empirical evidence that gives substance to this grim portrayal (inter alia Sennett, 1998; Procoli, 2004; Cederström & Fleming, 2012; Frayne, 2015; Fleming, 2015). All these authors, and many more besides, reinforce the point made by a long line of critics of capitalism, starting with Marx and on to Gorz, and more recently Standing (2011), who, in discussing the 'precariat', distinguishes 'work' (which, he says, captures the activities of necessity, surviving and reproducing, and personal development) from 'alienated labour' (whose function is to produce marketable outputs or services, with those who control it often oppressing and exploiting those performing it). That distinction has been obscured by the sanctification of paid employment over the past two centuries, with even progressive forces buying into the notion that a 'job' brings 'dignity', 'status' and a sense of belonging in society (Standing, 2018).

Will there be work?

A second consideration revolves around the thorny question of whether work – meaningful or otherwise – will be there for the taking for the majority of our students, as we hurtle forwards into a period of widespread automation and artificial intelligence. Here we are held hostage to representations as well as predictions that range from the most upbeat and positive on the one hand, to the most forbidding gloom and doom scenarios imaginable on the other. Some hail the arrival of a new golden age of leisure, an idyllic Arcadian society where everybody's needs are met thanks to technological wizardry and personal robots that render human labour superfluous. Here, some argue, an education for leisure rather than for work would be relevant, recalling the lycea and gymnasia of classical Greece where the elite, having exported labour onto slaves, could dedicate themselves to enacting democracy and contemplating philosophy and the finer things of life (Hemingway, 1988; Kleiber, 2012). Other accounts paint a dire picture, forecasting the arrival of workerless workplaces marked by a deepening chasm between a technological elite and the rest. Yet others recall that this is not the first time that humanity has survived technological innovation, with new work opportunities being created at the same time as others are destroyed, and new skills replacing old.

Reviewing several prognostications made by companies, think tanks, and research institutions about predicted job losses (and some gains) at the hands of automation, robots and AI, a team at the *MIT Technology Review* synthesised the main findings and concluded that there are as many opinions as there are experts. Predictions ranged "from optimistic to devastating, diverging by tens of millions of jobs even when comparing similar time frames… In short, although these predictions are made by dozens of global experts in economics and technology, no one seems to be on the same page. There is really only one

meaningful conclusion: we have no idea how many jobs will actually be lost to the march of technological progress" (Winick, 2018).

Authentic career education

We are thus confronted by the fact that much that passes for work nowadays is hardly conducive to human flourishing, and, moreover, that it is difficult to know what the future of work will look like in a world that is possibly without work. This, however, does not render work education irrelevant. If anything, with so much that is at stake in terms of having access to flourishing and meaningful lives, it is reasonable to claim that all students are *entitled* to a truthful, authentic work education programme that helps them both recognise and understand the way work is shaped now, and how it might be shaping up in the future. The question that we now need to ask is: is this what students are getting? And if not, what would such a truthful, authentic career education look like?

That begs other existential questions as: What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to live a 'good life'? How can people organise themselves to produce and consume the requirements of life, in ways that are in harmony with each other, and with nature? What kind of social arrangements could/should be put into place so that everybody can lead dignified lives, free from domination and exploitation? Several historians of education have documented the extent to which these sorts of questions have been given importance or have instead been eclipsed by the more utilitarian concerns of 'making a living'. Unsurprisingly, we find here a recurrent pattern: economic downturns have tended to marginalise the kinds of educational visions that a long line of educational protagonists – from Socrates down to Dewey and Freire – promoted (Carnoy & Levin, 1985), promoting instead a troubling utilitarianism that subordinated education to economic imperatives.

As I have noted in my reviews of career education and guidance programmes in many parts of the world, there is a distinct tendency for students to be encouraged to adapt to and 'feed' into the world of work as it is, rather than to question it in the light of already existing and possible alternatives (Sultana, 2012a, b).

As decades of scholarship in educational sociology have shown us, this is an endeavour in which the whole school colludes: schools teach the specific skills (e.g. vocational and digital proficiency, literacy and numeracy) and generic competences (e.g. 'soft skills') that are functional to the economy; they invest a great deal of resources in selecting, sorting and credentialing individuals, thus organising the distribution of 'hands' and 'minds' across the whole spectrum of vacancies available, while at the same time legitimising that distribution; they teach about 'work' through the formal curriculum, and even more so thanks to the way of life that schools inculcate through their ethos, their routines and rituals, and their institutional and pedagogical cultures. Schools thus instil such habits as time discipline, they normalise the notion of authority, they inculcate the disposition to postpone gratification, they demand the acceptance of a disciplinary regime that subordinates body movements and bodily needs to external demands, they expect students to expend effort for extrinsic rewards (such as grades) rather than intrinsic ones (such as pleasure in doing something), they teach them to consider as natural the socially and historically constructed distinction between 'work' (which is demanding, often boring, requiring a disciplined effort) and 'play/leisure' (which is about self-expression, freedom, and enjoyment – an opportunity to 're-create' oneself) (Apple, 1995).

In all these ways, schools powerfully communicate to the younger generation hegemonic notions about how to inhabit the world. Educators are here faced with a predicament: should they teach *for* work, encouraging students to adapt to the 'new spirit of capitalism'

(Boltanski & Ciapello, 2007) so as to stand a better chance of securing insecure livelihoods in a liquid world (Bauman, 2006). Or should they teach *about* work (and *against* labour), by helping students develop the thinking and activist tools to challenge the way in which the neoliberal labour market is letting citizens down? Or should educators perhaps do both? Prilleltensky & Stead (2012) speak about this in terms of what they call the 'adjust /challenge' dilemma, noting that career work can encourage students to (a) adjust to, and challenge the system, at the same time, (b) adjust to the system but not challenge it, (c) challenge the system but not adjust to it, and (d) neither adjust to the system nor challenge it.

This dilemma is duly acknowledged. Those who teach about work – as much as any other educator – act *in loco parentis*, i.e. they seriously take into account Dewey's well-known dictum which states that "What the best and wisest parents wants for their own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy" (1907, p.19). Most parents – even those most critical of the *status quo* – would nevertheless want their children to have access to a livelihood, even if that entails a temporary compromise on the basis of which one then has more robust access to stronger community representation and action that brings about social change.

An authentic education however cannot simply focus on helping students 'adjust'. While schools and educators cannot be expected to resolve systemic problems, the answer is not a resigned withdrawal from the political, since this in itself would be a political act, and ultimately collusion with the prevalent state of affairs. Rather, as educators, we are called upon to navigate the tensions and contradictions that necessarily arise in the 'messy' field of practice where pragmatism and realism have to respond to the moral and ethical imperatives of education. While the 'adjust/challenge' dilemma cannot be readily resolved, courageous practitioners need to endure the productive discomfort of working in the field of forces between the two. It is by remaining open to the seemingly contradictory demands represented by the adjust/challenge dilemma that new insights into emancipatory action can be generated, avoiding the twin temptations of idealism on the one hand, and pessimism on the other.

That leads us to a number of final reflections in this paper, in response to the question: "What, then, would an authentic work education in a democracy entail?" The following deliberations are meant to open up critical conversations rather more than serving as a blueprint in any shape or form.

From common sense to good sense

A first point to be made is that it is crucial that an authentic work education *examines the common sense assumptions and 'presentism' on which it is based*. The current 'planet speak', utilising as it does a set of 'elevator words' such as 'lifelong education' and 'lifelong guidance', serves to identify what is (and what is not) a 'problem', creating ways to talk about it, and offering 'solutions' to it (Simons, Olssen & Peters, 2009, p.46). It conjures up an image of an economic world subject to constant, rapid and ultimately 'inevitable' change forces, in front of which individuals have no other option but to adapt if they are to survive – and to do so throughout their whole lifetime. Within this discourse, the dynamic flows of capital worldwide, which contribute to instabilities that are increasingly difficult to manage at a nation state level (Bauman, 2017), tend to be reified – that is, they are often assumed to be a 'given' and not open to question, and that furthermore there is no viable alternative.

The implication is that it is individuals that must adjust their way of being in the world (Bengtsson, 2011, 2015), with CEG being one of the services that supports such adaptations by providing information, advice and guidance where and when needed, lifelong. It is in the nature of totalising 'ideology' to persuade that

the prevailing order is 'natural', 'normal', 'self-evident, 'universal', and that it works in the interests of all – while mystifying, excluding and denigrating alternatives (Eagleton, 1991). It is equally in the nature of an authentic education to reveal the masking that goes on around social conflicts, where a state of affairs which works in the interests of the powerful is presented by the latter as if it satisfies the interests of all.

One way of helping students become aware of the contingent nature of their understanding of the world of work is by *developing a historical imagination*. An authentic career education programme would therefore help students understand how work has come to be what it is, the hopes and dreams for decent and dignified living that have sometimes flourished and sometimes been devastated, the interests that are at stake, who stands to gain and who to lose in shaping the workplace in particular ways, and what can be done to gain a measure of collective control over such forces and dynamics. It will remind students of past struggles that saw subordinate groups claim for themselves a raft of rights at work that, while far from being comprehensive, nevertheless did make substantial differences in the ability of the majority to live decently if not actually flourish. *Box 2* recalls some of the more important of these hard-won rights, gains that, under current neo-liberal regimes, are under constant threat as capital tries to claw back its privileges.

Box 2: Historical achievements of workers' struggles over time

- awards (minimum entitlements)
- bereavement leave (paid)
- child labour rendered illegal
- right of workers to form unions
- collective bargaining
- equal pay for women
- establish the 40-hour week
- establish the 8-hour work day
- guaranteed minimum wage
- health care insurance for workers
- job discrimination (race, colour, religion, sex or origin) outlawed
- family medical leave
- health and safety guarantees
- long service leave
- meal breaks
- paid annual leave
- paid overtime
- benefits for work injury
- unemployment insurance
- parental leave (paid)
- redundancy pay
- rest breaks
- shift allowance
- sick leave (paid)
- superannuation/ pensions
- unfair dismissal protection
- uniform allowance
- workers' compensation

There are alternatives – another world is possible

Another way to help students become aware of the contingent nature of their understanding of the world of work is by *developing an anthropological/comparative imagination*. In other words, an authentic work education programme would also encourage students to understand that, as the clarion call of the World Social Forum reminds us, "another world *is* possible". It would do so by giving witness to the myriad exciting grass roots movements that have arisen across the world to challenge 'dead labour' and to enact meaningful work. In doing so, critical work educators would be providing students with the intellectual tools and moral resolve to not only trouble the present, but to also imagine more socially just ways of living together, furnishing them with examples of how such

aspirations are neither idealistic nor dystopic pipe dreams.

These 'new economies' constitute a broad set of ideas and practices that share a common critique of mainstream economic thought, that ideologically range from 'defensive struggles' (Dinerstein, 2014) that try to modify and humanise capitalism, to approaches that articulate alternatives to the market, and set out to prefigure a better, post-capitalist society in the belief that personal flourishing is really only truly possible within the norms and institutions of civil life. They thus contest such neoliberal canons as "the focus on growth as an economic goal, faith in markets as efficient allocative mechanisms, and the role of government and national banks in issuing money and credit" (Avelino et al., 2015, p.5). They however do not only contest, but also tap into embedded values, cooperative practices, mutual aid, reciprocity, and generosity, in order to build diverse, ecologically-sound, and directly democratic economies (Avelino et al., 2015).

These are not oddball, one-off, ephemeral initiatives: the plethora of concepts and terms in circulation demonstrates the sheer vitality in the search for meaning and for alternative ways of organising production and consumption, including 'green', 'communal', 'community', 'collaborative', 'sharing', 'inclusive', 'solidarity', 'informal', 'social', 'social impact', 'social entrepreneurship', 'core' and 'commons-based' economies. We are therefore here talking about a groundswell of local, but thanks to anti-globalisation movements, increasingly transnationally connected responses to the imposition of market-led restructuring (se Sousa Santos, 2006), that represent what Dinerstein (2014) calls 'hope movements'. These efforts enact 'territories of hope' which "articulate a wider conceptualization of work, as dignified work that moves away from the traditional division between work and labour, and engages rather with the possibility of conceiving work as a wider social activity by a multiplicity of subjects" (Dinerstein, 2014, p.1049). They thus offer "alternative forms of sociability, social relation and solidarities, caring practices, learning processes, and emancipatory horizons" (Dinerstein, 2014, p.1050).

And yet few if any career education programmes in circulation make any reference to such social and economic experiments. Few if any discuss what, following Piketty (2014), one could call 'pragmatic utopias' – such as the four-day week, flexicurity, universal basic income, and a global tax on wealth – which require grassroots support for progressive taxation and for the socialisation of profit in a world where, by 2030 the world's richest 1% will own two thirds of global wealth (Frisby, 2018).

Fewer still discuss the even more far-reaching experiments in 'solidarity economics' that represent alternatives to both capitalism and planned economies, where what matters are 'life values' rather than 'profit values' (Miller, 2005), and which therefore more profoundly unsettle, challenge, and generate alternatives to the kinds of identities, lifestyles, and political and institutional modalities that have become hegemonic.

Some of these 'real utopias' – as Olin Wright (2010) refers to them in a series of book projects which evaluate the value, processes, and effects of substantive and radical economic, political, and cultural projects and assemblages – feature in *Box 3* below. These are not 'utopic' – the Greek meaning of which is 'no-where'. Rather, they are 'some-where', enacted by real people in real situations mobilising a range of collective, grassroots methods to organise economic activity.

Box 3: 'Pragmatic utopias' and 'Territories of hope'

- The *Mondragon cooperatives in the Basque region in Spain*, which remind us that efficiency and the generation (and socialisation) of profit are not mutually exclusive, in contexts where economic and not just civic democracy is valued thanks to worker participation in ownership and management (Johnson, 2017).
- The *Argentinian Movement of Unemployed Workers* (Movimento de Trabajadores Desocupados, MTD – also known as the Piquetero movement), which engaged in collective action and implemented cooperative forms of work and social activities in neighbourhoods. These included housing cooperatives, training and education, and environmental projects, all of which served to "generate 'genuine' and 'dignified' work and democratic and solidarity practices, in collaboration with other popular movements, social organizations, local trade unions and small businesses" (Dinerstein, 2014, p.1043).
- The *Movimento Sin Terra* (MST) which has, for the past three decades, mobilised an agrarian reform movement involving hundreds of thousands of landless peasants who occupy large unproductive land estates, and who pressurise the government to redistribute this land to landless families, enabling them to collectively farm their own land through cooperatives, within the context of a solidarity economy (Wright & Wolford 2003).
- The *city of Porto Alegre, Brazil*, which for decades now has promoted participatory governance and direct democracy by allocating sizeable portions of its wealth to citizens, who decide how and where it is used on the basis of discussions within local communities and neighbourhoods (Baiocchi, 2005).

All these social and economic experiments contest the neoliberal given, which sees the common good as the unintended result of the individual search for private interest (Zamagni, 2014, p.193). Instead, these movements gesture at a world where economic values are inseparable from social values, and where economic relationships and the human activity we refer to 'work' are framed by ethics, where ethics concern how values are inescapably intertwined with social relationships (Davis & Dolfsma, 2008). It is in such a context that 'work' – even modest work – can attain meaning-fulness. And it is by opening up vistas of the possible that work education can trouble the numbing effect of career learning that would have students acquiesce and 'fit in' with what is unfit for humans.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that students are entitled to an authentic education that expands their understanding of 'work' as a source of personal fulfilment. It has claimed that much of the career learning that schools offer tends to present the world of work in a reified manner, with students being encouraged to comply, consent and collude, rather than to comprehend, challenge and contest. This paper has moreover made a case for a work education programme that helps students understand how across time and space, communities have struggled to improve the conditions under which they laboured, and in some cases even set out to develop economic systems operating with a different logic and values than those of the market. Such a curriculum could be justified if education is understood as an endeavour that both transmits (*educare*) and draws out (*educere*) the best that humanity can be. Work education thus understood would engage students in conversations that deconstruct, interrupt, and challenge the economic system, in all of its complex forms, while pointing out to efforts that clearly showed that 'another world is possible.'

Most of the attention in this paper focused on the overt curriculum, i.e. in what is formally taught. Schools, however, powerfully teach students how to be in the world by the kind of social relations they encourage as institutions – an insight pithily caught by Dewey's affirmation that "education is not a preparation for life; it is life itself" (1916, p.239). An authentic work education would thus necessitate more than just a radical revision of the 'career management skills' curriculum. Rather, as Dewey noted, it would also require ensuring that students are engaged in meaningful work tasks and relations that balance "the distinctive capacity of individuals with their social service" (1916, p.360). That would require an overhaul of an education system that has become increasingly a mirror image of the market – leading us to echo Dewey's assertion that the kind of education he was interested in was "not one which will 'adapt' workers to the existing industrial regime; I am not sufficiently in love with the regime for that" (1916, p.42). For it is by experiencing life in an environment that promotes human flourishing that tomorrow's adults would accept nothing less than such democratic and enabling relations at work, and civic life more generally.

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