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The role and relevance of the pedagogic contexts in training adult careers professionals

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Abstract

Political impetuses for raising the professional status of the careers sector in England have spanned more than a decade, driving an assiduous pursuit for professionalisation linked to the training and upskilling of its workforce. This paper builds on previous work by the authors and explores the necessity, and integration of theory for practice through the delivery of a training programme for adult career advisers to meet the requirements of units from the Qualification Curriculum Framework (QCF) Diploma 6 in Career Guidance and Development. The findings indicate that successful careers pedagogy should accommodate trainers’ reflexivity and their theoretical stance(s). The integration of theory and reflection offers a powerful lens through which practice can be developed, supporting career advisers and trainers to engage in reflexive and reflective learning. The paper offers an original insight into the pedagogic approaches utilised and their effectiveness from both career advisers and trainer’s perspectives.

Introduction

The new all-age National Careers Service was established in England in April 2012 to provide information, advice and guidance for everyone (13+) digitally, and face to face provision for adults aged 19+ (or 18+ if job seeking) (BIS, 2012). This was the latest iteration of over a decade of publicly funded careers services for adults but the first to be branded as a national service. In its ambitions to provide a high-quality service it embraced the political discourses for re-professionalisation espoused by the then Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS, 2010) and the Careers Profession Task Force (DfE, 2010). Central to this rhetoric was the upskilling of the careers workforce with a qualification profile ranging from Level 2 upwards, to an aspiration of at least 50% of its career advisers achieving a minimum Level 6 in Career Guidance and Development (Careers Profession Task Force Recommendation 4) under the Qualification Credit Framework (QCF). Within the QCF a level 2 qualification equates to that achieved by a school leaver and a level 6 to the final year of an undergraduate degree, demonstrating significant disparity and confusion across the sector in terms of qualification levels. The commitment to the higher level qualification for up to 50% of career advisers indicated a recognition of the importance of individual professionalisation where Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is acknowledged to “maximise staff potential linking theory to practice,

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SDG 4: quality education
improving morale and motivation, helping self-reflection and providing opportunities for sharing effective practice” (DfE, 2010, p. 19).

This welcome focus on professionalisation demonstrated a renewed interest in revitalising the careers profession which had suffered years of de-professionalisation both for young people and the adult sector (Gough & Neary, 2021). It has been well documented that the careers profession in England specifically, has experienced decades of decline (Lewin & Colley, 2011; Hughes, 2013; Gough & Neary, 2021; Gordon, 2022), much of this related to neoliberal governmental agendas. The history of the adult guidance sector in particular, has lacked a coherence in training and a variety of job titles often resulting in a perception of being less professionalised (Harrison et al., 2001).

Professional status has also been allied with the acquisition and application of a theoretical body of knowledge (Williams, 1998). There is a wealth of theories drawn from trans-disciplinary milieu that exert a major influence on the way career advisers work. Lauder and Neary (2020, p. 477) drawing on Kidd (1996) assert, “there are two dominant strategies for theoretical improvisation in practice which have been distinguished as technical eclecticism and theoretical integration. Eclecticism involves the use of diverse methods and techniques drawn from different sources without necessarily subscribing to their parent theories”. Integration refers to attempts at synthesising diverse theoretical concepts into a coherent new theory (Hollanders, 1999). There is a prevailing preference for theoretical integration over non-theoretical eclecticism in the field of careers as integrationism is seen to be more closely allied with the status of a “profession”. Theoretical integrationism is therefore, a discursive factor for both trainers and learners in pedagogy and practice respectively.

This paper presents an original research project examining a bespoke training programme constructed to meet the enhanced QCF Level 6 Career Guidance and Development requirements (in particular Unit 2, “Reflect on and Improve Professional Practice” and Unit 3, “Career Guidance Theory”) as prescribed by the awarding body. The programme involved a series of interactive workshops delivered over three days, comprising of non-accredited, formalised training activity and through a modular approach (i.e. content meeting Units 2 and 3). Training impact was evaluated through independent self-reflective activities (such as a reflective practice diary) as well as workplace performance observations conducted at periodic intervals in the aftermath of the training (commencing at 3 months).

All the participants had achieved a guidance qualification ranging between level 2 and level 6, and were experienced adult guidance career advisers. The research question focuses on the pedagogic lens through which the training was delivered and seeks to understand three elements: (i) whether trainers’ provenance and theoretical expertise determine how theory is taught; (ii) what impact contemporary training has upon models of practice, (iii) the scope for integrative pedagogy within wider CPD frameworks including reflective practice approaches. This paper draws a spotlight to an under-researched area within the career development sector that of career guidance pedagogy and offers an explorative study through which practitioner and trainer lenses are examined.

Literature review

Over the last two decades, there has been a keen interest in the professionalisation of careers work. Sultana (2004) outlines the components of established professions including frameworks to regulate entry and qualification routes leading to clearly defined occupational roles, yet career advisers often experience disparate training and qualifications themselves. In (2005) Cedefop (an EU agency supporting vocational education and training) produced “Improving Lifelong Guidance Policies and Systems” which outlines the importance of practitioner competency and the quality systems that need to be in place to assure this, for example, qualifications, assessments and ongoing professional development. This was followed up in 2009 when Cedefop conducted extensive research examining the need for training in career guidance skills for practitioners to be competent and to contribute to high-quality career guidance services. They suggested that increasingly countries were providing specialist training, but there was still a question about the sufficiency of training. Allied with this is the need for not just initial training, but for ongoing professional development for practitioners (Cedefop, 2009).
The importance of CPD has been examined extensively. Mulvey (2013) considers CPD to be both an ethical requirement and a moral imperative, Neary (2016) defines it as a key element within the careers professionalisation debate, specifically contributing to professional identity formation. More recently Bimrose (2021) suggests that professionals offering a professional service have an important responsibility to update their knowledge as part of their CPD. Weber et al. (2018) in their “call to arms” for a research agenda for the careers sector argue that greater research is required on professionalism, core competencies and the training of career advisers. There has been little that has focused specifically on the trainers, teachers and pedagogies that contribute to creating successful practice within the careers sector. The literature has tended to focus on the importance of training (Niles, 2014) rather than the method through which practitioners become effective in the knowledge, skills and implementation of career development activities. Recently there has been a focus on the use of phenomenography (Kettunen & Tynjala, 2022), experiential learning theory (Heyden & Osborn, 2020), alignment of training for practice (Brown et al., 2019) and the role of values and ethics (Allan & Moffett, 2016) in developing training for career advisers. In the UK there is a long tradition of a binary approach to initial training of career advisers delivered through postgraduate programmes by higher education institutions and work-based learning provided through training organisations. Geary and Liston (2009) suggest the background of the educators within graduate-level professional career guidance training courses is highly dependent on their context and specifically their areas of expertise. Gough (2017) also considers many of the challenges specifically in relation to the impact of policy, engaging practitioners with theory and the tensions between training and educating practitioners within a higher education (HE) context. He concludes with the need to create employed practitioners with a deep and critical understanding of theories, models and ethics.

Initial training alone is obviously insufficient in terms of competence (Allan & Moffett, 2016) and CPD is required to ensure practice remains current and informed by evolving theory, evidence and practice. In service training is often provided as a mechanism for evolving practice, Neary (2016) challenges the overreliance of training and specifically mandated training at the expense of other CPD approaches such as experiential learning and reflective practice.

Within England the work of the Careers Profession Taskforce (DfE, 2010) has contributed to a focus on standardisation of practice resulting in the upskilling of career advisers to QCF Level 6, necessitating increased levels of engagement with CPD and particularly with a focus on theory to inform practice. The challenge therefore, is to examine what contributes to successful training which develops career advisers’ knowledge, skills and practice and more specifically how practice can be better informed by theory. In research by Kidd et al. (1997), 59% of careers officers (as careers advisers were known at that time) who had experienced the higher education professional training route, the Diploma in Career Guidance (DCG) felt it was influential or a major influence on their practice. However, the effects of training albeit enduring, were limited and modified by experience. Careers officers adjusted their approach, primarily in response to the perceived needs of clients. For example, traditionally, the Diploma in Career Guidance was seen as preparing career advisers for working with young people in schools. However, the role of career advisers was expanding and many were now confronted with the needs of the unemployed and other adults seeking career guidance, thus requiring adoptions and adjustments to their practice since their initial training. Watson (1994) suggests the conflict this poses for career advisers in arbitrating between the set models they had been taught and the flexibility of approach contingent for practice. The need to update theoretical knowledge is therefore a professional imperative, yet the most effective way to achieve this can be problematic. Often, the type of CPD provided is not perceived by practitioners as appropriate to meeting their needs, due to the technocratic approaches adopted to meet contractual compliance, such as health and safety or legislative requirements (Neary, 2016; Hearne et al, 2022). Amundson (2008) considers models for training careers practitioners and outlines the importance of experiential learning, critical reflection and active engagement of a delivery model. He outlines how various countries utilise approaches from a series of short seminars to programmes lasting
a couple of years. Models that demonstrate impact deliver regular inputs with opportunities to follow-up and reflect.

Lauder and Neary (2020) have previously explored how career advisers have integrated their training into practice. In this paper we present a complementary study examining the experiences of career advisers and those of the trainers in delivering the CPD sessions addressing theory and reflective practice to meet the requirements of the QCF level 6.

Methodology
Methods and research design

This research utilised an interpretive approach to understand the perceptions of both the training participants and the trainers. Participants were all career advisers delivering face to face career advice and guidance interviews to a variety of adult clients including, minority ethnic groups, Public Employment Service customers, (ex) offenders and older workers. All advisers in this study subscribed to a common National Careers Service delivery model for the Northwest England region. Interventions could range from a minimum of a single session to multiple interviews over a year depending on client need and until contractual outputs had been achieved. These included customer satisfaction, career management and learning/employment outcomes which released funding for the service through payment by results. This required career advisers to capture evidence of achieved outcomes such as, employment or starting a course in order for the organisation to be paid for the work.

The training for career advisers against Units 2 and 3 from the QCF Diploma 6 in Career Guidance and Development constituted a three-day CPD programme addressing the content of each module through a series of interactive workshops. Group sizes were limited to 16 participants. Theoretical frameworks were presented and participants were encouraged through open discussion, small group tasks, case studies and role play to consider the application of learning to practice. Formative assessment activities included the completion of reflective practice exercises in the intervening period following each training day and were reviewed at the succeeding sessions. Summative assessment and longitudinal evaluation were appraised through competency-based workplace observations conducted some months after the training to allow time for knowledge embedding and adoption within practice (there is insufficient space to include the outcomes of the observations in this paper). This study comprised of those who had participated in training aimed at the theoretical enhancement of professional practice via QCF modules Units 2 and 3 (albeit this was non-accredited).

Thirty-five participants who had all undergone the modular training programme within the 12 months prior were invited to contribute to a structured online survey. These participants represented the full training cohort, purposively selected and resulted in a response rate of 83% i.e. 29 responses. Questions examined advisers’ perceptions of the training and the concomitant impact upon practice; exploration of theoretical relevance; practitioner experience and reflections of practice. Given the small-scale nature of the project and small sample sizes, statistical analyses were non-applicable. Analytical rigour was inculcated through repeated checks for accuracy and reduction of unwanted bias involving the support of other colleagues.

Selection criteria for the 12 in-depth interviews following on from the survey included variation in initial training qualifications (i.e. academic or vocational), length of professional service, performance level, degree of participation in the QCF CPD programme (undertaking the full L6 Diploma or modular units only) and delivery contexts (adults, further education, recruitment and employment agencies and local authority provision). Telephone interviews were conducted and followed a semi-structured schedule containing dichotomous, multi-choice and open-ended questions. The narratives explored advisers’ perceptions of trainer knowledgability, expertise and competency in delivering the training programme. Determining the impact of the training upon individuals, was based on consideration of prior education and qualifications as well as previous opportunities for training.
The four trainers who delivered the QCF continuous professional development programme were also interviewed by telephone using an interview topic guide comprising of open, scaling and investigative questions. Variation in the QCF training programmes correlated to the different backgrounds of the commissioned trainers and provided a range of perspectives from two academic staff (a higher education lecturer and a principal researcher at a higher education institution) as well as a manager and lead internal verifier at an assessment centre and another trainer and assessor at a vocational centre. Trainers’ backgrounds varied in terms of the range of qualifications held, variations in their experience across the career guidance sector (i.e. Higher Education, Further Education, adult guidance, young people, private provision, specialist provision, professional and awarding body contexts), expertise in training and assessment of careers or related qualifications, longevity in practice and experience of developing the QCF programmes (see Figure 1). The modular training programme was however standardised and delivered universally by all four trainers. The programme was developed in collaboration with the organisation’s quality standards, workforce competencies and a priori contractual requirements integrated with QCF assessment criteria and learning outcomes for the two units. Trainer interviews explored variations in training approaches to teaching theory and its relevance for practice, although the objective was not to attempt a formal evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching. This study was focused on the pedagogical aspects of training process perspectives and outputs for participant’s praxis.

Findings

**Trainer profiles and programme constraints effecting learning**

The four trainers engaged on the QCF Level 6 Training programme ranged in qualifications, sectoral experience and pedagogic variations. Such variations in training approaches led to differential impacts upon the advisers with respect to theoretical assimilation and conceptual integration. The study identified that 77% of advisers (n = 27) who had responded to the email survey felt they had gained an adequate theoretical knowledge and 100% (n = 35) stated their interview skills had been enhanced. A notable number of participants however denied or remained ambiguous (24%) concerning the theoretical application of models to practice. The disparity between the trainers’ backgrounds, and specifically their perceived inexperience of the current adults’ careers sector, was considered as limiting theoretical contextualisation for practitioners.

They (trainers) did not necessarily have current practitioner experience; it’s been a while since they may have interviewed. They were more from an education environment – so perhaps the training wasn’t as realistic and practical. It felt like they dismissed the constraints on practice. (Adviser)

The prevailing consensus amongst the advisers was that three days had been insufficient to “take in theories at higher level study” and that more emphasis could have been placed on application in situ through activities such as role play and use of videoed interviews “to show how it can be done using theory within the realities of the contract” and “to look at practical approaches within realistic scenarios and interviews first and then tease out the theories rather than the other way round”. The responses could suggest both a weakness and a tension in terms of pedagogical approaches adopted by the trainers, but also a lack of independent learning by the participants. Uncertainty regarding the teaching of inter-theoretical connectivity and meta-paradigms was expressed by 31% of advisers (n = 11) who had responded to the initial questionnaire.

Although we were encouraged to compare and contrast theories, we were not shown how the connection is made where everything is brought together within an interview scenario. Rather the theories were taught in a more segregated manner. (Adviser)

The integrative stance of trainers themselves was that although none were currently practising, all had been initially inducted within a single model approach but through development acquired
eclectic approaches to delivery. Nevertheless, teaching had been aimed at enabling conceptual integration amongst trainees, holding theories up as “mirrors” and “sieves” to enable participants to “map” their skills, “name” the underpinning influences on practice, adopt an objective premise to theoretical selection and use theory to determine skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAINER*</th>
<th>Pilot or Main Study Participant</th>
<th>Relevant Qualifications Held*</th>
<th>Local Authority Careers Services and then private provision (1983)</th>
<th>Experience in training and assessment</th>
<th>Experience in practice</th>
<th>Current Role</th>
<th>Experience of developing QCF programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>DCG D32,33,34, PTTLS</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>18-20 years</td>
<td>Trainer and Assessor with Vocational Assessment centre.</td>
<td>First-time experience on current programme.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Main</td>
<td>DCG, MSc Psychometric Testing Awards</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>24 years</td>
<td>Principal Researcher at HE Institution</td>
<td>First-time experience on current programme.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Main</td>
<td>DCG, D33, 34, Level 5 Management Qualification.</td>
<td>36 years in: Young People, Adults and Careers Education.</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>Manager, Lead Internal Verifier and Assessor at Centre.</td>
<td>Previously developed: Business Administration Level 4 and Level 3 Assessor Award.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Main</td>
<td>DCG, Dip Careers Education, Diploma Personal Advisers, D32, D33, MA</td>
<td>Specialised in working with young people; Careers Education and Higher Education contexts.</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>HE Lecturer</td>
<td>First-time experience on current programme.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note on relevant qualifications
D32/D33/D34- Assessor qualifications required for assessing work-based learning awards
PTTLS – Qualification for teaching in the adult education and skills sector
What concerns me is that some people still considered themselves to be a differentialist or developmentalist – we were at pains to point out that you don’t adopt a theory and then adapt your practice using that theory. Theory is a sieve for the interaction and not to root themselves in one theory. (Trainer)

**Trainers’ personal and contextual influences on programme content**

Trainers themselves had approached the selection of theories for the programme on the basis of their personal preferences, with trainers from academic backgrounds providing greater assurance that the chosen theories comprised of academic soundness and valid criteria based on practice. These trainers worked regularly with theorists, had consulted other faculty members including cross-disciplinary colleagues and were academic researchers themselves which supported the focus on “criticality” in training. Vocational trainers had honed their selection through considerations of delivery contexts and client types for adult careers practice.

The principal motive amongst all trainers however was to challenge their trainees intellectually, through the selected rubric of theories “bringing them out of their comfort zone in terms of their engagement with theory” and to gain an understanding of the eclectic utility of theories, “not a one size fits all approach”. Theoretical selection had been ultimately compromised for all trainers by the requirements of the awarding body and assessment centre constraints. The qualification was relatively new, and trainers were constrained by the focus on assignments requiring the accumulation of theoretical knowledge rather than broader practical application. Workplace and contractual requirements also posed limitations with an emphasis on skills acquisition, so trainers felt that the development of theoretical critique and the assessment of theory-based competency were encumbered and compromised.

I think the challenge is that I like the academic theories but the nature of the qualification and training do not allow for this so you don’t have the freedom that you can within a classroom as for a Masters or even QCG (Qualification in Careers Guidance, postgraduate Level 7) programme. You are constrained in some ways by the nature of the training and skills. If it was left to me, I would have had a far wider debate on the theory with my trainees. (Trainer)

**Learning process: facilitated interaction, medium or incidental learning?**

A further discriminating factor concerning the approaches to training was the relationship with reflective practice. Some advisers who had solely participated in the modular programme on theories (i.e. Units 2 and 3 as opposed to other units or full undertaking of the QCF Level 6 Diploma in Career Guidance and Development) had expressed reservations over the disjuncture between these units and the more practical components of the qualification. Other participants appreciated the value of studying dual modules and juxtaposing the teaching of theory with reflective practice.

Yes, I have analysed my practice and definitely improved it as a result of the training. It was helpful and important that the Units 2 and 3 went together. If you are studying to be a reflective practitioner but you’re not learning anything new – what do you reflect on? But the Unit 2 on reflective practice was given so much more of a context and learning and developing by studying the Unit 3 on theories alongside. (Adviser)

Such an integrative pedagogy was considered distinctive by trainers for the development of both skills and professionalism. A structured and facilitated programme, must be supported by opportunities for situated or incidental learning with opportunities for reflection, if meaningful workplace learning is to take place.

Interestingly also is how we’ve used reflection moving alongside theory to get them to unpack that and this has been the key difference in this training. What’s been so rich and three dimensional (rather than just teaching them an interview model) is teaching them reflection alongside. (3 dimensional – interview model, theories and reflective practice). It’s a far more complex learning process but more vivid, engaging and exciting and because of it we’ve seen some dramatic, fundamental changes in the way that these professionals have been thinking about their jobs, their attitudes and for us trainers that’s been a brilliant experience. (Trainer)
Concerns that these advancements in reflexive epistemologies acquired in training would be upheld during on-going practice were expressed by trainers and career advisers. The overwhelming notion was that practice-led curricula comprising of a matrix of activities to support further professional development was required. Observations, peer-learning, supervision and shared practice underpinned by political and organisational commitments to professionalisation were considered necessary for the maintenance of elevated levels of professionalism.

In order to make theory more applicable to practice, I need to do more research myself – looking at the impact of theory on customers. Taking it further back than just immediate customer feedback and outcomes and relating it to the models used … something like this would be useful. (Adviser).

I think that theory in the past hasn’t always been that engaging. It’s something you do; it ticks the box … The lynch pin is although they have a qualification to do, it’s far more fundamental than that, its teaching them to be critical of what they are doing – getting them to move from just doing what they are told to questioning what they are doing and asking critical questions. (Trainer).

Learning through facilitated interaction such as via the QCF modular training programme, had also been affected by variations in advisers’ backgrounds including initial training (such as vocational or academic-based routes), prior qualifications and the extent to which these had provided theoretical exposure (see Figure 2). Theoretical awareness and perceptibility amongst National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) trained career advisers for example, was ostensibly linked with varying training providers and subsequently workplace contexts affecting situational learning. Organisations promoting a liberal-progressive culture for career guidance, as opposed to conservative ends predicated by unemployment policies, (Watts, 1996) often encouraged theoretical growth and maturity in practice. One respondent was able to identify 16 theories of familiarity proceeding from her NVQ 4 training and nurtured successively in delivery.

We did cover theory on the NVQ and this was refreshed when I went to work in Connexions; especially theories on decision-making and career choice. (Adviser).

High levels of theoretical astuteness were also common amongst academically trained career advisers. The capacity to absorb theory during training and consequently its application to practice was amplified by experiences of further academic study, such as at post graduate level – Diploma in Career Guidance (DCG) or the current Qualification in Career Guidance (QCG) and organisations encouraging a culture of professionalism. These findings have been fully explored in the authors’ complementary work (Lauder & Neary, 2020).

Figure 2. Did advisers’ initial careers training provide exposure to theory and did this affect their engagement with learning and applying theory via their subsequent training on the Qualification Credit Framework Diploma 6 (Career Guidance and Development) Professional Development programme? (n = 29).
Discussion

**Incidental learning impacted by workplace culture and learners’ prior educational backgrounds**

The capacity for theoretical absorption during professional development and practice is modified by experiences of academic study whether sector-specific qualifications such as the DCG or as it currently the Qualification in Career Guidance (QCD) or graduate degrees in wider disciplines. Considerations for redefining the qualification requirements of career advisers therefore gain merit, resonating with European training models where guidance workers hold first degrees in related disciplines (such as psychology) combined with years of specialist or post-graduate training in guidance (as in France, Portugal, Spain and Slovenia) leading to an “interdisciplinary enrichment” in the services ultimately provided (McCarthy, 2004; Gough & Neary, 2021).

Workplace cultures advocating good career guidance and nurturing professionalism also provide a locus for learning with opportunities for informal pedagogy and social dimensions for learning. According to incidental or situated learning theories, learning is dependent on differences among workplace environments and whether individuals are more favourably located in the workforce or with higher levels of prior education (Esmond, 2018). Findings from this study may be indicative of prior learning enabling individuals who already possess greater academic or social capital to profit more from learning in the workplace. Esmond (2018) notes that the workplace can disadvantage individuals without prior opportunities, educational backgrounds and confidence to develop. Organisations and policy makers must therefore consider a “two-way street” towards enhanced and structured learning for all and build sustainable models for workplace learning (Esmond, 2018). Policies striving for commercial benefits, such as payment by results (PBR), must therefore be balanced against the need to promote favourable professional development frameworks and autonomy amongst its workers if career guidance is to achieve its mission as both a “public and private good” (Watts & Sultana, 2004).

**The impact of facilitated interaction and contemporary training upon models of practice**

The movement towards integrationist practice has been precipitated by the facilitative interaction of a formalised and structured QCF (Units 2 and 3) professionalisation training programme featured in this study. Career advisers now avail themselves of wider theoretical perspectives including career helping and motivational theories appropriate to the uncertainties of modern economic and career landscapes. Objective guidance techniques provided by traditional career theory are increasingly being combined with subjective techniques derived from counselling theory in practice, with a clear movement to encourage a greater recognition of the interrelationships between various theoretical perspectives (Patton & McMahon, 2021). It is this ability to place the client’s need above the practitioner’s own theoretical, subjective preferences and employ an expanded toolbox as discriminating craft workers (Norcross & Grencavage, 1989) that intimates movement towards theoretical integrationism.

Integrationism however demands more from the marriage of theory and practice, calling for the new epistemology of reflective practice where the practitioner is “not dependant on established theory and technique which separates thinking from doing but rather constructs a new ‘theory of the unique case’ in which they are more integrated” (Scanlon & Baillie, 1994, p. 411). This involves an interpretative process where theories are constructed through their use and technical rationality is displaced by the personal models of artistic practice. Formal theories are validated through personal experience and re-interpreted within personal models serving as heuristic devices (Collin, 1998) for the confident, expert practitioner. Whilst the QCF training had enabled career advisers to conceptualise their practice, reflection was mostly in retrospect
and focused on their “espoused theories” as opposed to “theories in use”. Confidence in theoretically informed tacit knowledge was nascent following the QCF (Units 2 and 3) training programme and competency could not yet be ascribed across a variety of theoretical systems. Since the systemic integration predicates an “ability to be taught, replicated and evaluated” (Norcross & Grencavage, 1989) by self-monitoring individuals, there is still much ground to be gained before careers practice can make the claim for theoretical integrationism. Career advisers must therefore consciously adopt the practice of “reflection-in-action” engaging in their own research and theorising (Collin, 1998).

The scope for integrative pedagogy within wider CPD frameworks, including reflective practice approaches

The implications for on-going training are significant for the maturation of integrationist practice. The initial success of the QCF programme in this study can be attributed in no small degree to the submersion of theoretical learning within the tenets of learning how to reflect. As Scanlon & Baille so poignantly quote, “The most important skill to be acquired during a course of professional education therefore is that of ‘learning how to learn’” (1994, p. 425). Moreover, most of the career advisers were already skilled in the practice of conducting career guidance interviews and could therefore concentrate on theoretical conceptualisation and practical application presented in the training. Findings from this research corroborate work by McCarthy (2004) where he argues that training for guidance workers influences both their professional behaviour and the professionalisation of the sector.

If theory is to assume its preeminent role in defining professional status, then training must continue to be improved to facilitate this ambition. A tertiary style pedagogy must therefore afford adequate flexibility. Trainers must not be constrained by the minutiae of assessment criteria and requirements (unlike the experiences of those featured in this study). Rather programmes must be constructed to support the development of critical thinking and debate. If career advisers are,

Advisers in this research had considered the QCF training to be too limited in duration for the acquisition of detailed knowledge of theories and not entirely effective in rearing integrative understanding. More time for specialist theoretical training is demanded as training across diverse frameworks can lead to “confusion”, “frustration” (Hollanders, 1999) and “disunited techniques” (Norcross & Grencavage, 1989). In one model of training proposed by Hollanders (1999, p. 492) the final stage involves a meta-framework for integrative practice allowing for a “selection of procedures which can be applied to particular techniques” and one which “bears ... responsibility for providing a system of analysis by which a multiplicity of theories and methods could be organised into an integrated understanding” (Hollanders, 1999, p. 492). Whilst Hollanders (1999) explores integrative training programmes within counselling and psychotherapy contexts, Hambly’s (2007) model focuses on career guidance training and practice. The model bears resonance to a grand integrative schema aiding theoretical synthesis within a cyclical interview process. A continuum is provided with ample flexibility to move through eight stages during careers interviews including an exploration of the client’s motivation, approach to decision-making, awareness of “self” and opportunities, implementing actions and managing the outcomes of these as well as evaluating the outcome of this process. There are opportunities within each stage and across these for improvising and synthesising multiple theories to achieve efficacious outcomes for the client. More attention should be paid to this and other such macro-frameworks in integrationist training.
**Enhancing trainers’ provenance and theoretical expertise to improve pedagogy**

Such a sophisticated curriculum as proposed above, requires the adoption of integrationism as a pedagogic principle. Primarily trainers must be skilled in the practice of integrationism themselves and a “practice-led epistemology” as a collective approach between reflexive trainers and career advisers developing curricula within their own epistemology of practice rather than relying upon and be limited by the propositions of academic research and technical rationality (Scanlon & Baillie, 1994). In Further Education for example, expectations of the vocational teaching workforce have been discursively repositioned by notions of “dual professionalism” (i.e. industrial/occupational expert vs. educator) with underlying problems in the relationship between occupationally based knowledge and teachers’ pedagogic expertise (Esmond & Wood, 2017). Furthermore, the authors highlight other work which suggests that for vocational pedagogy, work practices (of trainers) “not only provide the source of knowledge but determine the means by which it is taught” (Esmond & Wood, 2017, p. 231). This enables not only the tacit transmission of skills but the explicit communication of the moral aspects of workplace behaviour. The practice of reflexivity is deemed as key to this change, as Esmond and Wood’s (2017) research suggests that in the longer-term this will allow educators to adopt a higher level of practice. More recently, Esmond (2020) has argued that expectations of a neo-liberal performativity can constrain trainers’ professional formation and practice. For example, an employer or policy-driven curriculum may be so narrow as to restrict trainers’ levels of autonomy in delivering content/sessions. Instead, as Esmond’s (2020) work suggests, when compared with workplace managers or other internal, institutional hierarchical roles, an external educator can bring fresh, wider expertise supporting different types of professionalism, pedagogies and practices amongst learners. The use of external trainers has also been identified as having greater credibility amongst career advisers as the investment is perceived as an example of valuing staff (Neary, 2016). Yet, increasingly the challenges for careers organisations to be able to recruit qualified and experienced staff have resulted in reduced opportunities for ongoing CPD as limited budgets are used predominantly to fund initial training (Gordon, 2022).

Past occupational expertise and own training must not be relied upon but rather training drawing upon current practice and research that provides a relevant response to the present workplace context is imperative. As such the importance of what works, and the evidence base to support the ongoing development within professional practice cannot be underestimated. A move away from vocational knowledge and skills rooted in the past will enable a better pedagogy on theoretical integrationism for the structural and cultural zeitgeist of the sector (ever more challenging and performance-based). Therefore, “Back-ward mapping” where the closer the trainer is to the source of the problem, the greater their ability to influence, is thus significant to curriculum development (Geary & Liston, 2009). Trainers own knowledge, membership of professional guidance and counselling forums and continuing professional development support the complex task of implementing a guidance training programme (Geary & Liston, 2009). Maturation of trainers’ own professional identities is also achieved, and “lifelong learning” is exemplified to their trainees. This would go some way towards answering the demands of career advisers in this study for a system of on-going professional development ushered by those experienced in adult career guidance and integrative practice.

**Limitations of the study and deterministic considerations in careers training and evaluation**

The research is limited in scale and to small sample sizes. The use of a case-based approach to examine career adviser and trainer perspectives is also subject to concerns of non-generalisability, complexity and extensiveness of data generated. Nevertheless, the study offers some valuable insights into theoretical praxes and the associated pedagogy, further advancements can be made towards its epistemology.
This investigation was conducted in the aftermath of training with immediate benefits and limitations noted by advisers and trainers. Further longitudinal studies would provide a more accurate vantage point for gauging the impact of training in theorising practice and, hence advancing professionalisation.

**Conclusion**

Professional development pedagogy for career advisers is complex and could be perceived to include, programme requirements juxtaposed against trainers’ own theoretical stance, reflexivity and professional perspectives, combined with the receptiveness of career advisers to openly engage with learning.

Commissioners of training and learners must therefore be willing to compensate for a priori training methodologies and the role that external trainers can bring which may rely on specific theoretical schools of knowledge and practice experiences. Flexibility and autonomy should be afforded for the construction and delivery of training programmes that go beyond the minutiae of contractual/awarding body requirements and nurture the development of critical thinking and theoretical integrationism. Opportunities for consolidating knowledge through situated or incidental learning must be further accommodated within integrative training programmes.

Trainers must form intractable allegiances towards integrationism themselves through the maturation of own professional practice and identities. This will not only increase their credibility but also provide good modelling for their trainees. Cultivating greater reflexivity within curricula and trainees’ epistemologies of practice will further support an integrationist pedagogy.

The reforms for professionalisation in career guidance in England and the needs of the post-modern society demand new epistemology in practice and professional training. Especially as there are currently significant workforce issues, related to recruitment and retention. There is an irony that a recent study produced by Gordon (2022) identifies that a lack of access to CPD, when combined alongside poor pay and renumeration act as significant barriers to both progression and staff retention within the careers profession. Integrationist training programmes should be developed accommodating meta-framework models (such as Hambly, 2007). If careers practice is to be grounded in theory, then policy must recognise the pre-eminence of integrationist professional development training programmes. These must go beyond the economic accountability focusing instead on meaningful workplace learning with adequate time for facilitated interaction. A systemic approach to the continued upskilling of practitioners theoretical knowledge combined with a reflective practice approach will contribute significantly to both the professionalisation of the sector and also to creating a more critical workforce.

**Data availability statement**

The data that supports the findings of this study are available on request from the lead author Lydia Lauder, upon reasonable request.

**Ethical consent**

Ethical approval was obtained from the University ethics committee. Permission was also received from the authors employer to undertake the research and to publish the findings in academic journals. The data are held by the lead author and can be made available if requested.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).
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