Career Development Practices: What Theories and Models Have to Offer

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Abstract

Career theory serves as a crucial foundation for practice, yet its relevance is sometimes questioned due to a perceived gap between theory and its practical application. We contend that the practical utility of theory should be a central criterion in evaluating contemporary career theories and models. This study aimed to bridge the gap between theory and practice by analyzing the practical applications of 43 career theories and models featured in *Career Theories and Models at Work: Ideas for Practice* (Arthur et al., 2019). Through thematic analysis, eight foundational themes emerged that support theory-driven practice. We propose that, regardless of their theoretical orientation, career practitioners can benefit from understanding and applying these themes. The results are discussed with a focus on making career theories and models more accessible for integration into practice. Practice points developed by the contributing chapter authors are provided, illustrating how specific theories and models informed the eight themes. Suggestions are offered for aligning the themes with professional standards and guidelines, and for improving learning and supervision.

Keywords: career development theory, career development models, career development practice

Over the past century, numerous theoretical perspectives on career development have emerged. In the case of career theory, these perspectives come from diverse fields such as vocational psychology, education, social science, and organizational psychology. Explanations for career-related behaviours have included theory-based content, process, and frameworks that integrate both (Patton & McMahon, 2021). Beyond individual behaviours, career theories have also addressed specific populations, human factors, and workplace dynamics within organizations. Theories have informed new models of career practice, while emerging models have introduced novel concepts or integrated ideas across theoretical perspectives (Arthur et al., 2024).

Career development theory is pivotal for practice, guiding practitioners in case conceptualization, assessment, and interventions (McMahon, 2019). However, career theories have long been criticized for being inaccessible and difficult to translate into practice. To address this theory-practice gap, resources have been developed to provide practical guidance on applying theoretical concepts through case examples (e.g., Arthur et al., 2019; Arthur & McMahon, 2019; Swanson & Fouad, 2019). Although theories have often been classified according to explanations for career-related behaviour, no previous work has examined commonalities across the practice elements of multiple career theories and models. To fill this gap, we analyzed the practice points on specific chapters provided by chapter authors in *Career Theories and Models at Work: Ideas for Practice* (Arthur et al., 2019). Focusing on the practice points provided a fresh lens to identify the foundations of career development practice.

We begin by emphasizing the importance of theory-practice connections in shaping the career development field. We argue that utility and practicality should be central considerations for selecting and applying career theories and models. We then outline the method used in our study, focusing on the analysis of practice points from 43 career theories and models. Our analysis revealed eight themes that underpin a transtheoretical approach to career practice, offering guidance across diverse contexts and practitioner roles. Finally, we provide suggestions for future directions to strengthen connections between career theory and practice.

Theory Matters for Career Development Practitioners

The professionalization of Career Development Practitioners (CDPs) has seen progress in many parts of the world, including Canada (Canadian Career Development Foundation [CCDF], 2021; Godden & Borgen, 2024) and Australia (Career Industry Council of Australia [CICA], 2022). Despite these advancements, the career development sector continues to face challenges, including inconsistent training and the employment

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of individuals with varying educational backgrounds and work experiences (Challenge Factory, 2024). Consequently, many individuals working in the field, including front-line workers and supervisors, may lack familiarity with the well-established and emerging theories and models that inform contemporary career development practice. Even experienced practitioners can benefit from reviewing and updating their theoretical knowledge to challenge existing assumptions and to expand their repertoire of theory-practice applications (Matthews, 2017).

To recap, career theories provide explanations for understanding career-related behaviours. Theories serve as guides, models, or hypotheses that help explain specific phenomena (Brown, 2002; Lent, 2017; Solmonson et al., 2009). Nearly two decades ago, Krumboltz (1996) addressed the connection between theory and practical application, stating:

The purpose of theory is to help us understand a complex domain so that we can take more useful and intelligent actions. A theory enables us to step back from the nitty-gritty details and see the big picture. A good theory is a simplified representation of reality, identifying relationships among the most crucial characteristics and ignoring the rest. (p. 56)

However, the purpose of career theory is sometimes questioned due to a perceived disconnect between theory and practice (Watson, 2019). A distinction can be made between the knowledge of theory and its purpose and the practical use of specific theories (Killeen, 1996). It is crucial for career practitioners to understand the role of theory in professional practice and to make informed decisions when selecting theories and models for practical application. Despite variations between educational levels and practical experience, workplace settings, and organizational cultures, the integration of theory can enhance practice. There are concerns about practitioners working without a theoretical base, relying on popular but ungrounded techniques, which poses risks for practitioners and clients. Theory provides a basis for case conceptualization, assessment, intervention planning, and evaluation of outcomes (McMahon, 2019). For example, narrative career counselling practices including life design (Hartung & Santilli, 2024), the story telling approach (McMahon & Patton, 2024), and career counselling based on contextual action theory (Young, 2024) are all founded in theory and supported by an evidence base. Also, greater attention has been paid to culture, contexts, and social justice perspectives in theories and models to inform career counselling (Arthur, 2024; Arulmani, 2024; Blustein et al., 2019).

The career development field has grown, accompanied by an expanding set of resources for practitioners. This includes an increasing number of theories and models, with revisions to time-honoured perspectives and the introduction of new and emerging theoretical approaches (Arthur et al., 2019; Arthur & McMahon, 2019; McMahon & Abkhezr, 2024; Patton & McMahon, 2021; Yates, 2024). We encourage career practitioners to stay updated through ongoing professional development. With such an abundance of theories and models available, it is essential to provide guidelines for reviewing and selecting resources that best inform and expand a practitioner's knowledge base.

Criteria for Evaluating and Selecting Career Theories and Models

In their review of career development theory, Watson and Stead (2017) identified four criteria traditionally used for evaluating theories:

- 1. The structure or framework of the theory and how well the concepts explain its purpose;
- 2. The conceptual scope of the theory, including the populations and contexts it addresses;
- 3. The measurement and testing of constructs through research; and
- 4. The logical consistency of the theoretical constructs, emphasizing simplicity where possible.

To reflect contemporary perspectives in the field, Watson (2019) provided six expanded criteria for evaluating career theories:

- 1. Articulate both commonalities and unique features compared to other theories and address contemporary issues.
- 2. Assess whether the theory aligns with practitioners' personal worldviews and practice contexts, as well as its applicability to their clientele.
- 3. Emphasize parsimony in the number of constructs used, ensuring the theory remains manageable within a practice framework.
- 4. Ensure that theories are culturally relevant and applicable to diverse populations and contexts.
- 5. Evaluate the adaptability of the theory, ensuring it can flexibly respond to changes in the world of work and evolving career issues.
- 6. Consider social justice, reflecting how the theory addresses inclusivity or exclusivity, honouring the historical roots of career development.

Career practitioners can use these six criteria to anchor their decision-making for reviewing, selecting, and comparing career theories and models.

The Utility of Theory in Practice

To reiterate, there is an increasing demand for theories that not only generate new knowledge but also provide clear implications for practice. Career practitioners, the primary consumers of these theories, are eager to understand how to apply them in real-world settings. As noted previously, as practitioners seek to strengthen their capabilities, they need theories that support their work in a wide range of practice settings.

Building on Watson's (2019) six criteria, we propose to integrate the main ideas into one overarching criterion to emphasize the practical utility of theories and models. This focus on utility in practice affords practitioners the flexibility to consider their workplace contexts and client needs, while selecting theories and models that best support their career development practices. Emphasizing utility also extends the evaluation of theory beyond a source of knowledge, in order to leverage and enhance theory-practice connections. Our exploration began by asking how well career theories and models emphasized practice applications. We found that many theorists tend to prioritize theoretical content, which led us to consider the potential for prioritizing theory-practice connections.

In response, we invited authors of career theories and models to clarify the practice points derived from their theoretical orientations in the book *Career Theories and Models at Work: Ideas for Practice* (Arthur et al., 2019). By analyzing the practice points, we examined theoretical applications through a practice-focused lens. Our research sought to address the following question: What are the foundations of career development practice?

In the following sections, we detail our method and key findings from an analysis of practice elements across multiple career theories and models. The themes and sub-themes from the results were integrated into career practice principles, which are further elaborated in *Career Practice Principles: Theories and Models at Work* (Arthur et al., 2024). In this article, we highlight the initial analysis of practice points and the eight themes that emerged, informing a transtheoretical approach to career practice.

Method

As noted, our project began by analyzing the practice points listed across the 43 chapters of *Career Theories and Models at Work: Ideas for Practice* (Arthur et al., 2019). Each chapter provided an overview of a different theory or model, followed by a practice-based case vignette, and concluded with several practice points illustrating how to apply it. These 296 practice points served as the qualitative data for our research. We employed an inductive thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021), to analyze the data. Inductive thematic analysis involves deriving themes directly from the data, without predefined codes or researcher biases (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is a reflexive, meaning-making process (Braun &

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Clarke, 2019), and is valuable for organizing and describing qualitative data by identifying recurring patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes represent significant ideas in the data "in relation to the research question," forming "patterned responses or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). They are not solely determined by frequency but by researcher judgement regarding which concepts are central to the data's meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The data analysis followed the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021): a) data familiarization, b) coding, c) theme generation, d) theme review, e) the defining and naming of themes, and f) writing up the results. In Phase 1, each author independently coded the practice points. In Phase 2, we compared our coding results, discussed differences, and reached consensus. Phase 3 involved identifying patterns across the codes to generate overarching themes and sub-themes. Phases 4 and 5 consisted of further discussions to refine our shared understanding of the themes, taking the time to present our views and note the similarities and differences in how we organized and represented the content. Through iterative revision and reflection, we reached consensus on eight themes and accompanying sub-themes (See Table 1).

Thematic analysis provides several advantages, offering rich, detailed, and nuanced insights into qualitative data (Nowell et al., 2017). However, its flexibility can also present challenges, such as inconsistency and a lack of coherence (Nowell et al., 2017). To address these potential issues, we ensured the trustworthiness of our analysis by adhering to Braun and Clarke's (2006) criteria for good practice in thematic analysis and Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Guided by Nowell et al.'s (2017) approach for conducting trustworthy thematic analysis, we implemented strategies such as an audit trail that detailed the steps of our data analysis in Excel files, reflectivity about our individual decisions, and regular meetings between the researchers to mitigate potential biases and arrive at consensus at every stage of the analysis to ensure the integrity of our findings.

Table 1 Eight Foundational Themes and Sub-Themes for Career Practice

Themes	Sub-Themes		
Reflective Practice	Reflection on self Reflection on practice		
Culture and Context	Client worldview Methods, tools, assessments	Organizations Multiple pathways	
Working Alliance	Creating a safe space Assessment practices	Goal setting and decision-making Evaluating progress	
Client Characteristics	Personal characteristics Competencies/skills	Motivation Readiness for change	
Theory-Based Interventions	Evidence-based Range Format	Holistic Integrative Systemic	
Professional Interconnectedness	Colleagues Lifelong learning		
Social Justic Advocay	Views of work Sociopolitical context	(In)Equity and access Professional Voices	

Results

Table 1 lists the 8 foundational themes and their sub-themes that provide the structure for reporting the results. Each will be described in turn.

Given the word length restrictions of this article, a limited number of quotations from the data will be presented in quotation marks in the findings. Readers are referred to the Appendix for additional representative examples of practice points related to the themes and sub-themes.

Reflective Practice

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Reflective practice underpins professional practice across many disciplines (Bassot, 2016; Neary & Johnson, 2016), informed by classical models of reflection (e.g., Kolb, 1984; Schon, 1992). The theme reflective practice concerns the personal awareness of career practitioners in relation to examining their personal worldviews and how their views of themselves, other people, and the world around them shape their professional roles. The sub-themes of reflection on self and reflection on practice, provide direction for reflection and will be presented in turn.

The reflection on self sub-theme is about the need for practitioners to be self-aware in relation to their personal worldview, and how that worldview has been shaped through their personal culture and life contexts.

To what extent has your career progression to date been influenced by your social and economic background? What barriers have you overcome at career turning points and who/what have been the key influences on your career decisions? How important has community been for you? (Bimrose, 2019, p. 62).

Reflection about self includes gaining awareness about how personal assumptions are carried into our professional roles and interactions with other people. This might include reflecting about family and community influences on attitudes towards paid and unpaid work, desirable and undesirable jobs, etc. Reflection on personal identities (e.g., gender, culture, ethnicity, social class, religion, ability, affectional orientation, and their intersections) might include ways that experiences of privilege and/or lack of privilege have shaped practitioners' worldview and might be similar or different to the experiences of the clients they serve. Such self-awareness is important in practice and in relationships with others to guard against stereotypes and to "take responsibility for your own biases and prejudices" (Pope, 2019, p. 346).

The reflection on practice sub-theme is about the need for career practitioners to be mindful in their work and self-monitor themselves for the intrusion of personal views that could impede practice. Reflective practitioners emphasize collaboration with clients and consider the power relations that exist in practice. Reflections on learning with clients can help "to identify areas for growth and be intentional about seeking resources and professional development" (Arthur, 2019, p. 30).

Reflection and seeking feedback on practice may be actively sought through formal and informal supervision. This suggests the need for professional interconnectedness with colleagues within and beyond their workplace, seeking avenues for networking and collaboration through their professional associations. Career practitioners may seek additional feedback on their work from appropriate members of their support network, while being mindful about client confidentiality. Reflection on practice also occurs through engaging with lifelong learning, professional development, interdisciplinary learning, cross-training and continuing professional development. Career practitioners integrate reflection on practice into daily practices with all clients and across all practice contexts.

Culture and Context

The reflective practice theme focused on career practitioners and their worldviews. The culture and context theme focuses on clients and the influences they have absorbed through socialization in families, communities, schools, and workplaces. As noted by several chapter authors (Aravind & Arulmani, 2019; Arthur, 2019; Pope, 2019), culture permeates our notions of work and livelihoods, approaches to decision-

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multiple career pathways.

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making and perceived opportunities for future careers. The related sub-themes include *client worldview*; culturally relevant methods, tools and assessments; culture in organizations; and recognizing diverse and

The client worldview sub-theme recognizes that individuals' career behaviour is shaped alongside their life experiences within their specific cultural contexts. Exploring clients' values and beliefs can incorporate career assumptions and an assessment of their relevance for current and future goals. Some individuals may hold firmly onto prior understandings, while others seek guidance to resolve value conflicts and consolidate new perspectives. Remember to check personal assumptions, Career development practitioners are encouraged to "know the process of cultural identity development and use it" (Pope, 2019, p. 346) in exploration with clients in a process that "focuses on strengths rather than deficits" (Aravind & Arulmani, 2019, p.19).

The next sub-theme highlights how career practitioners support career exploration using both formal and informal methods, tools, and assessments. Culturally relevant tools must be carefully chosen for clients to consider diverse worldviews and experiences. For example, "view guidance methods from the cultural preparedness viewpoint. It is important to evaluate the cultural relevance of methods and tools used in career guidance when working with students to match their needs and abilities" (Aravind & Arulmani, 2019, p. 20). Informal techniques, such as active listening and collaboration, allow clients to share their experiences and find career solutions. Practitioners should adjust their language to suit clients and avoid generalizations, highlighting each client's unique life experience.

The sub-theme related to organizations represents the multiple ways that organizational culture – both explicit and implicit workplace norms – also influences people's career development. "It is equally important to understand structural, organizational, and policy aspects" (McCoy, 2019, p. 236) of an employment role and context. Career practitioners familiar with workplace expectations help clients to navigate performance goals, prepare for employment, or adjust to new environments. Listening to how clients perceive change at work can offer important clues about perceptions of workplace norms, current strengths, and potential areas for skill building "to mobilize resources for within-career transitions" (p. 236).

The multiple career pathways sub-theme refers to the openness of both career practitioners and clients in career exploration. As a starting point, "build culturally sensitive knowledge of family pathways. Continue to update yourself about educational and career pathways not just locally, but also regionally, nationally, and globally" (Bakshi & Fialho, 2019, p. 40). Discussions may include exploration of the ways that culture and context have been relevant for past career choices as well as current and future opportunities. Career practitioners guide clients in reflecting on how their roles, both paid and unpaid, influence preferred career pathways, helping them to expand and clarify possible options, while challenging expectations that there is a single, "right" career choice.

Working Alliance

Previous research has demonstrated the importance of the working alliance for supporting client change (Milot-Lapointe et al., 2021; Whiston et al., 2016). In the current study, the theme working alliance concerns the relationship between practitioners and clients. The sub-themes of creating a safe place, assessment practices, goal setting and decision making, and evaluating progress were identified and will be

The creating a safe space sub-theme is about establishing a working relationship that recognizes the potential vulnerability of clients in sharing their concerns and is built on trust in order that clients feel able to describe their situation and share their thoughts and feelings with a practitioner. Creating a safe space involves "taking the necessary time to listen, observe, and respond to each individual's story" (Neault & Pickerell, 2019, p. 281). A safe relationship facilitates collaboration, demonstrates support for clients, and features a transparent approach where career practitioners offer explanations in a language that is understood by clients rather than the jargon of the field.

The assessment practices sub-theme refers to the methods used by practitioners to garner relevant client information in order to facilitate learning and meaning making for clients. Assessment is ever-present in career practice and can draw on a range of quantitative, qualitative, formal, and informal instruments to obtain

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holistic knowledge about clients and their life histories. For clients, understanding themselves in relation to their work experiences and future options assists in the career transition process. As noted above, the cultural appropriateness of career assessment instruments is critical for practitioners to consider as inappropriate selection could result in unintentional harm to clients. Practitioners could consider clients' understandings of career practices, the power dynamics of career counselling, and the cultural background of clients including factors such as gender roles and how decisions are made in families and communities.

The goal-setting and decision-making sub-theme is about career practitioners and clients collaboratively making plans for the future in order to bring about meaningful change at an appropriate time. This may involve exploring past and present life, work, and learning experiences and considering a client's preferred future. Emanating from this process, agreement can be reached on "what is to be accomplished through counselling," practitioners and clients can "explore and clarify potential goals," clients can be encouraged to "commit to a new goal" (Vondracek & Ford, 2019, p. 441) and action steps planned. At this stage clients may need to be supported with relevant resources and to take action steps in their life context.

The evaluating progress sub-theme is about gauging progress within and across sessions with a view to appropriately catering for client's needs and improving practice. Such evaluation is an ongoing process that monitors client learning and changes that occur within and across sessions. This includes helping clients "to document their goals and plans and to develop a system to monitor progress regularly" (Niles et al., 2019, p. 293). Through noticing changes, clients may be encouraged to progress in their career transitions.

Client Characteristics

The *client characteristics* theme concerns the client and the emotional, cognitive, and physical resources they bring to the client-practitioner relationship and, beyond, to their learning and work experiences. The sub-themes of personal characteristics, competencies/skills, motivation, and readiness for change were identified and will be presented in turn.

The personal characteristics sub-theme has been the traditional focus of many career development professionals, especially when working with individual clients or groups. Many theoretical perspectives are linked to assessment tools, resources, or activities that can help clients to identify their skills, interests, values, and/or personal style. Other theories and models focus more on emotions, beliefs, or motivation – all of these can be important in facilitating an individual's self-reflection and deeper understanding about what personal characteristics they bring with them into the contexts of learning and work. From the perspective of current theories, "the self comprises the qualities of the individual. These may include cultural factors, demographic characteristics, psychological resources, and resilience" (Goodman, 2019, p. 134), taking the notion of personal characteristics far beyond a simplistic consideration of skills and interests.

Although competencies/skills could certainly be considered personal characteristics, as noted above, the amount of emphasis this sub-theme was given across theorists resulted in us listing it separately. From a strengths-based perspective, understanding and being able to articulate one's skills can instill confidence at work and in the job-search process. Career practitioners can also work with clients to realistically assess and ameliorate gaps in competencies/skills that might be blocking the way to career growth and sustainability. With an increasing recognition of the importance of lifelong career development, upgrading and learning new skills is always necessary. It is important to "identify skills individuals can target to bring their abilities in line with work-environment requirements. Work environments are always changing and people's skills need to stay in sync" (Woodend, 2019, p. 462). There are many generic competency frameworks such as Skills for Success (Government of Canada, n.d.) that can be helpful in prompting individuals to recognize their existing strengths and, also, to identify areas to work on, related to their career goals. A focus on transferable skills can also be important when supporting clients through career and other life transitions.

Another important sub-theme of client characteristics is motivation. Helping clients to identify meaning and purpose can strengthen their commitment to finding and keeping work, engaging in lifelong learning, and bringing their best selves to their work and other life roles. It is crucial here for career professionals to acknowledge and set aside their own biases - responses to questions like "Why is work important?" or "What do I want from work?" will vary greatly from one individual to the next, so it is important not to make

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assumptions. Self-efficacy is also linked to motivation, so it is essential to work with clients to understand what they believe they are capable of, in terms of finding work as well as in doing work. Some clients, for example, may feel very capable of doing the work they did in their last job but completely at a loss regarding how to find similar work or how to transition to a new career in situations where finding similar work is simply not an option. They may be highly motivated to work, but lack the skills, confidence, and, therefore, motivation to look for work. Outcome expectations, not surprisingly, impact motivation. As career professionals, one of your key roles can be to instill hope and optimism through supporting clients to identify viable career pathways and prepare for successful transitions. "Learn to read the level of hope in the people you work with. Be self-reflective: Are you increasing or decreasing people's hope?" (Poehnell, 2019, p. 326).

Another sub-theme of personal characteristics is readiness for change. "Career counselling is all about life changes. Any career development intervention aims, above all, to help people make conscious and meaningful changes in their personal and professional lives" (Cournoyer & LaChance, 2019, p. 102). However, not all career or life changes are by choice, nor do they occur at conveniently scheduled times. There are many reasons that your clients may be unprepared for the changes they are facing or ill-equipped to navigate those changes. If clients seem stuck, disengaged, or unmotivated, consider if this could be related to change readiness. It may be necessary to slow down the transition process to boost your client's self-efficacy and belief that positive outcomes are even possible.

Customized Practice

The *customized practice* theme captures the recognition across numerous theories and models that a one-size-fits-all approach simply does not work in career development. As highlighted throughout Maree's (2019b) handbook, innovation is crucial and current theories reflect that. In our research, the practice points related to this theme clustered into three sub-themes as areas of focus for customization: *practice*, *clients*, and *process*.

Applying a customization lens to the sub-theme of practice, career development professionals are encouraged to take a holistic view of their clients and those clients' complex and interconnected life roles. This can be expanded through a stance of curiosity. Rather than assuming clients' goals, needs, priorities, or availability, practitioners are encouraged to ask relevant questions and then follow up by brainstorming and investigating possibilities together. Creative career professionals are far more likely to guide and facilitate their clients' progress than to direct them; they are more inclined to ask than to tell. Customizing career development practice fits well with strengths-based approaches. Customization can remove programming redundancy, build upon existing strengths, and systematically dismantle barriers to employment success. It can also make learning memorable and fun! Practitioners are encouraged to integrate and expand upon their clients' own metaphors, providing opportunities for clients to tell (and rewrite) their stories, and introducing engaging experiential activities, "find[ing] creative ways to help people who are stuck to discover alternatives and possibilities" (Poehnell, 2019, p. 326).

Career development practitioners may work with individual jobseekers, groups, or employers as clients. Customization at the client sub-theme level can stretch limited resources, saving time and money. It can help to maximize work-search success, workplace productivity, and, ultimately, contribute to improving the local economy. Through customization, practitioners are encouraged to "promote optimal career development" (Nauta, 2019, p. 270), considering how they might be able to build on clients' strengths, bolster their agency (rather than ongoing dependency), and engage their own expertise as, together, they co-construct viable next steps for clients' careers.

The customized process sub-theme reflects the numerous ways that theories and models can be applied, regardless of setting or context. The focus of this sub-theme is on how career practitioners engage with their clients. Not surprisingly, such practitioner characteristics as empathy and active listening were identified as crucial approaches. These can be foundational to customization; through empathy, for example, the practitioner can form a deep understanding of how to better connect with a client. Good communication strategies, including questions and prompts, can help to surface where customization may be most beneficial to fully engage clients, bolster their hope and confidence, and maximize their success. Customization models

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often emphasize adaptability and through such modelling, clients can be inspired and encouraged to also adapt when needed, at work and in their other life roles. Using immediacy when working with clients is another form of customization as it involves acknowledging what is happening in the moment, sometimes introducing interventions that can turn such moments into memorable learning opportunities. "Any time we are learning to tell a new story about our lives and what we are capable of, we are in a nonlinear learning process that takes time, involves emotions, and usually surprises us" (Lengelle, et al., 2019, p. 193). Career practitioners are encouraged to help clients identify themes and patterns that are influencing their career/life success and to engage in meaning-making together. To reiterate, adjusting language to avoid jargon and to be culturally appropriate can be an important customization strategy that helps to engage clients in learning and careerbuilding activities.

Theory-Based Interventions

The theory-based interventions theme expands the application of theory as a foundation that influences all aspects of practice, such as the choices practitioners make about the approach they take, the strategies and interventions they employ, and the assessment instruments they use, if any. Through career practice, theory influences clients. The sub-themes of evidence-based, range, format, holistic, integrative, and systemic were identified as important elements of intervention planning.

The evidence-based sub-theme refers to the importance of applying theory in practice to provide a firm foundation for practice by providing it with an evidence base that can be further strengthened through research. Together, theory and research can move practice from a set of techniques and "good ideas" to interventions that are proven, well understood, and with outcomes that can be anticipated. By showing "the theoretical and scientific basis of your practices ... credibility with stakeholders" (Viviers, 2019, p. 431) may be enhanced.

The range sub-theme is about acknowledging that practitioners can draw on a variety of interventions. provided that the interventions are relevant to the client's needs and consistent with the theoretical framework being applied (Domene & Young, 2019). This reinforces, as noted in the previous section, that theory-based interventions can be flexible and customized to suit individual clients.

The format sub-theme is about the nature of interventions which can range from individual to peer, or group processes. For example, many theories and models and the tools that were developed from them can be adapted to "be used in individual career counselling or in group counselling or career education workshops" (Healy & McIlveen, 2019, p. 157). Different formats could also include interventions in families and dual-career couples. The cultural appropriateness of the format of theory-based career interventions is critical to consider. Individuals could benefit from sharing with, and the support of, peers, family, and other group members. Considering the best format for interventions could stimulate the creativity of career practitioners and may require them to have skills and knowledge in individual intervention as well as those of group facilitation. In some cases, interventions may occur in community settings in collective projects.

The holistic sub-theme refers to important relationships between work and other facets of a client's life, their social and economic circumstances, and their relationships with family and others, in order to gain a comprehensive picture of a client's situation. The "work-based issues" that clients bring to career practitioners "are rarely separated from nonwork issues, social and economic factors, and relationships" (Blustein et al., 2019, p. 72). This should ensure that relevant information is not overlooked, and that interventions and action plans are appropriate for the client.

The integrative sub-theme is about the complementary nature of some theories and practices as well as taking an integrative view of clients and their circumstances. It suggests that practitioners familiar with a range of theories may be able to discern interventions consistent with their own theoretical background that are appropriate for clients. Alternatively, practitioners who are proponents of a particular theory may find that "other career theories could complement" (Watson, 2019, p. 452) their use of the theory.

The systemic sub-theme is about the importance of taking the whole context of clients into account, in order to maximize practitioner understanding of their situation as well as stimulate reflection by clients. Assessment can be accompanied with interventions, because "systemic influences can be powerful... [through

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helping] clients to view their concerns within larger systems influences to avoid internalizing blame and to address barriers" (Arthur, 2019, p. 30). For some clients, with their permission, interventions at a systemic level (e.g., within a work organization or a family) may be advantageous.

Professional Interconnectedness

The theme of professional interconnectedness refers to the recognition that career practitioners do not (and cannot) work in silos. Rather, as the adage goes, "It takes a village." Two sub-themes, colleagues and lifelong learning, are expanded upon in the following paragraphs.

Career practitioners typically do not work in isolation – rather, they work within a network of colleagues. Amundson (2019) encouraged practitioners to "be collaborative [asking] Are you trying to do too much by yourself?" (p. 10). From a systems perspective, effective networks include people who are closely connected (e.g., colleagues and supervisors), but also key collaborators who may be further removed (e.g., employers in the community, professional associations, leaders of business associations, other service providers and helping professionals, funders, and policy makers). Connectedness is multi-directional; career practitioners can learn from others and can also inform others, serving as advocates, advisors, mentors, or even trainers. It is common for career practitioners to serve on multi-disciplinary teams; understanding others' perspectives and being willing and able to represent their own unique areas of specialization (e.g., in case conferencing) results in a collaborative synergy that can be far more effective than working in silos or, worse still, at cross purposes. Sharing visions, advocating for needed resources, and seeking feedback from colleagues, clients, and community stakeholders are all additional benefits of connectedness.

Another important aspect of professional interconnectedness is captured in the sub-theme of lifelong learning, which includes "stay[ing] current" (Osborn et al., 2019, p. 306) and "study[ing] and understand[ing] the theory" (Sheu & Wang, 2019, p. 390) when incorporating new ideas into practice. Foundational to all professional roles is the need for ongoing professional development (sometimes referred to as continuing education). Career practitioners work within complex, dynamic, interconnected geo-political systems. To do their work well, they need to continuously hone their interpersonal/relational skills; enhance their cultural competency (and cultural humility!); deepen their knowledge and understanding of evidence-based and theory-grounded research in their field; stay current with changes in the local labour market and regional, national, and global economies; and continue to learn about the different occupations and sectors that their clients work within. Many career practitioners have chosen to belong to professional associations and have become certified as career development professionals. In most cases, maintaining such certification requires evidence of ongoing professional development.

Social Justice Advocacy

Working in career development inevitably involves interacting with individuals affected by social injustices (Irving, 2021; McWhirter & McWha-Hermann, 2021). The social justice advocacy theme refers to actions career practitioners take to address social inequities. Sub-themes include views of work, the sociopolitical context, (in)equity and access, and professional voices. Career practitioners address societal and structural barriers to education and employment through advocacy skills and strategies.

The views of work subtheme acknowledges the diverse ways people engage with work and its associated meanings. Access to work is a human right, essential for income, family support, and community contributions. For some, work is about survival, with job insecurity or unemployment threatening their basic needs. Career practitioners can help clients explore the role of work in their lives, often linked to other roles and relationships. This exploration may foster a stronger sense of agency and self-determination in shaping future career plans. Although paid employment is often emphasized, unpaid care and community work also hold value. Career practitioners engage clients to review the values associated with life roles, noticing signs of fulfillment or strain. Clients can also be supported to identify stressors and positive coping strategies for building resilience and positive mental health, while pursuing desired changes.

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The sociopolitical context subtheme shifts focus from the individual to broader societal influences on career development. "Individuals are continuously interacting with their life contexts. Career development interventions must take this into account. Individuals are as much determined by their life contexts as by the actions they take within them" (Cournoyer & LaChance, 2019, p. 102). Career practitioners help clients to understand how structural factors shape their experiences and determine what is within their control. Ongoing assessment includes potential "influences of power, privilege, and/or oppression" (Popadiuk, 2019, p. 336).

The (in)equity and access sub-theme focuses on the distribution of social and economic resources, discrimination, and other forms of oppression. Career practitioners assist clients through highlighting how sociopolitical forces create challenges and persist over time, helping to shift blame from individual vulnerabilities to systemic barriers, while also generating potential solutions. Advocacy for social justice can be integrated into client conversations, sometimes supporting uncomfortable yet often necessary discussions to build on client strengths and help them to access resources. For example, when working in a school system, "find out what prevents a student from accessing career development resources and rights in an institution (e.g., review rules, measures, and methods of delivering development services). Identify the measures, information, or resources that help students to access those services" (Picard et al., 2019, p. 316). Career practitioners work across multiple intervention levels – directly with clients, on their behalf, and through professional networks – to address systemic barriers that impede people's career development.

The professional voices sub-theme relates to ways that career practitioners can build their knowledge and skills for social justice advocacy. Although individual influence is important, collective action through professional associations and interdisciplinary collaboration can be even more powerful in driving systemic change. For example, "on a macro level, representation through professional associations or unions could be sought to define and defend the work of your profession" (Viviers, 2019, p. 431). Social justice advocacy can be practiced at multiple levels; collective efforts to change policies and improve service provision can potentially improve conditions for many people.

Discussion

The inclusion of career theory application in the professional standards of various countries (e.g., Australia and Canada) and organizations (e.g., the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance [IAEVG]), is a testament to the importance of understanding and applying career theory. For instance, in Canada, knowledge of career theory has been positioned as a core competency; career development practitioners "draw from a wide variety of traditional and emerging career development theories, models, frameworks and approaches" to inform practice, research, and policies (CCDF, 2021). Australia's *Professional Standards for Career Development Practitioners* lists career development theory as a core competency, requiring practitioners to describe and apply "major career development theories, concepts, research, and associated models and frameworks" (CICA, 2022, p. 11). Similarly, the IAEVG's *International Competencies for Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioners* (2018) assert that practitioners need the "skills, knowledge, and attitudes" to demonstrate the core competency of "integrating theory and research into practice in guidance, career development, counseling, and consultation." Indeed, career theory serves to differentiate career development from other professions with distinct theoretical frameworks.

Connections Between Foundational Themes and Standards of Practice

The eight themes identified in our research generally align with standards of practice, particularly the theme of theory-based interventions, which assist practitioners in applying and integrating theory into their practice. Further complementarities exist between professional standards and the other identified themes. For example, the themes of *culture and contexts* and *social justice advocacy* align with the diversity and inclusion competencies in these standards, while the themes of *working alliance*, *client characteristics*, and *professional connectedness* align with communication and interpersonal skills competencies (CICA, 2022), effective client communication (IAEVG, 2018), and client-practitioner relationships (CCDF, 2021). Additionally, the themes of *customized practice* and *reflective practice* complement competencies related to professional responsibility

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(CCDF, 2021), professional practice application (CICA, 2022), and ethical behaviour (IAEVG, 2018). Unlike professional standards, however, the themes we identified provide details for implementation through a set of sub-themes that offer practical insights. For instance, the theme working alliance and suggestions for implementation are elaborated through its sub-themes: creating a safe space, assessment practices, goal setting and decision making, and evaluating progress. Therefore, career practitioners can refer to the professional standards and seek ideas for practical applications from the eight themes and sub-themes that are based on theory.

Implications for Training and Supervision of Career Development Professionals

As noted, knowledge and application of career development theory is a core competency (CCDF, 2021) or standard of practice for career development practitioners (CDPs; CICA, 2022). However, in many jurisdictions, there is no formal, required training for entry-to-practice, resulting in many CDPs beginning their careers without knowing what they don't know. Their practice may be eclectic and atheoretical, lacking a solid understanding of what works, what doesn't work, and why not. Whether new to the field or more experienced, barriers such as a lack of awareness, avoidance, or a dislike of theory – often stemming from misconceptions, learning experiences, or the inaccessibility of professional resources – must be addressed. A key point to reiterate is that practice can be enhanced through the intentional selection and application of resources designed to bridge theory-practice connections. The eight practice principles were developed to establish a foundation for building expertise in specific theories and models that guide career development practice.

Although some CDPs pursue certification, which often requires coursework in career development theories, many certification programs still lack an emphasis on linking theory to practice. Some certification programs focus on competency assessments, without requiring formal education. As part of ongoing professional development, many CDPs seek additional training to strengthen their practice, but these programs often fail to clearly link theory with day-to-day practical application (Life Strategies, 2013). In many training programs, theory courses are separated from skills or practicum courses, and in others, a single theoretical approach is emphasized, leaving practitioners unaware of how different theories and models complement or contrast with each other.

The eight themes and related sub-themes identified in our analysis offer a comprehensive, theoryinformed guide to practice. These transtheoretical themes, derived from the practical application of 43 different theories and models, can provide an integrative framework linking theoretical knowledge to practical interventions. This approach allows for bidirectional learning, where theoretical guidelines are clustered within the eight themes, and practitioners are given opportunities to see how these themes translate into practical interventions. Additionally, a career reflection practice guide has been developed to encourage continued professional learning across the eight themes (Arthur et al., 2024).

For example, in training, theories can be introduced alongside related interventions organized under the eight transtheoretical themes. Alternatively, the themes can be introduced first, with practice points traced back to their theoretical foundations. The Appendix to this article offers an example of this approach, providing a list of exemplars of practice points from each chapter of Career Theories and Models at Work: Ideas for Practice (Arthur et al., 2019). Similarly, these eight themes and sub-themes can serve as a strong foundation for the orientation and supervision of new employees, offering a practical conceptual framework for theoryinformed practice as a whole and for targeted learning. Additionally, in our workshops based on these eight themes, participants have provided valuable feedback regarding their professional learning interests, which has informed the content of "live" workshops and the design of future training workshops.

Summary and Conclusion

In this article, we have emphasized the critical role of theory-informed practice in career development and highlighted the increasing range of resources available. However, "more" does not necessarily equate to "better"; it is crucial for career practitioners to understand and apply criteria for selecting theories and models. Criteria-based choices enable practitioners to be intentional about the "what," "how," and "why" of theory

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application with clients. From 43 different perspectives, we distilled eight themes that are rooted in theories and models but centred in practical applications. This transtheoretical approach can help practitioners deepen their general foundational knowledge and scaffold their specific theoretical and practical knowledge by building from each of the eight themes. Although the themes are presented individually, they are interconnected, allowing for nuanced, multi-dimensional applications in practice (Arthur et al., 2024). We encourage career practitioners to explore specific theories and models, compare and critique their utility, and continuously refine their theory-based practices.

In conclusion, theory informs practice, and practice, in turn, informs theory. This discussion has focused on enhancing both general knowledge about theory and specific knowledge of career development theories and models for practical application. In future, these eight themes could be used to create new knowledge and contribute to the ongoing revision and evolution of career theories and models. Further testing and refinement of these themes and sub-themes is essential to improving their utility and their potential to enhance client outcomes. We encourage career practitioners to share innovative ideas for applying these eight themes through ongoing learning, supervision, and professional development.

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Appendix

Examples of Practice Points that Informed Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes and Sub-themes	Examples	
Reflective Practice		
Reflection on self	Practice what you preach. For the counsellor, it is necessary to know the core processes from personal experience. Practicing them (e.g., mindful listening) has positive effects on the counsellor's own psychological health, attitude, and competence. (Luken & de Folter, 2019, p. 205)	
Reflection on practice	Pause. Take some time to step back and examine what is happening in the work you are doing. Are you making adjustments to fit with the needs of your clients or just following a traditional framework? Does your counselling space look like a creative space where collaborative work is being done? (Amundson, 2019, p. 9)	
	Career counsellors must fine-tune their ability to pinpoint the origin of these shifts—which are delicate, fragile, and intangible—in their clients' perception of the world of work. They will then be better able to help their clients in their continuous career transitions. Career counsellors must pay particular attention to the very first moments of a shift, which are precursors to meaning and therefore precede any change in one's participation in this world. These moments are experiential prerequisites to a commitment to an important process, namely the continuous career transition process. (Riverin-Simard & Simard, 2019, p. 377)	
Culture and context		
Client worldview	Acknowledge client expertise. Clients are the experts on their lives and the ways that their cultural identities and contexts may be relevant for their presenting concerns. (Arthur, 2019, p. 30)	
Methods, tools, assessments	Consider cultural context. Clients' family and cultural backgrounds should be taken into consideration in selecting and administering assessments, interpreting assessment results, and designing SCCT-based interventions. Counsellors should also be aware of their own assumptions and biases toward different cultural groups. (Sheu & Wang, 2019, p. 390)	
Organizations	Provide employees with the opportunity to share their visions and to have input into the organization's vision/outcomes. (Bernes, 2019, p. 52)	
	Notice change. Be mindful of the ongoing changes in work-environment requirements and individuals' needs. This information can help individuals navigate discorrespondence as it arises. (Woodend, 2019, p. 454)	
Multiple pathways	Explore previously unrecognized pathways. Career counsellors may identify potential educational or vocational/career pathways that are not apparent to the client. (Vondracek & Ford, 2019, p. 441)	
Working alliance		
Creating a safe space	Make it safe for students/clients to feel and express thoughts and emotions. Creative introductions where people aren't asked about their career or social standing make for inspiring starts to the process. (Lengelle et al., 2019, p. 193)	
	Establish a respectful, caring, trusting, and mattering relationship with clients. Seeking help, in general from someone they don't know, may expose individuals to a sense of vulnerability. Relationship building is not a single step but is essential to work on throughout the counselling process. (McMahon & Patton, 2019, p. 247).	
Assessment practices	Ongoing assessment. All career development interventions must be based on an initial and ongoing assessment of an individual's personal resources, psychological functioning, and life conditions. (Cournoyer & LaChance, 2019, p. 102)	
Goal-setting and decision-making	Choose small steps to begin the next chapter. Setting a goal is only as helpful as the actions that the client akes toward the goal. Help the client to identify two or three small steps, recognize that there may be obstacles, brainstorm resources that can be used to manage these obstacles, and monitor progress. (Brott, 2019, p. 82)	
Evaluating progress	View guidance methods from the cultural preparedness viewpoint. It is important to evaluate the cultural relevance of methods and tools used in career guidance when working with students to match their needs and abilities. (Aravind & Arulmani, 2019, p. 20)	

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Examples

Client characteristics

Themes and Sub-

themes (cont'd)

Personal characteristics

Exploring constraints and opportunities. Explore how the properties of pathways (e.g., accessibility, mobility, prestige, extrinsic rewards) may be affected by client characteristics (e.g., gender, social circumstances, cultural identity) and context (e.g., historical time and place). Discuss meeting challenges. Engage in relevant advocacy. (Bakshi & Fialho, 2019, p. 40)

Help counsellees represent their learning and progress. Use SPARKS systems and tools to help keep track of identified strengths and areas needing improvement, as well as desired qualities in future jobs. (Kattelus, 2019. p. 182)

Competencies/skills

Enhance career competency. Help clients gain, further, and polish concrete skills in building and managing their life-careers. The career counselling process reinforces and facilitates clients to become intentional, transformative, and life-long learners who are better equipped with pertinent skills to encounter issues, changes, and challenges in the real world of work. Helping clients form and use an accurate belief of career self-efficacy strengthens career competency. (Chen & Hong, 2019, p. 92)

Skills can be learned. Effective career decision-making and problem-solving are teachable. (Osborn et al., 2019, p. 306)

Consider ways in which you could creatively re-combine your/your client's current knowledge, skills and abilities, that may lead to a new narrative and possibilities in the labour market. By changing one's perspective on one's experience and skill set, hitherto unappreciated transferable skills can be revealed. This can open up new and unexpected opportunities. (Pryor & Bright, 2019, p. 358)

Motivation

Assess motivation. A subjective investigation of your client's personal interests, passions, and desires is needed. (van Brussel, 2019, p. 422)

Support empowerment. Counsellors can be facilitators and cheerleaders for their clients, encouraging them to build resilience, to become cognizant of their strengths, and to advocate for themselves. (Tang, 2019, p. 410)

Readiness for change

Transitions are universal and a common part of life. Everyone experiences transitions throughout life, some big and some small. They are common to all, yet unique to each individual. (Goodman, 2019, p. 134)

The two most reliable predictors of navigating change are hope and confidence. Constantly seek ways to provide behavioural-descriptive feedback (to develop confidence) and identify bridges to possibility (to develop hope). (Magnusson & Redekopp, 2019, p. 216)

Transitions are normative and non-normative. The HAC model outlines normative transitions that an athlete is likely to experience. However, it may also be useful for practitioners to explore athletic career transition literature to become familiar with non-normative transitions that athletes may face. (McCoy, 2019, p. 236)

Customized practice

Practice

Encourage adaptability. Teach clients not to be slaves to goals and plans. Encourage them to be open and flexible while keeping in mind their highest priority in life. (Niles et al., 2019, p. 293)

Clients

Start with what the client wants. It is essential that clients choose their own direction for the interview. The practitioner may ask one or more of the following: What hopes do you have for today? [To establish a goal for the session]; What hopes do you have from today? [To describe a preferred future]; What will tell you that coming here was a good idea? (Miller, 2019, p. 259)

Process

Connect to daily life. Career counselling is only effective if in-session work is connected to the client's daily life. Counsellors should explicitly focus on this task throughout their work. (Domene & Young, 2019, p. 124)

Process of career development. Students should progress in their understanding of the processes involved in career development. Learning that there is a process involved in choosing and obtaining jobs may be facilitated by field trips or career days that allow children to learn about why and how others chose their jobs and how they pursued them. At the later levels of reasoning, children are able to understand specific steps involved in career development and attainment and to grasp the importance of career adaptability.

(Howard & Dinius, 2019, p. 169)

Career Development Practices

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Themes and Sub- themes (cont'd)	Examples	
Theory-based interventions		
Evidence-based	ige can be enhanced via evidence-based practice. Using theory and research from the PWF and PWT, selling can enhance specific change elements such as fostering critical consciousness and career tability. (Blustein et al., p. 72)	
Range	Consider a range of career interventions For instance, if the client is in the exploration stage or has recycled to that stage, you could consider from among the many exploration activities that are suggested in the career literature. (Watson, 2019, p. 452)	
Format	Realizing a collective project. The project completed by the group met the needs of a community. It helped counter isolation and allowed participants to be seen in terms of their skills. It also fostered learning and empowerment. (Dionne & Dupuis, 2019, p. 113)	
	MCC can be used with groups. MCC can be used in individual career counselling or in group counselling or career education workshops. In group settings, there are added opportunities for peer feedback and social support. (Healy & McIlveen, 2019, p. 157)	
Holistic	Acknowledge complexities in people and environments. People and environments can have characteristics of several RIASEC types. Practitioners encourage clients to consider environments with any combination of RIASEC types they resemble, not limiting their exploration to environments with an exact match to their Holland codes. (Nauta, 2019, p. 270)	
	Practice your capability to view the client and the counselling event in a holistic manner. Acknowledge that "everything affects everything else." (Spangar, 2019, p. 400)	
Integrative	Listen "for" stories. Use the integrated approach of career construction counselling to listen "for" clients' career-life stories rather than "to" these stories. (Maree, 2019a, p. 226)	
	Connect the concepts. The concepts of connection, disconnection, and reconnection provide a basic way of organizing your client's career story. (Popadiuk, 2019, p. 336)	
Systemic	Consider both internal and external resources. Not all problems (or solutions) reside within the individual. Changes in a variety of interconnected systems may help individuals to re-engage. (Neault & Pickerell, 2019, p. 281)	
Professional interconnectedness		
Colleagues	Create professional alliances. Alliances can help you to stand your ground in multidisciplinary teams, to inform colleagues about your profession and the role you play in your organization, or to claim the conditions or resources required for the professional practice of counselling in your workplace. (Viviers, 2019, p. 431)	
Lifelong learning	Adopt cross-training as part of your life-long learning strategy. If you are working with increasing diversity, the sources you typically use may not address all of the issues you face. Reading outside your field may provide helpful insight into thoughts or activities that others have used to address some of the issues you are working with. For example, some helpful areas to read about include creativity and imagination, cross-cultural communication, posttraumatic growth, neurocognition and brain plasticity, and story. (Poehnell, 2019, p. 326)	
Social justice advocacy		
Views of work	Describe one's optimal work situation in the context of one's current life. (Goyer & Dumas, 2019, p. 146)	
·	In talking to clients about their work, be sure to encompass care work in personal lives as well as market work. Calling attention to care work can validate this typically unconsidered and/or devalued aspect of clients' life experience. (Richardson, 2019, p. 368)	
Sociopolitical context	How familiar are you with the social factors in your society that are most strongly associated with social inequality? Understanding the primary sources of inequality and how these interconnect and compound disadvantage (for example, gender with ethnicity) is a necessary step to developing a practice approach that	

most vulnerable in your society. (Bimrose, 2019, p. 62)

responds to inequality. For example, examine rates of unemployment and the social characteristics of the

Career Dev	Career Development Practices		REVUE CANADIENNE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT DE CARRIÈRE	
Themes and Sub- themes (cont'd)	Examples			
(In)Equity and access	Examine the resources and the formal rights pertaining to guidance services. Consider whether or not students from targeted populations (e.g., female, socioeconomically disadvantaged group, ethnocultural group, or students with disabilities) are impacted by any inequality or have different access to, or use of, educational rights and resources, compared to those of their peers. (Picard et al., 2019, p. 316)			

Provide positive social advocacy for clients who are culturally diverse. (Pope, 2019, p. 346).

the effort needed, which could require an excessive amount of energy. (Viviers, 2019, p. 431).

More voices count. Collectively speak out for your profession so as not to individualize the challenges and

Professional voices