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CAREER EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS: REFLECTIONS ON ESF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION IN LATVIA

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Abstract

In Latvia, the issues of career education are most often addressed by school teachers. In 2003, the Standards of Teacher Profession adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia provided the list of teachers' duties, tasks, and specific skills. One of such skills is to help pupils to understand the professional activities and to teach them career planning. This issue is given insufficient attention in teacher professional education. The article aims to use the context of sustainable education to analyze the activities carried out within the National Program Project "Career Education Activity Provision in the System of Education" co-financed by the European Social Fund. The questionnaires were designed to determine the needs for teacher education in relation to learner's career education. The data were obtained from in-service teachers (N=228) involved in career advising activities for their pupils in all regions of Latvia and were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The results approve and elaborate on a necessity of integrating career education issues in the teacher education curriculum.

Key words: teachers; career education; general education; vocational education; educational needs.

Introduction

One of the directions stated in the *Basic Positions of Educational Development of Latvia for 2007-2013* to achieve the goals of education policy is the necessity to improve youth career education so as to motivate them to acquire further education and guide their career development. It has been planned to include career education in the long-term educational work program and facilitate teacher professional development for teaching career education in Latvia (*Izglītības attīstības...*, 2006).

The European community has expressed an intention to promote the formation of a Lifelong Career Support policy network. This initiative has been undertaken by 28 European states, including Latvia. By means of the open coordination, the network participants are to identify and define their common goals, apply the common indicators for measuring success, stimulate innovations, exchange the examples of positive practice, and develop mutual learning (*Jauns sadarbības tīkls*, 2007).

Since 2004, career education issues in Latvia have been in some way integrated in different stages of the educational system, initially as the requirements set forth in the normative documents of the Ministry of Education and Science. Hence, the section related to special professional skills of the Teacher Profession Standards (2004) adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science, describes the skills necessary for school teachers to provide career education at diverse stages of education. For example, at the primary education stage, the teacher needs skills to provide information on the possibilities of a profession and on career choices and ability to determine the pupils' aptitude and to enhance their talents; at the stage of general secondary education, the teacher needs skills to motivate pupils toward a conscious choice among career options. Furthermore, for vocational education teachers, the skill to cooperate with employers is emphasized along with the ability to reveal a link between career growth options and the acquired study program, thus binding the theoretical and practical components of the learning process (*Profesiju standartu reģistrs*, 2004).

The analysis of legislation and activities in the sphere of career (*Koncepcija "Karjeras attīstības atbalsta…",* 2006; *Mūža ilgumā pieejamu…*, 2006) shows to the rapid growth of career education in Latvia; yet it is the teachers' responsibility to react to these changes and carry out the career education in practice. Though teachers are open to changes, the formal decisions are sometimes hasty and their practical application immature.

Standardization in education and career education generally ignores the multi-faceted school context, disregarding the needs of learners and their teachers. According to Kincheloe (2003), it is necessary to help to develop the research skills of teachers so that they might become the initiators of change in education. It is also essential to assess the decisions taken on the national scale with respect to professional development courses and the associated higher education studies in order to help teachers prepare for their professional activities in the sphere of career education.

To implement career education, there is a need for qualified professionals and support from diverse institutions. Cooperation with community partners is of a major importance in career education; for instance, employers' opinions help to determine the competences necessary for the potential specialists.

Today education of any kind and, specifically, career education should entail the context of sustainability where the quality of education is measured according to the criteria of flexibility and adaptability; interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity; collaboration; experience; holism; local relevance; problem solving; future-orientation; action-orientation; learner-centeredness; system approach (Fien & Tilbury, 1996: 70; NSW EPA, 1996: 20, quoted by Institute of Environmental Studies, 1999: 16). Implementation of these criteria in career education would mean, among other that the content of the program would address both local and global needs. Nevertheless it is often rather difficult to adopt these criteria in formal education, because to implement the sustainable education, well-considered innovations in education policy, in educational documents and in teacher training programmes are needed in advance. Integrating the principle of sustainability in career education that entails planning and implementing solutions for future problems, the interaction of previous experience and social, economic, and environmental contexts also have to be considered (Grabovska, 2006).

In 2005, ESF National Program 3.2.7.1. *Support for Implementing Career Guidance and Career Education in the System of Education* initiated the project *Career Education Program Provision in the System of Education* (CEPPSE) aimed at

> *promoting the availability and quality of career guidance services and career education at education establishments of all levels and kinds in the context of life-long education by creating the system of career guidance professional qualification acquisition and development, improving the teaching and informative material provision in career education (ESF National Program Project CEPPSE*, 2007).

The project was targeted at Latvian teachers and other education professionals involved with the activities of career guidance and career education and implemented from June 2005 to December 2007. The course and the results of this project are reflected in the four stages of project activities:

First stage of activities (July 2005 – September 2005) envisaged to (1) determine the needs of teacher/career guidance professional education in all regions of Latvia; (2) discover the difficulties teachers face in the process of organizing and administrating career guidance and career education activities for diverse age groups; and (3) design the recommendations for creating a structure of teacher/career guidance professional further education program for diverse age groups.

Second stage of activities comprised the elaboration of program and designing of teaching aids for teacher further education.

During the **third stage of activities** the project team implemented the teacher further education program and evaluated the results of this program.

Fourth stage of activities, characterised in this article in brief, envisaged the creation of informative materials as well as online and electronic project related resources involving the experts from comprehensive schools, vocational schools, and higher educational establishments of Latvia.

Thereby, the present article in its core reflects on the results from studying teacher education needs and activities in career education that in its turn provides a proposal for elaborating and implementing teacher further education program.

First stage of project activities: Determining the needs for teacher education

Research methodology

The project activity *Designing the Basic Course and Specialized Courses of Teacher/ Career Guidance Professional Education and Presentation of the Results* was supervised by academic staff from the Daugavpils University. Project team participants from all regions of Latvia were then involved in data collection. A questionnaire was completed by a total of 228 teachers and career guidance professionals from Kurzeme, Vidzeme, Latgale, and Zemgale regions of Latvia (see Table 1) involved in career guidance and career education activities for grades 7 – 9, secondary school, and vocational schools. Twenty-three questionnaire forms were clearly misunderstood by the receivers; therefore the research results reflect the replies from the remaining 205 respondents.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to the region and place of work

Region	Respondents' place of work				
	Comprehensive schools			Vocational schools	TOTAL
	Primary schools (Grades 7 – 9)	Secondary schools	Primary schools (Grades 7 – 9) and secondary schools		
Kurzeme	22	2	13	1	38
Vidzeme	31	14	14	7	66
Latgale	25	9	1	7	42
Zemgale	33	10	8	8	59
TOTAL	182	23	205		

The data were analyzed by dividing respondents in two groups – the teachers from the comprehensive schools (n=182) and vocational schools (n=23). The number of respondents in these groups was determined by the proportion of comprehensive and vocational schools in Latvia.

The questionnaire focused on the needs of respondents in the sphere of career education. It consisted of 12 statements as well as allowed space to express one's opinion and comments for enriching work in career consultancy. Therefore, the research data were analyzed both in qualitative and quantitative way. Respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of statements on a 3-point scale, where 1 point means *not important*, 2 – *difficult to say*, 3 – *significant*. The authors calculated the average and weighted average for the importance of each of 12 statements in different groups of respondents. While evaluating the expressed importance of stated needs, it was assumed that the average from 1 to 1.95 points to rather unimportant of unimportant needs, but the average from 2.05 to 3.00 means that these needs were considered as important. The average from 1.96 to 2.04 (2±0.05) indicates to the needs that were difficult to evaluate.

All statements from the questionnaire were divided into two content aspects: theoretical and practical. The former includes statements related to the necessity of more extensive theoretical knowledge for organizing career education activities (1; 2; 3; 5; 11). The latter includes statements related to the necessity of practical skills (4; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 12).

Table 2. Statements of questionnaire

Theoretical knowledge statements	Practical activities statements
(1) Knowledge on relationships between individual peculiarities and requirements of diverse professions;	(4) Skills to determine pupil/learner's professional interests;
(2) Knowledge on how to determine the professional compatibility;	(6) The ability to determine the compatibility of pupil/learner's motives with the profession requirements on the part of community;
(3) Information on pupil/learner's professional motivation;	(7) Skills to determine the specific requirements of professions;

Sequel to Table 2 see on p. 72.

Sequel to Table 2.

(5) Knowledge on the contemporary professions obtained from the manuals for different professions;	(8) Skills to design educational and diagnostic programs in the field of career education;
(11) Skills to create non-conflicting program (suggestions) to reorient vocational students for another, more appropriate profession.	(9) Skills to design career education program for diverse age groups;
	(10) The ability to foster the pupil/ learner's conviction about the appropriate choice of profession;
	(12) Skills to assess the efficiency of career education activities.

In order to calculate the statistical significance of differences between two independent samples and two groups of statements (theoretical and practical) Mann-Whitney criteria were applied. Comments and recommendations of respondents were analyzed qualitatively evaluating the content of expressions.

Results

The analysis of data indicates that there is no statistical difference in respondents' answers among four regions of Latvia ($p<0.05$), therefore all the obtained data was analyzed considering the specifics of the groups of respondents and the classification of statements. Answers of teachers from *comprehensive education* show that it is urgent to enrich their knowledge of determining professional compatibility (2.92 on average), develop skills to determine pupil/learner's particular professional interests (2.75), gain more extensive knowledge on the relationships between individual peculiarities and requirements of diverse professions (2.67), acquire more information on pupil/learner's professional motivation (2.47), develop the ability to form pupil/learner's conviction of an appropriate choice of a profession (2.36) (see Table 3.).

Teachers working in comprehensive schools found it hard to decide how significant for implementation of career education are the skills to elaborate diagnostic and educational programs (2.01), assess the efficiency of career education activities (1.97), and determine the specific requirements of professions (1.96). The respondents had an idea that the administration of diagnostic activities and the designing of career guidance programs are complicated and labour-consuming process. Respondents found it hard to assess their theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

The results show that teachers/career education professionals do not consider important the skills to create non-conflicting program (suggestions) to reorient vocational students for another, more appropriate profession (1.11) and skills to design career education program for diverse age groups (1.48).

Table 3. Average and weigthed average of statements' importance

Average in the groups of respondents	**Statements**											
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**
The group of comprehensive school teachers	2.67	2.92	2.47	2.75	1.80	1.78	1.96	2.01	1.48	2.36	1.11	1.97
The group of vocational school teachers	2.74	2.87	2.66	2.58	1.99	2.02	2.01	1.97	1.51	2.38	2.43	2.04
Weighted average for both groups of respondents	2.68	2.91	2.49	2.73	1.82	1.81	1.97	2.01	1.48	2.36	1.26	1.98

The replies of teachers from *vocational education* were analyzed separately. Respondents' answers show that these teachers need more theoretical knowledge on determining the professional compatibility (2.87), relationships between the individual peculiarities of learners and requirements of diverse professions (2.74), they lack knowledge on the formation of professional motivation of learners (2.66). They also recognize the insufficient skills to determine the particular professional interests of learners (2.58) and to develop their conviction for having made an adequate choice of profession (2.38) (see Table 3.)

The comparison of the data coming from comprehensive education and vocational education demonstrates that the major needs in both places are: extending knowledge about determining the professional compatibility (weighted average – 2.91), skills to determine pupil/learner's professional interests (2.75); extending knowledge about the relationships between the individual peculiarities and requirements of diverse professions (2.68); and acquiring more comprehensive information on the professional motivation of learners (2.49).

In relation to the division of statements in the groups of theoretical knowledge and practical activities, it was discovered that there are no statistically significant differences between the importance of these two groups of statements ($p<0.05$).

The data in the *theoretical content aspect* reveals the respondents' positive attitude towards extending knowledge on determining professional compatibility, pupil/learner's particular professional interests, information on the relationships between individual peculiarities and requirements of diverse professions, as well as pupils/learners' professional motivation.

The results in the *practical content aspect* suggest that majority of respondents are not oriented to the acquisition and improvement of practical skills in the sphere of career education. The most important skills mentioned by teachers/career guidance professionals are the ability to determine the compatibility of pupil/learner's motives with the profession requirements on the part of community and skills to assess the efficiency of career education activities. This may be explained with the sufficiency of the practical experience of the respondents, yet unsatisfactory theoretical knowledge in educational psychology.

Table 4. Importance of statements for two groups of statements and two groups of respondents

	Theoretical knowledge statements					Practical activities statements						
	1	**2**	**3**	**5**	**11**	**4**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**12**
Average importance of statements for comprehensive school teachers	2.67	2.92	2.47	1.80	1.11	2.75	1.78	1.96	2.01	1.48	2.36	1.97
			2.19						2.04			
Average importance of statements for vocational school teachers	2.74	2.87	2.66	1.99	2.43	2.58	2.02	2.01	1.97	1.51	2.38	2.04
			2.54						2.07			
Average importance of statements for both groups of teachers			2.37						2.06			

The analysis of statements' importance regarding the theoretical knowledge and practical activities indicates that for both groups of respondents theoretical knowledge is more important than practical skills. The significance of theoretical knowledge for teachers can be explained by teachers' strongly perceived lack of theoretical knowledge in the field of career development that would not allow them to develop their professional skills.

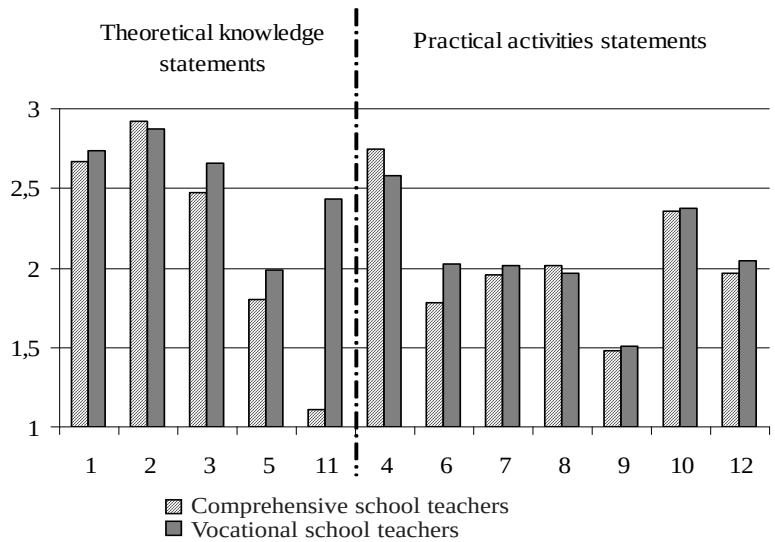


Figure 1. Importance of two statement groups for two groups of respondents

Teachers/career guidance professionals need to improve their practical skills to determine pupils/learners' particular professional interests and develop pupils/learners' conviction for having made an adequate choice of profession.

The analysis of data has brought out certain paradoxes, e.g. though the respondents did not consider it possible to carry out diagnostic activities independently and design career guidance programs for each age group, they were ready to work with pupils/learners using such programs if only they would be able to extend their theoretical competence and improve their skills.

The analysis of data leads to the conclusions that for efficient career guidance and career education implementation, teachers/career guidance professionals need (1) to extend their theoretical knowledge in the following spheres: career guidance and education peculiarities in diverse age groups, developing professional interests and motivation, determining the professional compatibility; (2) to improve their skills of enhancing their pupils/learners' conviction for having made an adequate choice of the profession; (3) to extend their theoretical competence and improve their skills, teaching materials, in order to be able to carry out diagnostic activities in career education and design career guidance programs for different age groups.

The analysis of comments showed that only 5% of respondents offered some suggestions. Respondents who replied to this open question basically acknowledged that they need information on profession market monitoring in Latvia and abroad. They expressed a wish to gain prognostic information on this issue for the next 10 years. It was discovered that respondents have a desire to establish a position of career consultant in their schools: *Pupils need to learn how to choose the occupation corresponding to their abilities as early as possible. We hope that in future similarly as to other countries the adequately educated and paid career consultants will be also employed in our schools.* Though the comments were not very extensive, in general they show that teachers are aware of the complexity of career education.

Second stage of activities: Guidelines and suggestions for teacher further education programs

Focusing on the study of teachers' needs, the group of academic staff of the Daugavpils University put forward suggestions for developing the content of professional career guidance program. They reflected both on specific psychological aspects of career education and on integration of the concept of sustainability. It was emphasized that the content of teachers' further education programs has to be connected with the peculiarities of certain age group, for instance:

- learners in grades 7 – 9 pay a great attention to discovery of their abilities and individual features as well as development of social contacts in micro-, mezo-, and macro-environment. Their interests are emotionally coloured and unstable;
- learners in grades 10 – 12 develop essentially different motivation of behaviour and focus more on social motivation. There is a growing interest about how to assess and develop one's individual abilities and gain more profound knowledge in the subjects corresponding to their future profession. Self-assessment and self-education are especially significant factors facilitating the personality development.

Elaborating further education program for teachers/career guidance professionals, it would be necessary to emphasize its orientation toward sustainability based not only on meeting the individual needs of learners, but perceiving these needs from the broader economic, cultural, social, and spiritual contexts.

The aim of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is to promote and improve the integration of education for sustainable development into the educational strategies and action plans at all levels and sectors of education in all countries. Education for sustainable development is a visionary approach to education that seeks to help people better understand the world in which they live, and face the future with hope and confidence, knowing that they can play a role in addressing the complex and interdependent problems that threaten our future such as poverty, wasteful consumption, environmental degradation, population growth, conflict and the violation of human rights (UNESCO, 2006). However it must be acknowledged that integrating the principle of sustainable education into the educational curricula in Latvia is at an early stage. Integrating principles of sustainability in career education enables orienting this education toward a more global aim that is not narrowly grounded on egoistic interests. Career education has to make contribution for the whole society helping every individual to understand his/her position in future.

Elaboration of teacher further education program

In the framework of CEPPSE Project, a work group under the guidance of DU researcher E. Oļehnoviča worked out the teacher further education program *Career Education Organization in General Education and Vocational Education Institutions* (2005). This program aimed to update the professional qualification of the career education support staff by acquiring relevant competences. These competences included organizing career education activities in general and in vocational education, work with informative and teaching materials, skills to select adequate and up-to-date forms and methods of work corresponding to the needs of successful adolescent/youth socialization and professional self-realization, encouraging pupils/learners to make conscious decisions concerning their future education and profession choices.

Content of program

The content of teacher further education program includes three parts:

- the basic course (32 hours) focused on organization of career education activities in general education and vocational secondary education entailing the theoretical basis of career education; career education planning and organization; pupils/learners' career development stages and competences; basic positions of career advising;
- the specialized course (20 hours) oriented toward the organization of career education activities in grades 7 – 9 entailing the methods of self-cognition; portfolio creation; pupils' competences in investigating education and occupation; pupils' competences in career planning; career education program elaboration; work with the teaching materials for career education provision;
- the specialized course (20 hours) for organization of career education activities in secondary school and vocational education entailing the methods of self-cognition; portfolio creation; secondary school learners' competences in investigating education and occupation; secondary school learners' competences in career planning and decision making; career education program elaboration for secondary school and vocational education establishments; work with the teaching materials for career education provision in secondary school and vocational education establishments.

Third stage of activities: Implementation and evaluation of teacher further education program

For the implementation of the further education program, teaching materials *Multiplicator's Portfolio* were elaborated in cooperation with Riga Teacher Training and Education Management Academy, Daugavpils University, Liepaja Teacher Training Academy, Latvia Agriculture Academy, University of Latvia, Professional Career Choice State Agency, along with the experts from Dobele State Gymnasia, Riga Culture Secondary School, Carnikava Primary School, Riga J. Poruks Secondary School, Talsi State Gymnasia, and Viesite Vocational Secondary School.

The materials were approbated in the further education courses for multiplicators in February – March 2006, at Daugavpils University. In the framework of CEPPSE project, 44 multiplicators from 38 regions of Latvia were involved in the further education program. Till the end of 2006 they delivered the program to more than 90 general education school teachers from 38 School Boards and 280 vocational school teachers, thus all in all the further education program was mastered by 3819 teachers from all regions of Latvia.

The results of teacher further education program

Implementation of further education program envisaged (1) the development of the theoretical understanding of career education and organization and planning of career education activities for grades 7 – 9, in secondary school and vocational schools; (2) the improvement of teachers/class teachers' competences for integrating career education topics in teaching school subjects and general education work, acquisition of methods and techniques of studying learners' professional intentions, improvement of skills to deal with information and teaching materials (Internet, profession descriptions, teacher's books and learners' work sheets, etc.); (3) the acquisition of methods and techniques for studying pupils/learners' professional intentions, improvement of competences of supporting and facilitating adolescents/youths in the process of selecting further education and potential career.

In order to clarify the achieved results and identify the possible problems in program implementation, 44 program participants (multiplicators) were interviewed by the end of the first stage of further education courses in February 2006, and by the end of the second stage in March 2006. The questionnaire entailed both quantitative and qualitative questions related to the content of program, assessment of lecturers' performance, and organizational issues. The significance of the program is illustrated by statements of teachers that express the views of the majority of respondents (full text available in the publication of Career Guidance Information Centre of Vocational Education Development Agency):

> *The benefits of the course are its high quality and practical teaching materials… new useful ideas for lessons, self-cognition, as well as web page addresses for acquiring information…*
>
> *I have gained lots of good ideas for motivating learners for further development and choice of profession…*

> *The course was focused on individuals and their needs. The acquired ideas are useful to improve the self-assessment of both learners and teachers. The elaborated materials are very useful for career planning, thus also for successful creation of the individual life base…* (*Mācās, lai mācītu*, 2006).

Fourth stage of activities: Teaching materials and informational sources

To ensure the sustainability of career education, improve the professional competence of teachers, provide them with the resources necessary for career education, the following items were designed involving more than 40 experts from comprehensive schools, vocational schools, and higher educational establishments of Latvia:

(1) teaching materials *Career Education for Grades 7 – 9, Career Education for Grades 10 – 12*, *Career Education for Vocational Schools* with teacher's handbook, CD, and work books for learners;
(2) informative booklets *Education after Grade 9*, *Education after Grade 12*;
(3) interactive web tests for youth: *Test of Interests*, *Test of Career Values*, *Test on Motivation, Test on Selecting Work Environment, Test on Relatedness of Academic Subjects with the Further Career Choice*, etc.;
(4) DVD materials: *Find Your Way: Career and Education Opportunities in Forestry*, *Find Your Way: Career and Education Options in Electrical Engineering and Electronics*;
(5) electronic data base of national education possibilities www.niid.lv;
(6) booklet *Improvement of Life-long Career Development Support Services*, *Career Education Support – Handbook for Policy Makers* (*Projekta KIPNIS rezultātu publiskuma apliecinājums*, 2007).

Teaching materials were approbated in the educational institutions of Latvia – both general education and vocational school teachers gave a positive evaluation to these materials and teaching aids as an essential support for career education activities. It was also emphasized that the teaching materials and other productions are available for general public at school libraries and on the Internet.

Conclusions

In order to provide sustainability of career education activities in Latvia, from 2007 to 2013 several important tasks have been designed for career education development related to including career education in the long-term education activity program, teachers' professional updating for career education, career consultant preparation according to the needs of the career development support system in the country as well as raising the capacity of responsible institutions, e.g. State Career Development Agency Career Support Department, improvement of the cooperation between social partners and public organizations, creation of information and career development support centres, etc. (*Izglītības attīstības pamatnostādnes...*, 2006).

These activities testify to the efforts taken for career education development, yet they do not envisage full involvement of higher educational establishments, neither is any research planned that would be coordinated on the national level. Thus, there is no answer to the question about the sustainability of the aforementioned activities and

teacher education activities in career education and the relation of these activities to the urgent needs of teachers.

Teacher further education program is meaningful if it is based on the urgent needs of the teachers and facilitates the development of professional competence. It is recommended to integrate the principle of sustainability in the content of each professional development program, involving the ability to evaluate basic positions of education policy, extend the understanding of career education goal and facilitate the development of the professional competence of teachers.

Accepting the idea of sustainability, the content of the study program must include not only the local but also the global context that emphasizes the close interaction and unity of all processes including the environment, social, and economic components as well. In the same way, for the assessment of study programs in the context of sustainable education, cooperation of institutions matters more than competition, in the case of which there is a tendency to ignore the idea that we all are interconnected in a holistic unity.

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