

# David Andrews on Careers Education in Schools

how careers education got started, where it flourished and foundered, and how it can start again

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22 October 2012

A question...

*'what is the relationship between careers education and guidance?'*

Some terms, like 'CEIAG', suggest - in one breath - a unity. Such talk implies that 'careers education' and 'information-advice-and-guidance' share expertise, and call for the same qualifications. The one might even be thought to contain the other - a dominant partner, and its ancillary support. A consequence could be that anybody with a lot to say about 'IAG' would not know that there was much more to say about 'CE'. They would be unknown unknowns.

We are at a stage in the history of careers work where that relationship needs to be sorted. And David Andrews helps to explain why it hasn't been - and helps us to see how it can be. The author is well positioned to do this. Like few others - Anthony Barnes is among the few - David's own career includes year-on-year experience of listening to students, designing programmes, developing material and managing classrooms. You need that kind of grasp on the reality to make sense of careers education's tangled history. His chronology sets out the twists-and-turns - from its twentieth-century hope, to its twenty-first-century condition.

The book treats careers education as having a distinct professionalism. At its best careers education has its own...

- rationale - its justifications for existence are its own
- objectives - it enables a distinctive range of learning outcomes
- methods - it characteristically manages stage-by-stage learning
- research - it rests on its own assembly of enquiries into how learning works

It's not surprising that so many prominent commentators miss so much of this. There is a lot to know - and more to know that we don't know yet.

## the history

This is how David Andrews' exhaustive, closely-observed and well-organised gathering of information helps. There are run-downs on government reports, significant organisations and influential voices. They form a chronicle of the coming-and-going of objectives, frameworks, roles, training, material, standards, requirements, monitoring and evaluation. It's riveting stuff - some policy initiatives coming two-at-a-time and pointing in different directions. Expectations range over national economic performance, across equal opportunities, and into personal-and-social well-being. Some initiatives originate in the public sector, yet others as private enterprises. The account sets out careers education's relationships with parallel initiatives - such as Personal Social and Health Education, the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative, the National Curriculum, Education for Citizenship, and Connexions.

The author acknowledges parallel work. And it's true that there have been other chronologies setting out the story of careers services, though careers education barely gets a mention. And there have been other examinations of the contested pressures on careers education, but with too little on the changing contexts in

which it sinks or swims. It's also true that there are other initiatives which share careers education's commitment to life-relevant learning, but they often have more to say about how to do it than whether it's worth doing.

*Careers Education in Schools* shows the work is bounced around by pressure, repositioning and compromise. It documents the results as being at times integrated, at times competitive, and at times splintered. It is merciless in its scrutiny of both the events and the wider contexts in which careers education flourishes and founders. Both its devils and its angels are in that detail.

### **a critical examination**

No aspect of careers work can be understood except in relation to its changing economic, cultural and political contexts. Every time anyone opens their mouth to speak about any aspect of careers work some allusion to that context comes out. Those conversations are with students, their families, politicians, colleagues, programme managers, business people, theorists and philosophers. This critical examination signposts the issues. They are for...

- stakeholders - who has an interest in careers education?
- interests - what is it that they seek from it?
- dissonance - can careers education hope to deliver on everything?
- credibility - what is supported by convincing evidence?
- ideology - with what underlying beliefs about what is valuable?
- dominance - what are the most influential interests?
- fairness - how do they affect those who most need career help?
- location - where in an overall programme can such learning be realised?

Understood like this careers education is not merely a welfare service in schools - handed to some kindly person who happens to be available. And this book's middle section provokes more demanding questions concerning...

*...who gets to do what?  
...on whose say-so?  
...in whose interests?*

They are not questions about how careers education can be saved, but an underlying search for what is worth saving. There shouldn't be many thinking teachers who would not be interested in that.

And I doubt that there are many aspects of schooling which are more exposed to such probing. Careers education must be among the most researched, scrutinised and manipulated in any curriculum. Whatever attitude other thinking teachers may take, careers educators would be crazy not to learn from that experience.

### **looking to the future**

This third section sets up a distinction between...

*'learning **about** careers and work'  
and  
'learning **for** careers and work'*

It deserves close attention. It raises questions about the value to students of not just competing for up-coming placement but also of exploring for unforeseen possibilities. And this helps to sort out where each of these most belong in the IAG-CE tangle.

Nobody was in any position to know what to expect of policy when, in 2011, the book was published. As it turned out not even the minister was. We know better now about how radically policy is prepared to reduce

careers work and reframe schooling. The position of careers education in schools may well be weaker than it was in 1965.

We need the account in *Careers Education in Schools* to show what has been tried, what has worked well, and what has failed to deliver. The book also shows how careers education was never as strong as it deserved to be. I wonder whether that has anything to do with its apparently ancillary role, which was never going to attract enough interested attention from the ablest in the teaching profession.

But we are where we are. And the book examines current policy statements which promise a liberation of schooling - both in its structures and its programmes. That gives careers education something to play for. But it won't play well unless it understands what is proposed, why, and where the levers for action are.

It seems to me that, if careers workers are to take their future into their own hands, the outcomes will depend more on the level and quality of professional commitment, and less on compliance with statutory requirements. For any education professionals who take this prospect seriously David Andrews' account is a unique resource. Each chapter is a rounded story. The references in each are themselves the products of assiduous search. The index is excellent.

An appendix sets out options for the future organisation of careers education. I don't know that I would recommend showing it to senior managers - they already have enough problems. But every school has colleagues who can be interested in the uses of education that this book describes. And it has enough scope to interest a teacher of any subject. So, instead of trying to distract pre-occupied bosses, look for a friend, get something going that looks more like a solution than a problem, and show them that.

If professional freedom means anything it means the ability to do that. It puts us in a new situation. It gives professionalism a new place to start.

Would you call that 'innovation'?

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**David Andrews: (2011). *Careers Education in Schools*. Stafford: Highflyers Publishing**