catching up with career management

whose voices are heeded? what interests are served? and who can afford hope?

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Career learning is how clients and students take on their own career management. The career-learning café is a place where their helpers take on the issues. And that work needs to be independent of professional and careers-service interests. It also needs to stand aside from political and commercial influences. So the café has no sponsors. It carries no advertising. It welcomes debate. And, as events unfold, it changes its thinking. You are invited to take part in that process.

This blog sets out the most recent contributions to that process. But, now, both education in general and careers work in particular need to go into how technological and cultural change is raising urgent issues for voice, interests and hope. They are policy issues. The account probes the political causes of career-management effects. It finds that big data and sociology are at odds on that. It shows why the future of career needs re-envisaging. And it probes what, in all this, yesterday's theory has to do with tomorrow's practice. Enthusiastic defenders of careers-work may not like it. But that's a good reason for studying it. A thinker's best friends are opponents, because not facing what goes wrong is a highway to failure. And all aspects of public-service education are facing that possibility. This is a sequence of signposts to new ways forward.

- **new questions demand new answers**

There's no shortage of reports urging the recovery of public-sector careers-work. The arguments are strong, but contemporary politics is not listening. It is the politics of individual responsibility, for achieving economic gain, by participating in a market place. It seeks private-sector solutions.

There is a backstory. The global commercial-and-political consensus entertains the possibility of unfettered economic growth. The damaging consequences range from the personal to the planetary. Policy characterises such damage as 'creative destruction'. The café's evidence is that valued and viable small businesses are lost, citizenship and worker rights are undermined, careers and social services are captured, the compliant are rewarded, the critical are dismissed, and society fragments. It is private-sector interests that are served. And the trend is accelerating.

education and policy - changing attitudes [BL39]
This is a detailed run-down on why public-sector careers-work is in such a fix. The article examines the interests influencing policy, the appeal to simple-mindedness, the confusion of reality with myth, the fragmentation of society, and the recognition of who is most at risk. It also suggests how fear can be transformed into hope.

what education gets from politics [BL38]
The article examines what policy does and what it fails to do for learning services. It separates stakeholder from shareholder interests, and it explains why it is stakeholder voice that careers work should heed. It wonders why so much of career talk is metaphorical, and how the images shape perceptions. It uses these insights to show how stakeholder interest are voiced. It describes how student voice is central. It shows how

educator voice connects to students. And it sets out how community voice can be activated with or without policy support.

is careers work distinct or extinct? [BL37]

This is a monograph examining how public-sector careers work can thrive alongside a global multi-billion-dollar private-sector career-coaching industry. The article begins by facing up to the bad news - diagnosing the threat of extinction. It moves on to examine how careers work can make a new start. It points to careers-work thinking, which careers coaching has done little more than cherry-pick. And that gives careers work an opportunity to start again - from scratch. It has done it before, it can do it again. The article points to the opportunity to re-imagine an altogether more inclusive, substantial and distinctive service. It is needed to enable people to manage the precarious work-life that is becoming the norm - people ready for anything in what is partially a foreseeable and but increasingly an unforeseeable future.

change in politics and education [BL41]

A careers work whose leadership fails to engage with change cannot survive. This monograph goes into detail on the realities of change. And it sees a way forward in a strategic repositioning of careers work in its communities. In particular it shows how local stakeholder interests can outflank shareholder interests. It examines the ways in which student-educator-community conversations can outshine any hokum. And it sets out how authentically credible voice will attract more constructive attention than merely plausible ploys. The argument is that such a re-negotiated way of working with students and clients in their communities will forge a more sustainable grounding for help.

which way is forward for students their educators and the business-world? [BL44]

Is there a business-world attempt to capture the careers-work curriculum? If there were, then no educator could afford to ignore it. This article faces the possibility, documenting how such attempts work, and pointing to the unresolvable conflicts that result. It cites and links to examples. And it documents how a prominent careers-work think-tank failed to recognise the danger. But the article also finds a stronger basis for partnerships between students, educators, and employers. And that means setting the partnership in a social-world. It reports how business interests are acknowledging that need. There are no heroes or villains here, just causes worth identifying and effects to be dealt with. One of the most telling conclusions is that genuine partnerships work best, not with 'how-to-do!' prescriptions, but with 'what-went-wrong?' diagnoses.

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- **enclaves and cities**

Collections of statistics which can analyse and order wide-ranging findings are called 'big data'. They are commonly used to track national trends used to influence governments. Among their uses is the backing they give to complaints that access to services is a post-code lottery. And in a sense it is. But such massive generalisations need to assume that what applies anywhere applies everywhere. And, in another sense, it doesn't.

There are realities that big data fails to find. They can only be detected up-close. Sociological observations find that what is welcomed in one neighbourhood falls flat in another. Where that is so there is no 'best practice', there is what local people recognise as relevant, useful and possible where they live. What serves some neighbourhoods harms others. These are post-code realities.

The sociological term for such realities is 'enclaves'. An enclave is where what the people believe, value and expect belongs to that location, and need not belong to any other. Inside the enclave understanding is shaped by that experience. Outside it is misunderstood. This is not economics, it's culture.

enclaves and voice [BL33]

This monograph examines how geography influences life chances. It is because what people mean by winning respect, or gaining self confidence, or experiencing freedom are understood differently in different locations. Each location frames its own memories, expectations & voice. And each has its own way of realising a stake in society. And of not realising such a stake. The monograph sets this thinking in relation to an extensive range of careers-work sociology. And it uses that mapping as a platform for suggesting research and development which must be made to work locally.

while nations fail and cities liberate it's shock that sets the agenda [BL45]

The article examines a new perspective on the importance of locality. It reviews fast-emerging thinking on the potential dynamism of city-grounded reform. It looks at the differences between how nations and cities develop policies. It cites evidence on why nations so frequently fail and cities increasingly succeed. It shows

how any careers-work leadership needs better to understand what's going on. The article probes what politicians do, why they disappoint, and how to test them for trustworthiness. It also shows why raising aspirations is the most demanding test for any education policy. But this means being open to the arresting meanings found in the resulting narratives. And it is that shock that opens minds to needed change. The article unfolds a dynamic radicalism which can carry education reform farther and faster. But it needs city specificity rather than national generality.

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- **theory for practice**

Careers theory is an applied not a pure discipline. Its ideas are, at best, second-hand - imported from original sources, largely in economics and psychology. Early-days UK thinking drew on a handful of US adaptations of such basic research. If UK careers work has a distinctive position it is because it reaches beyond psychological characteristics linked to economic possibilities. The UK account develops an understanding of career management as grounded in economic, social and cultural conditions. This is a distinctively wide-ranging explanation of what people do about work.

Any theory is conventionally validated by the reliability of its research. There is an array of methodological validity tests. But the only test that matters asks whether the reported causes have the predicted effects. And that is not found on library desktops, it is found in immediate observations. The grounded understanding of how and why things work is called catalytic validity.

The importance of the test is heightened where what is found is found on-line. Careers workers have attempted a colonisation of the net by exporting their ready-made theory-based techniques. The more impressive and more worrying career sites are unhampered by any attempt at theoretical justification.

Careers work makes itself most useful by closing all these gaps between thinking about causes and acting on effects. It means never talking about research without saying something about development. The unified concept of research-and-development makes educators and researchers mutually-dependent partners.

what educators can do [BL40]
The café's use of the unified term 'careers work' replaces the divided term 'careers education' and 'guidance'. The unified term undermines the possibility of making either activity ancillary to the other. And could there be some residual clinging to the idea that it is guidance that holds the core careers-work expertise? Such a belief would locate a teaching staff's command of learning disciplines as lesser than a person's hold on a limited application. This article argues that contemporary conditions demand the breadth and depth of both the disciplines and the application. It does that by signposting the untapped relevance to students' lives of so-called 'academic' knowledge. This account of what educators can do identifies and links to sources on how curriculum can enable students to navigate their path through a fulfilling work-life. It rebalances the relationship between curriculum and guidance. And, while the article acknowledges that not all teachers are up to shaping curriculum to such purposes, it also shows that some are ready - and that careers work only needs some.

on-line careers work as hit & myth [NICEC Journal 29]
This fully-referenced journal article examines what on-line careers work does well, the 'hits', and how some sites mislead and damage life chances, with 'myths'. It shows how educators are well placed to enable students to deal with on-line sources. There are three key concepts: helping students to 'grasp' understanding, which means enabling critical thinking; while extending student's 'reach' means enabling students to transfer on-line finds into off-line life; and 'embodiment' means the direct-and-personal contact needed to incorporate on-line learning into off-line identity. The article sets out a partnership between what can only be offered through face-to-face guidance and what can only be delivered through stage-by-stage curriculum.

careers education in schools [BL75]
A review, linked to its source, of one of the most influential publications on careers education. Written by David Andrews it sets out a past, present & future for careers education in schools. His key distinction is seminal - it is between learning about something and learning for something. On the one hand students can 'learn about careers and work', on the other they can 'learn for careers and work'. The distinction deserves close attention. It opens possibilities for education, showing that it is about more than competing for up-

coming placement, but can also explore unforeseen possibilities. David Andrews puts a finger on what kind of mutually-respecting partnership there can be between guidance and curriculum.

what's the use of impartiality? [BL66]

The article wonders whether careers work's claim to impartiality are credible. It finds an impressive definition in Canada: impartiality acts 'without fear, without favour and without affection'. The article wonders if any Canadian or Brit can sustain the belief that careers work has been so unshakably impressive. It also suggests that it might not matter, because it finds, documents and links to a bigger and more independent education professionalism.

theory and practice [video link on publications list]

This video shows me under interrogation concerning what a century of careers-work thinking has done for careers-work practice. My interrogator is pushy on whether the thinking is for description or for prescription. I'm also asked what is a theory anyway? I have a go at explaining why theories change. And I try to say why the difference between a professional's work on career-development needs to be distinguished from student's action in career-management. The interrogator allows me to track thinking, from career matching, into community interaction, and onto learning theory and critical thinking. When asked 'what next?' I say why I think it's the careers-work's uses of narrative.

why we need a career-learning theory   and now? [BL76]

The text of a lecture, with links to its sources, sets out operational steps to enabling learning-to-learn, as part of a programme of life-relevant learning. It probes what the theories say. It locates learning theory in the melée of career thinking. It acknowledges that the disturbances of critical thinking may be counter cultural. But It also illustrates how critical thinking is necessary to any conversation about working life. And it shows how that kind of conversation equips a student for control in the navigation of a path through working life.

narrative as a critical voice of experience in contemporary career management [BL77]

The text of this fully-referenced and linked lecture identifies the uses of narrative in commerce and in politics. It argues for the various ways in which careers work can also draw on the dynamics of narrative. It uses 'storyboarding', a technique with a wide range of applications, as an example. The thinking hinges on a distinction between analysis and narrative. The former appears to draw on scientific expertise, the latter is a natural human approach to understanding. There are issues concerning reliability and practicality to resolve. But that resolution is handed to community stakeholders and their partners in education, rather than to remote theorists or political interests or commercial shareholders.

the uses of narrative [Link lost; see BL69]

The article sets out the material used in a research-and-development workshop on the uses of narrative. It examines how displaying careers-workers' expertise needs to be balanced by engaging the authority of clients' and students' experience. What careers workers know is modified by what students know, and narrative is the medium for recognising that reality. There is a link to the presentation used at the workshop as well as to the monograph which underpins the work. The workshop invites educators into partnerships with careers workers. It encourages the different members to group and regroup in their search for an approach to using narrative which promises to be useful to their work. They look for how they can shape these uses so that they best engage student learning. The assumption is that no one way of doing this will be found - indeed more than one way must be found. All of the issues and findings are documented and subsequently made available to the whole group.

trail-blazing thinking for UK careers work

An educator who changed the direction of my life was Peter Daws; he died this year. But it was Peter who laid the foundations for a distinctive UK careers work. Nonetheless, Peter was no out-and-out defender of careers-work institutions. Long ago he wrote an article on its iatrogenic effects. He argued that enthusiasts need to consider the possibility that careers work can harm as well as help. The task is not to defend what it actually does but to figure out what needs to be done - and that makes the ideas, not the institutions, the priority. Ideas and institutions are not the same thing.

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A recurring distinction here is the Career-learning Café's distinction between career development and career management. The former is what educators do to help. The latter is what students and clients do about it. The one rarely exactly corresponds to the other. In a changing world maybe we should worry when it does.

Educators and careers workers, their managers and their leaders, need to catch up with the sense student and clients are making of their experience of learning and work. There is no simple answer to any of the questions, neither is there is any single answer. But any answer must take account of the politics of whose voices are heeded, what interests are served, and who can afford to hope.