
The
DOTS ANALYSIS
original version

Bill Law and A G Watts
National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling

The **Career-Learning NETWORK**

The Old Bakehouse
Elsworth, Cambridge CB3 8HX
www.hihohiho.com

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Bill Law and A G Watts
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The Career-learning Café
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In our view, there are four careers education tasks to be accomplished with each student, facilitating the development respectively of:

- opportunity awareness,
- self awareness,
- decision learning, and
- transition learning.

By opportunity awareness we mean the help which is given to students to experience and gain some understanding of:

opportunity awareness

- the general structure of the working world they are going to enter,
- the range of opportunities which exist within it,
- the demands that different parts of it may make upon them, and
- the rewards and satisfactions that these different parts can offer.

We mean opportunity awareness also to refer to the exploration of the different paths and strategies which are open (or closed) to particular individuals for gaining entry to those opportunities. And at the level of the individual we take it to refer to the combination of demands, offers and strategies which match (or at least do not mismatch) a particular individual's characteristics.

We have argued elsewhere that the opportunities to be covered in careers education should encompass not only educational and occupational opportunities but also leisure, community and family opportunities: in other words, that careers education should be concerned not just with occupational roles but with non-occupational roles too.

self awareness

By self awareness we mean the help that is given to students to develop their own sense of themselves as unique individuals, with personal characteristics which in some respects are like other people's but in other respects are not. It is to address the question 'what kind of personality it is that I take with me to implement in the world of opportunities that exist for me?'

- In part it involves an exploration of actual and potential personal strengths - qualifications, abilities, aptitudes, practical skills, personal qualities, and physical strengths.
- In part it is an exploration of limitations in these various respects.
- But it is also the exploration of personal needs, involving questions about what kinds of satisfactions are sought, what kind of interests are developing, what personal aspirations are being formulated, and what is most valued in one's experience of the world.

Some of the needs expressed by a young person will be deeply internalised and abiding, some will be specific to the situation and transitory.

The converse of the exploration of needs is the exploration of frustrations - what is experienced as antipathetic, irritating, dissatisfying. To some extent all of the curriculum and extra-curriculum of the school - and especially perhaps subjects like English, art and music - provide an opportunity for such self-exploration. In this study however we have focused our attention mainly on activities which are concerned with it in a direct way, and which relate to what we have called opportunity awareness.

To incorporate a self-awareness component into a careers education programme is to pay attention to the importance of the self-concept in the facilitation of career preferences and choices.

By decision learning we mean the help that is offered to students to understand the variety of ways in which decisions can be made.

- That might mean, for example, helping them to understand the various pressures, expectations and cues which are offered to someone in a decision-making situation.
- It might mean helping them to understand the various styles in which decisions can be made - ranging from impulsive to deeply deliberate - recognising that different people make different decisions in different ways, and that some decision-making styles are more appropriate for some situations than for others.
- There are also certain skills which students can acquire that will help them to make decisions in a manner more satisfactory to themselves - skills such as those of collating information and ordering priorities.
- At some point, too, individuals will need to take account of the risks involved in decision making - balancing the desirability of different outcomes against the probability that they will occur.
- And it seems to us likely that young people will need some help in learning to take responsibility for decision making, accepting authority and accountability for the running of their own lives.

What we are talking about here, then, are the skills and awareness that students need in order to integrate what they know of themselves with what they know of their opportunities, and in order to convert these two kinds of knowledge into an implementable decision.

The skills involved are mainly generic ones for which career decisions are but one area of application: our analyses have made some recognition of this point, but for practical reasons we have attempted comprehensively to log only those activities which are directly concerned with career decision-making.

transition learning

By transition learning we mean helping students to gain the awareness and skills they need to cope with the transitions consequent upon their growing up and upon the particular decisions they make.

- It could mean, for example, gaining some understanding of how school life is different from work life - more attractive and manageable in some respects, less so in others.
- It could mean helping the students relate what they are learning at school to what will happen at later stages in their lives.
- It could also mean helping them to acquire the skills and information they need to cope with the new situations they will meet - communication skills, interpersonal skills, budgetary skills, information about trade unions, information about supervisory patterns at work, and so on.

Transition learning is, therefore, concerned with helping the student to gain a realistic understanding of what will come later in his (sic!) career development, and to acquire the coping skills he will need to make this transition appropriately and successfully.

There may of course be considerable variations in the types of learning that are required by different students: transition to routine work in a factory may present very different problems from transition to undergraduate work in a university.

Moreover, different people approach these transitions with different advantages and disadvantages - for some the acquisition of communication skills may be a priority, for others the erosion of naive expectations may be more important. There is a case also for helping students to begin to anticipate the decisions which will need to be made after the initial transition has been made - for instance, whether to stay in the job one has originally selected or to try something else.

In general, we judge transition learning to be an essential element in careers education, anchoring the processes of opportunity awareness, self awareness and decision learning to future realities, and helping students to prepare not only for making decisions but also for implementing them.