The Case for Indecision

How might theories of career, learning and identity formation contribute to planning an effective Careers Education programme for Year 7 and 8 students?

A reflective case study based on selected texts, loosely structured interviews with teachers and focus groups with Key Stage 3 students

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Contents

Chapter		Page
	Title page	**1**
	Acknowledgements	**2**
	Contents	**3**
	Abstract	**4**
	Dissertation overview	**5**
1	**Introduction**	**6**
2	**Literature Review**	**10**
3	**Methodology**	**24**
4	**Findings**	**34**
5	**Conclusions**	**48**
	References	**56**
	Appendix 1: **Summary of data collection**	**64**
	Appendix 2: **Sample of transcribed interview**	**65**
	Appendix 3: **Sample of transcribed focus group**	**71**
	Appendix 4: **Listing of codes**	**72**
	Appendix 5: **Permission letter to parents**	**73**

Abstract

The literature explored and empirical data collected in this study suggest that this period of pre-adolescence in Years 7 and 8 could be a time for healthy indecision in terms of vocational development as students emerge from the fantasy choices of childhood.

The significance of social learning and family influence at this stage, suggests that active career exploration could be an essential task, possibly contributing to further uncertainty, a crisis of indecision and eventually commitment to a chosen set of values, which seem essential to successful identity formation.

Careers Education can be a marginalised element of the curriculum, and, especially in the early stages of its introduction in Years 7 and 8, could also suffer from being included in PSHE, which can be seen as a ‘low priority’ subject, by both students and teachers.

However, effective Careers Education could support exploration and vocational development, through enabling active and engaging exploration of prior learning and how the student has developed, what opportunities might be available to them, and various decision-making strategies. Narrative approaches might offer new resources to support this.

Non-specialist teachers involved in Careers Education may base their programmes on an intuitive understanding of their students’ needs. Through in-service training, a grounding in underpinning career and learning theory, could offer an opportunity to understand the significance of career learning in school, and to reflect on appropriate objectives, active approaches and engaging resources with which to plan an effective careers programme

Dissertation Overview:

The gathering momentum of 14 – 19 reform in education, with the promise of a more diverse and vocationally rich curriculum in Key Stage (KS) 4 and post 16, has led to some strong, if vague, policy pronouncements on the increasing need for good quality guidance, support and preparation for choice at the end of Key Stage (KS) 3 (DfES, 2003a). This has been enacted in the statutory extension of Careers Education to Years 7 and 8 (DfES, 2003b). This dissertation will explore assumptions about the purpose of Careers Education in Years 7 and 8, through an analysis of teacher and student perspectives, gathered in interviews and focus groups. In analysing the data, I will reflect on its relation to career and learning theory and models of identity formation. Finally, I will offer a set of 'fuzzy generalisations' and propositions (Bassey, 1999: 52) on the value of particular theories and models in supporting the planning and delivery of Year 7 and 8 career learning. There will also be tentative ideas for potential further study on new approaches to career learning, and evaluating effectiveness. The findings may be useful to school managers and teachers beginning to plan and implement new schemes of work in this curriculum area, to local Connexions practitioners and may be disseminated to interested school and guidance practitioners.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Rationale

My interest in this area is based on my own professional training in careers guidance, and in teaching. I had a suspicion that Careers Education for Years 7 and 8 would be a new development in many schools this year, and that it may need a different approach from that adopted for Year 9 upwards. I hoped therefore to acquire a deeper understanding, and tools which might inform my own delivery of in-service training or consultancy. As a result, the study is located at the meeting point of three contextual dimensions: recent educational policy development, changing concepts of 'career' and the experience of pre-adolescence (11 to 13 years).

Education policy 14 – 19

Successive consultation and policy papers on 14 – 19 curriculum reform have set out proposals for a more diverse and inclusive offer within the Key Stage 4 and post 16 phases (DfES, 2003a, 2004a). This is aimed at increasing motivation and attainment for all, including those pupils on the edges of engagement, who have not been well served by a narrow, academic and prescriptive National Curriculum. The 'league table' focus has recently been broadened to include wider vocational qualifications as well as GCSE and GNVQ attainment, although Tomlinson's more radical proposals (DfES, 2004a) for a single 'baccalaureate'-style qualification, available at different levels and through varied routes, have not yet been enacted.

Nonetheless, '14 – 19 opportunity and excellence' (DfES, 2003a) opened the way for a far greater degree of choice in the KS 4 curriculum and suggested a 'review towards the end of Key Stage 3, leading to the development of an individual learning plan (ILP)' (DfES, 2003a: Annex 5) for the 14 – 19 phase. The statutory duty on schools

to deliver Careers Education to Years 7 and 8 was introduced in September 2004 (DfES, 2003b) to prepare students for this. Documentary and web-based support for teachers responsible for planning this new programme is available. A National Framework for Careers Education and Guidance (DfES, 2003c) and a scheme of work (DfES, 2003d) offer objectives, activities and learning outcomes; but for some schools, this may not be enough to enable them to deliver an effective programme. The challenge for many schools will be to convert the Year 9 options choices form, 'owned' and used by school planners to manage the KS 4 timetable; into a student centred process aimed at planning and reviewing progress. Preparation in Years 7 and 8, through a skills focused and student centred experience, will be critical to the successful implementation of such a sophisticated and demanding process.

Twenty-first century careers

Globalisation is a widely recognised social and economic phenomenon of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Its effects, neatly summarized by Colley, are seen in:

> the introduction of new technologies, the advent of the knowledge society, and a consequent shift from industrial manufacturing to service provision, the intensification of competition at all levels, the transformation of hierarchical structures to flatter forms, the end of jobs for life, and the need for life-long learning (2000: 14).

An increasingly fragmented and turbulent work environment demands significant career management skills, 'to grasp opportunities, manage change and deal with success, disappointment and the unexpected' (DfES, 2004b: 2). 'Metaphors of uncertainty and risk, such as navigation and fragmentation' may be more helpful for

planning careers work than the traditional pictures of 'linear progression, such as ladders and pathways' (Colley, 2000: 14). Careers Education may be less about matching self to opportunity, than about finding meaning in life roles and 'grappling with uncertainty, ambiguity, ambivalence and anxiety' (Collin, 2000: 40).

The experience of early adolescence

Social commentators agree that the experience of adolescence for many young people is now longer and more difficult than before (Heaven, 2001: xiii). Recent studies of children and young people in Britain suggest that they already face more pressure in life than ever before, from increasing commercial exploitation and an education system that has ever higher demands and expectations. Fragmented family structures and pressures on teachers to deliver academic success can sometimes combine to deprive children of the emotional support needed to ensure their broader development (Pointon, 2004).

For some, the early years of secondary education can feel like 'marking time', with little sense of progress: a hiatus between the transition from primary school and the real work of examination courses, commented on by both Year 8 student and teacher here:

> "I don't feel I've changed." (student)

> 'Year 8's an odd year, 'cos they don't really have anything to go towards, … it's like 'Year 8 don't really count.'' (Head of Year 8)

These years, however, are still part of ‘a key life stage and formative period in the life-course’ (McNamara, 2000: 31), as the young person acquires beliefs about work, money and crucially, about themselves and their identity (Heaven, 2001: 51). While an element of fun and enjoyment is still appreciated in lessons, there is an increasing awareness of the need to learn about, and for the ‘adult’ world. Yet the time available to explore, and respond to, the world outside the classroom is heavily circumscribed by the need to prepare for external assessments in the form of Standard Attainment Tests (SATs).

Since vocational identity is an important element of personal identity, effective Careers Education, alongside Personal, Social and Health Education and Citizenship, can make a vital contribution to the development of self esteem and emotional maturity.

Summary

Recent educational reforms and unstable work environments seem to demand more complex decision-making in early adolescence, when young people are already contending with a variety of other pressures. The literature review which follows in Chapter 2 will develop these themes, as a framework for the analysis of participants’ comments in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Three main areas of exploration were prompted by the initial framing of the project and by the data collected as it opened up rich insights (Ezzy, 2002: 11), particularly into the influence of family in early adolescence. I have been influenced by a range of writing, in addition to those quoted in the text, on developmental career theory, career learning theories and decision-making. Models of identity formation and social learning in adolescence were newer areas of knowledge for me, but a more familiar body of research (Andrews et al, 2002, 2003; Morris et al, 2001) explored the policy requirements and practical constraints on the planning and delivery of careers education in schools. From these I have selected several key concepts and themes, which seem relevant and offer a critical context to the findings in Chapter 4.

Fantasy

Defined by developmentalists (Ginsberg et al, 1951; Super, 1979), this is the stage, up to around 11 or 12 years of age, when ‘pleasure dominates childish occupational wishes’(Ginzberg, in Killeen, 1996a: 31). Unconstrained by considerations of timescale, interest or aptitude, children indulge in ‘wishful thinking’, like these Year 8 students reported by their Head of Year:

> ‘they think they’re all gonna be footballers and pop stars’.

Although children’s career ideas at this stage are sometimes dismissed as unimportant by adults, for children themselves this stage is significant in that it recognises the possibility that they might become something other than that which they are. In later stages, occupational preferences become influenced by interests, capacities and values

(Ginzberg, in Killeen, 1996a: 31), and commitment follows much later, following a period of exploration and crystallisation. Super (1979) built these stages into a model of occupational choice as an attempt to implement a self concept in an occupation, by matching one's self-image to the images of people already in occupations in which one has an interest (1979: 151). At a time when a certain predictability and stability of working life was assumed, developmentalism saw the goal as being '*the* decision (author's emphasis): the choice of a stable career, for which everything else has been a preparation' (Killeen, 1996a: 31).

Subjective and objective careers

The effects of globalisation are widely recognisable in the continuous restructuring of the work place, at micro- and macro-levels. In the nineteen eighties, 'de-layering' led to organisational streamlining and restructuring on a major scale; and more recently sophisticated information and communication technology has created 'off shore' employment opportunities for the well educated, and cheaper graduates of developing third world countries. In response, western, post-industrial concepts of career have become more complex, looking beyond the focus of an individual's relationship with objective organisational structures. Increased complexity in career paths are recognised here by a teacher:

> 'there's a lot of new regulations. It's very difficult to explain a career path with all the changes, especially in education'.

These Year 8 and 9 students reveal an objective construct in defining 'career':

> 'manager, like going up, higher position' (Year 9 student)

> 'if you do a really good job, they ask you to move up and do something else' (Yr 8 student);

while a subjective career 'tells one's "own story", usually by emphasizing 'a sense of purpose that coherently explains the continuity and change in oneself across time', which is similar to McAdam's conception of identity (Savickas, 2002: 152). For example, the Year 7 teacher explains her purpose at work:

> 'I mean, I'd hate to get up in the morning and go to work and hate it. I mean that would just be the worst thing in the world, I think. That sort of thing in a job, and I'm giving something back to the children and know they're getting something out if it, you know…'

Identity formation

Identity development is dependent 'on the interplay of what young persons at the end of childhood have come to mean to themselves and what they now appear to mean to those who become significant to them' (Kroger, 2004: 19). For example:

> 'Obviously I had careers advice when I was at school, 'cos I wanted to be a nurse and "No, no you're too bright to do that", you know what I mean? So I suppose it's what others see, and what I can do …' (a teacher, describing her own career choices)

Social encounter and feedback from 'significant others', about who they are and what they might become, is thus an important element for the early adolescent in their

identity development, since ‘vocational concerns are an important component of the total ideological identity’ (Erikson, in Vondracek et al, 1995: 2).

Savickas’ interpretation of Erikson’s stages of identity formation (2002: 168) are set out in Table 1 below, and include the vocational implications for each stage, as essential elements for successful career management in adolescence and later life:

Table 1

Period	Relationships	Vocational effects
Infancy	Secure attachments with care-givers enable the child to learn trust and hope for the future	The young adolescent is able to plan for the future (career concern)
Early childhood	An increasing sense of interpersonal autonomy is learned through decision-making, negotiating and asserting one’s rights	The young adolescent feels in control and able to make decisions and act on them (career control)
Later childhood	Curiosity about the purpose of life leads to exploration of how significant others make choices	This enables the young person to assemble information and values to assist their own decision-making processes (career conception)

Period	Relationships	Vocational effects
Early adolescence	Solving problems and 'social recognition of a job well done' (Kroger, 2004: 28) leads to a sense of useful purpose and anticipation of success	Feelings of self-efficacy underpin mature vocational exploration and decision-making (career confidence)

In later adolescence, identity formation focuses on becoming aware of individual uniqueness and making a commitment to a set of chosen values. Role confusion can be avoided by finding a 'feeling of reality' preferably in socially approved roles. But uncertainty about who one is, and what one is to become, could lead to involvement with a clannish subgroup of peers in order to bolster a fragile individual identity; or developing 'a self-destructive or socially unacceptable identity in preference to no identity' at all (Sugarman, 2001: 96). It seems possible that some of the underachievement issues to be found in the current education system could be traced to incomplete or limited identity formation.

Indecision and identity

'Central to identity formation are crisis (or exploration) and commitment' (Heaven, 2001: 31). Marcia's four identity types (1966) illustrate a process of questioning and indecision (diffusion), leading to a crisis (moratorium), following which a commitment to a chosen set of values is made (identity achievement). This model offers the warning that young people who do not experience indecision and crisis may simply adopt, without question, the values of their parents (foreclosure). It is interesting to note that, in this model, indecision and confusion form a vital

component in healthy identity development. The teacher who commented on student indecision, with mild exasperation:

> ‘they’re not gonna know exactly what they want to do, and they’ll probably change their mind about twelve times, but it’s just getting them to think about it’

had obviously observed it at first hand, but had possibly not recognised uncertainty as an essential part of the process of exploration.

It would be naïve in the extreme to suggest that the school curriculum, or Careers Education, could make up for incomplete identity development, since from birth the process is heavily influenced by home background. However if any aspect of the school curriculum would benefit from being informed by developmental models, including Erikson’s and Marcia’s, it would be that which has a responsibility for helping the young people to determine their future progression. ‘Identity is a person’s life story: the key features develop through infancy, childhood and adolescence, so that by the time we reach early adulthood we have available to us the tools needed to enable us to fashion our life experiences into a coherent, purposeful and meaningful story” (McAdams, in Sugarman, 2001: 100). In school, the processes that enable students to focus on ‘telling their life story’, in all its aspects, should be well-defined, rich and powerful. They should include personal, as well as academic, review and target setting, and should be valued and supported within the curriculum.

Career learning theories

Also responding to instability in the socio-economic environment and complexity in decision-making (Law, 1999: 39), career learning theories recognise 'how earlier learning lays foundations for later, influencing what people learn and do' (Law, 1999: 36). For example, community-interaction theories (Law, 1999) 'explain career in terms of encounters which, for help or hindrance, shape the mental space – or frame of reference – that people use to map possibilities' (37). This is a highly significant model in the light of frequent references, from both teachers and students in the study, to the influence of family on career thinking. They highlight the significance of learning through social interaction, and offer strategies for building an enabling, as opposed to a limiting, mental map of the world, which could support this teacher's aim of:

> 'letting them know that they can, they've got the opportunity, they haven't got to do what mum and dad say, or do what their friends are doing, … definitely they can be whatever they like …'

The earlier DOTS 'matching' model (Law & Watts, 1977) still has a prominent and influential place in both policy documentation and in practitioner consciousness. It highlighted four themes for Careers Education: Self awareness, Opportunity awareness, Decision-making and Transition. However, its resolution was choice and it saw the student as largely isolated from outside influences. New-DOTS thinking (Law, 1999) extends this model into a learning process, including 'sensing, sifting and focusing' new information (Law, 2000a: 151), with a resolution in understanding, possibly 'change of mind' (Law, 1999: 39). It allows for an emotional, as well as intellectual, response to the process of career planning (Law, 2000a: 153) and

emphasises the need to make learning purposeful and transferable beyond the classroom, through helping students understanding how they can make use of their learning in the life situation (Law, 1999: 47).

Career learning, with an emphasis on developing process skills and resilient attitudes for navigating a unique life path, rather than Careers Education, the study of a range of possible occupations, might be a more apt subject for the modern curriculum. It is no longer enough to make that initial 'match' of self with opportunity and find that first 'fit' in a life or job role. The likelihood is that role and career decision-making for an adult in the twenty-first century will be a regular feature during an increasingly unpredictable lifetime: 'a personal journey through an assortment of opportunities that includes learning, work and career breaks, both planned and unplanned' (DfES, 2004b: 2).

Pragmatic rationality

The role of chance in vocational development has also been recognised (Vondracek et al, 1995). As an individual interacts with their environment in exploring and making choices (Killeen, 1996: 34), a wide range of factors, including instability, emotion, 'faulty' learning and assumptions, contribute an element of 'probability' and reduce the likelihood that determinism and logical rationality will play a major role in the choice process. Hodkinson's work (1995) suggests that much decision-making by young people is, in reality, based on a 'pragmatic rationality'. It can be opportunistic, partially intuitive, based on incomplete information and very much influenced by local context. This is illustrated by the comments of the Head of Year 7 recounting a conversation with one of her students, (although probably discussing an 'exploratory' idea, rather than a final choice) (my interpretation in italics):

> 'She (*a student*) said: 'Oh, my auntie's a hairdresser, I think I'll go and work with her' and (*I said*): 'Oh y'know, do you really want to do that?' (*student*) 'Well, I suppose it'll be alright.''

Social learning and self-efficacy

The 'capacity to realise that someone else's viewpoint is different from one's own' (Smith and Cowie, 1991: 335) comes along with the decline in egocentrism, typical of the younger child. It is this capacity which expands the possibility, and potential, of learning in a social context. Bandura (in Colledge, 2002: 218) highlighted the process of learning by observing models, and later Vygotsky (in Smith and Cowie, 1991: 353) proposed learning collaboratively with a 'more experienced' guide. Career learning and choice are emotional as well as intellectual, social as well as individual, processes and those who support them need an understanding of the social processes of learning, which are 'vital to the understanding of emotions, motivation and action' (Bandura, in Colledge, 2002: 216).

Bandura's concept of self-efficacy is the 'judgement of one's capability to accomplish a certain level of performance' (in Colledge, 2002: 223). It echoes Savickas' 'career confidence' (2002: 170), since self efficacy beliefs can influence decisions about whether to engage with an activity, how much effort to expend, how long to persevere when difficulties are encountered, reflected in this comment by a Head of Year (my italics):

> ‘Even in lessons they (*students*) think ‘I can’t put my hand up in case I get it wrong … whereas it’s actually building them up to say ‘well, have a go, y’know.’

It offers a more thorough background to our understanding of self confidence and career aspirations, and it also suggests strategies for influencing and enhancing self-efficacy beliefs, through social learning interactions which offer success and achievement.

Building a ‘mental map’

Constrained by age, cognitive limitations, and social milieu, each young person in Years 7 and 8 ‘sees a small range of possibilities because each person has been exposed to a relatively few opportunities’ (Krumboltz, 1999: 60), but this current ‘mental map’ of the world becomes merely ‘the basis for designing new learning experiences’ (60). Careers education at this age offers an opportunity to develop a broader picture of the world than that offered within the family, through a wider range of interactions and experiences. Through also recognising learning and achievement which takes place, and skills which are developed, outside of school, it could contribute to building both self efficacy and a wider and richer ‘cultural capital’ (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2003b) on which to base later decisions. In doing this it may also provide an opportunity to make links with the world outside school and promote transferability and skills for life long learning.

Policy requirements

Current 14 – 19 curriculum reform (DfES, 2003a, 2003e, 2004a) makes significant reference to careers education and guidance. Since the new curriculum will offer students far more choice at both 14 and 16, Careers Education and Guidance becomes ever more important both to the success of the reforms themselves, and to government economic and inclusion agendas. However the reform guidelines say little on the subject of Careers Education and this is possibly a missed opportunity to highlight career management skills as a foundation for life long learning. There is more reference to guidance, but with a presumption that its goal is 'the making of a 'correct' or 'the best' career decision, as a preliminary to the next stage' (Hodkinson, 1995: 4; DfES, 2003a), thus avoiding drop out and 'wastage' in the system. There could be a tension here between the longer term needs of young people for exploration and experimentation and the short term need to manage the curriculum effectively.

Practical constraints

Assistance for programme planners has been published as a non-statutory National Framework for Careers Education (DfES, 2003c), and a Scheme of Work (DfES, 2003d). These, for the first time, have given schools a steer on content and learning outcomes, but since time allocations are merely recommended (DfES, 2004b), Careers Education still vies with PSHE, Citizenship and other National Curriculum subjects for precious space on the timetable. This comment by the Pastoral Head illustrates it well:

> '… the problem, I don't know whether it's just our school or other schools, is at the moment we have one lesson, an hour, for PSHE, and in that lesson we

do PSHE, Citizenship and, obviously now, c-careers, so how much time we can actually, erm, give careers I really don't know to be honest …'

This scenario makes practical considerations as significant a feature of the planning process, as theoretical and conceptual ones. Most careers research focuses on the later years of statutory schooling, but if findings could be generalised to the early years of Key Stage 3, they would probably suggest wide variations in the quantity and quality of programmes on offer: 'over two thirds of (surveyed) schools (69%) displayed some major deficits in capacity' (Morris et al, 2001: 3) to deliver careers education and guidance (in Years 9 to 11). The underlying reasons for this lack of capacity are likely to affect the introduction of careers education in Years 7 and 8: namely a 'lack of clarity about the role and purpose of careers education … and a lack of wider understanding and general expertise, (which) meant that programmes (Year 9 to 11) sometimes lacked coherence and were not always connected with the wider curriculum in school' (Morris et al, 2001: 3). It is to be expected that developmental work in Years 7 & 8 will lag even further behind, given the newness of its introduction in many schools.

The inclusion of Careers Education within the Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) programme, as is so often the case (Barnes et al, 2002: 6), and the lack of a mandatory careers work element in initial teacher training, usually ensures it will be delivered by non specialists. The Head of Year 7 illustrates the inconsistency in her colleagues' approaches:

> 'Don't have too much time, but some staff look at it the week before and get extra things in, and others'll pick up the book on the day and go: "Whoa, we've got PSE this afternoon," and then forget about it again'.

A Careers Co-ordinator may have been responsible for the original planning, but only about half of these, in a recent survey (Andrews et al, 2003: 4), had a professional qualification in careers work. 'The satisfaction of helping young people' (Andrews et al, 2003: 6) may be a strong motivator for many PSHE teachers, as it is for many Careers Co-ordinators, but high quality learning experiences in the classroom also need to be based on sound theoretical understanding as well.

Making links between Careers Education and other aspects of the curriculum, would both enrich the learning experience for students, and reduce the burden on teachers to deliver yet another 'new initiative' (Ofsted, 1995: 26). For example, the Key Stage 3 National Strategy (DfES, 2005), referred to in more detail in Chapter 4, could offer significant support to developing careers learning, but finding the links requires an understanding of underlying concepts, and the time to negotiate and collaborate, and too often one or both of these elements is missing in schools.

Conclusion

The literature review has marshaled a context of theory, policy and practice against which to collect, understand and analyse the data. Increased policy interest in careers work, emerging subjective interpretations of 'career' and social models of identity formation and learning offer a background to the analysis which follows in Chapter 4. In exploring the purposes and planning of a Careers Education programme in Years 7 and 8, I was hopeful that, like careers practitioners, teachers also based their work on

theoretical, as well as practical and policy, assumptions. This underpinning knowledge may not always be conscious, as practitioners often do not seem aware of the theories they use to inform their actions (Kidd, in Collin, 1998: 82), but they might emerge through reflection and analysis.

Ozga suggests that ‘theories help us sort out our world, and make sense of it’ (2000: 43). They can be useful in providing structure: ‘a guide to action and help to predict what may happen next’ (2000, p 43). They offer language and frameworks of assumptions which help to place and make sense of participants’ comments, to categorise and analyse findings. However, assumptions can also restrict the horizon, and since unpredictability is also integral to the process of education, theory should be seen as a guide, rather than a straight jacket.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

In offering the story of my research process, this chapter will give a personal perspective on the quest for truth and how new knowledge is generated; on objectivity and the relationship of the researcher to the data; and on ethical considerations around respect for participants, and the pursuit of reliability and value. Finally, it will explain and justify, in this context, the methods selected, and the instruments used to gather the data.

Epistemology: generating knowledge

Education, learning and career management are rich, complex and unpredictable activities, open to a wide range of alternative ways of understanding. The interpretive paradigm of truth not being 'out there' (Rorty, cited in Hodkinson, 1998: 568) but a relative concept therefore seems an appropriate starting point for educational research. The positivist principle that "knowledge … acquired from the right use of reason is truth" (Brown and Jones, 2001: 21), and that truth is unchanging and the same for all, fails to take account of the richness, uncertainty and unpredictability of human experience. And the positivist insistence on 'large scale, quantitative information on effect sizes which will allow us to generalise' (Blunket, in Goodson and Sikes, 2001: xii) may seem to offer reassurance that the truth has been found, but actually has more of the feel of scientific 'testing', than the multi-tonal 'shades of grey', and every other colour, which are normally needed to describe the richness of human activity.

Truth, insight and meaning can be found in fuzzy generalizations (Bassey, 1999: 52), derived from "rich and thick" (Geertz, 1973) qualitative data, even when drawn from

a ‘single case’ study. Interpretation by both reader and writer will depend on individual perspectives and an integrity that recognises and minimizes the potential for bias. Insights and propositions offered around the findings within this case study may have value to teachers, school managers and careers practitioners, as a basis for reflection, action, debate or further enquiry.

In following an interpretist approach, I was aware that my perceptions of truth and reality, filtered through my experiences and vocabulary, may well be different from those of my research participants. I was anxious not to impose my horizons (Hammersley, 2002: 68) on participants, but try to understand theirs, based on where they were standing at the time, but also recognised that perceptions and ‘horizons change for a person who is moving’ (Gadamer, in Hodkinson, 1998: 568) and became very aware that both I and my participants were ‘in motion’, for example the Head of Year 7 reflected on the interview at the time (my italics):

> ‘you know, highlighting today (*the interview*), there’s a lot more things … that could be done, to make them (*students*) more aware.’

Most of my careers work practice had been with Year 9 students and older, but working with these younger students, at an earlier stage of development, I realised I needed to read more widely on psychological, cognitive and social development; and thus theories of identity formation and social learning emerged as important themes. This new range of texts and theory, in turn, made the data collection and analysis both more complex, and richer.

Ontology: how objective can research be?

In considering the "interplay that takes place between data and researcher" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 58) in both the data gathering and analysis stages, a discussion on objectivity is almost inevitable. Positivists would suggest that objectivity is best served by not allowing the data to become 'tainted' by the researcher. But understanding is always an interpretive endeavour and it would seem perverse, if not impossible, to try to keep 'self' out of the process (Reid, 2003a). Selection, organisation and interpretation of the data must be shaped by the ideas, reading and assumptions I bring to analysis. However rather than subjectivity and objectivity being mutually exclusive, it must be in the *pursuit* of objectivity, even if ultimately unachievable, that interpretive research is made rigourous and reliable. In declaring interests, defining key terms and striving for a balanced interpretation, I am aiming for as honest and transparent a process as possible, which also includes enough of the 'raw' data to 'enable the voices of those being researched to be heard' (Wilkinson, 2000: 79).

However, I felt that feedback to participants was also important (Brown and Jones, 2001: 43): the researcher is not just a passive observer or recorder of data. At times, I felt able to contribute to the learning experience of those participating both at the data-collection and analysis stages. Indeed it proved hard to resist the temptation to answer questions and offer ideas and comments in both interviews and focus groups. The discussions which followed were useful in gathering reactions to new ideas and suggestions, but I was careful to keep the balance of contributions from participants.

Methods, Instruments and Evaluation

The choice of a case study methodology was based on my interest in exploring an issue: Careers Education in Years 7 and 8, rather than an intrinsic interest (Stake, in Bassey, 1999: 29) in the school specifically. Supplementary material from two Year 8 interviews , from an earlier project in another school was also helpful.

'Consistent with the logic of grounded theory, this study did not begin with any explicit hypotheses to be tested' (Karp et al, in Ezzy, 2002:13). The literature review recognised the preconceptions to be found in existing theory and my own experience, but in my analysis of the data, I tried not to be constricted by these, but to allow the data to open up new possibilities for insight. Aware of what I did not know (Cohen et al, 2000: 270), I eventually selected loosely structured interviews, welcoming new insights that might emerge from the experience of participants, and the flexibility (Cohen et al, 2000: 273) to follow an individual train of thought, in response to initial prompting.

I had first considered questionnaires to generate qualitative data. However, they can also limit and restrict its quantity and depth (Cohen et al, 2000: 129). Audio-taped interviews seemed better suited to the purpose of eliciting views and attitudes, and studying purpose and planning processes; and, on a professional note, would offer an opportunity to bring the ethics and skills of guidance to the research context. Taping allowed 'attention to direction, rather detail' in the interview and 'intent listening afterwards' (Bassey, 1999: 81). Key members of staff, and student groups, were identified in discussion with school managers.

I found that my professional guidance skills adapted well to a slightly different purpose, so that the semi-structured interviews were enjoyable, challenging, and productive. Reflection on the collection process however, raised questions about the content of the data I was analysing: were these carefully considered thoughts, 'off the cuff' remarks or responses shaped by the questions, however open: comments that my participants thought I wanted to hear? It concerned me that this could make a difference to the final analysis, and as a researcher, I wanted to remain as true as possible to the original intentions of my participants. I have therefore quoted verbatim as much material as was possible and appropriate. And as analysis continued, I realised that 'meaning is not a thing or a substance, but an activity' (Ezzy, 2002: 3) and 'interviews are places where meanings, interpretations and narratives are co-constructed' (Ezzy, 2002: 100). My interaction with the data, was also an important part of the process.

Interviews and focus groups yielded 210 minutes of transcribed material, with 55 minutes of supplementary notes, from two earlier Year 8 student interviews (See Appendix 1 for a breakdown). Transcription in full (See Appendix 2 and 3 for samples) captured the nuances and uncertainties (Bassey, 1999: 82) of the dialogue, but was also as time consuming as expected. Although it limited the amount of material that could be gathered, transcription offered the stimulation and security of returning frequently to a bank of 'real life' comments, which, alongside published material, could not be overestimated as an essential source in the process of discovery. Data collection took place during the Autumn and Spring terms (2004/05), overlapping with early analysis and further reading, in a grounded approach (Ezzy, 2002: 7).

My initial reading helped me to open up areas for data collection, but the literature review itself was later shaped by insights which arose from the data and its analysis. 'Analysis is not a structured, static or rigid process, rather a free-flowing and creative one' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 58). It seemed possible to organise the data in several different, but still meaningful ways, even during the writing stage of the study. The listing at Appendix 4 shows how data was coded and gives an idea of how it was possible to both mobilize as well as fix meaning (Stronach & MacLure, 1997: 5). Findings thus emerged from alternate study of the transcripts and further reading of the texts: 'this shuttling back and forth between general propositions and empirical data is central to the process of discovery' (Ezzy, 2002: 15) and led to continually richer insights.

There was also an element of 'serendipity' (Fine and Deegan, in Hodkinson, 1998: 567) with the unexpected insights of Year 9 students enriching the process. My earlier intention to study KS 3 as a whole determined the composition of the student focus groups. This later proved a double edged sword, since it may have been more productive and authentic to have worked exclusively with students in Years 7 and 8. Nonetheless, the contributions made by Year 9 participants were easily identifiable in the transcripts, and offered useful comparisons, in terms of vocational maturity and understanding, with those of their younger colleagues. The Year 8 student perspective was also enhanced by material generated when the final focus group turned out to contain only one student (Year 8), and by two supplementary interviews with Year 8 students in another school.

However, for similar future projects, should the opportunity arise, I would certainly consider it more equitable and productive to work with year groups separately. I

would also aim to make sessions with younger students more active, possibly along the lines of a lesson, with activities designed to encourage discussion. This may also have the effect of making the sessions more difficult to record for later transcription. Video recording may offer a solution, and an even richer transcript with non-verbal communication available for analysis, provided practical considerations of 'camera positioning' and 'stage-fright' are also accounted for, and dealt with using technology to best effect.

Ethical issues: the pursuit of reliability

In the qualitative context, reliability might be translated as 'trustworthiness' (Bassey, 1999: 81). Honesty and transparency in documenting the research process, including set backs as well as triumphs, and explaining my relationship with the project, also contributes to the sense of integrity and reliability of the analysis and findings. For example, I might have selected a school with a strong Careers Education programme and willing participants with an interest, and expertise, in Careers Education and Guidance. This was not the case, since almost all participants were non-specialists, the Careers Co-ordinator's contribution to the planning process was limited and the data reflects a 'lay person's' approach. The choice of school was based on the offer of the Head Teacher, who had a strong belief in the benefits of Careers Education for her school and the desire to develop the provision. It was disappointing not to have any detailed comments from the Head Teacher, as, beyond the initial meeting, she was unable to commit time to the study.

Interviews and focus groups were transcribed in full, as faithfully as possible in order to minimise potential bias, as a result of unconscious 'selective attention' (Hinds, 2000: 49). The focus group transcripts were also summarized for clarity and

accessibility, and the summaries were shared with students. Transcriptions in full were shared with adult participants. This differentiation of approach, rightly or wrongly, was based on assumptions of interest and motivation to read and respond. It gave the opportunity for all participants to reconsider, check for accuracy, and offer further comment, although neither teachers nor young people took this up.

If feedback and emerging propositions, however fuzzy, are shared and 'opened up to criticism' (Phillips, 1993: 70), this can be an additional method of building in reliability. At a recent local conference for careers practitioners, I was able to share, tentatively, parts of the research analysis and findings with two groups of Careers Co-ordinators. In offering insights into the vocational development of Yr 7 and 8 pupils, and suggesting that Careers Education at this age was not about choosing, but about exploration and skill building, I was reassured by the ensuing discussions that I might be presenting some useful material. Through 'inviting practitioners to dialogue' (Bassey, 1999: 51) the research process was fulfilled and further enriched.

Ethical issues: respect for persons

'Participants' rather than 'subjects' (Reid, 2003a) is a far more appropriate term for this type of research and suggests a specific set of values, which carried through into planning and action. Following Bassey's suggestions (2002: 77) around safeguarding the ethical rights of people taking part in research, I sought permission from participants (including from parents where young people were involved: Appendix 5). I also agreed arrangements for the anonymity of participants and for permission to publish the final report, based on guidelines produced by British Educational Research Association (1992). Discussions took place at the start of the project, with the Head Teacher, and subsequently with individuals and groups of participants.

There were echoes here of the contracting stage of a guidance interview (Egan, 2002: 58) so that expectations around confidentiality, anonymity, agenda, timescales and activities were negotiated and clarified on all sides, building trust before collecting data. Having trained as a careers professional in the early 1980's, I felt a reassuring familiarity with some of the requirements of qualitative research. The skills and ethics acquired, applied, and updated during a career in careers guidance, management and staff development could also be appropriately transferred to the research process.

Ethical issues: the search for usefulness

Educational research needs to include a "moral commitment to putting learners in the way of a better lot in life through making some contribution to the effectiveness of educational processes" (Desforges, 2000: 2). While difficult to guarantee, enhanced understanding and positive action is the desired aim for the project. It is possible that even the process of data collection and discussion – through reflecting on and sharing perceptions within a relationship of trust – may have been helpful for those who took part (Schon, 1996). Certainly the interest and passion of the teachers involved, on behalf of their students, suggested a desire for the continuing development of career learning provision, for example, a further comment from the Head of Year 7:

> 'it's, y'know, highlighting that we need to, y'know, get some more of that sort of thing within the programme in the year.'

Consequently, I felt a responsibility to consider how to facilitate useful learning and action as part of the process, as well as in the findings, to enable effective outcomes

for the project, and was pleased when teachers began drawing their own links between careers work and other aspects of the curriculum.

However, Hammersley offers a salutary, but potentially daunting discussion of the possible negative consequences of research (2002: 48) – it might not be read by practitioners, or be given too much or too little weight, or the consequences of action based on it may not be cost effective. In 'politically charged situations' there may also be a temptation to give less than "balanced consideration", where the "'implications' of research findings (may be) used in battles among those advocating different policies" (Hammersley, 2002: 50). For example, the temptation to argue for extensive careers work in Years 7 and 8, on principle, was resisted in favour of suggesting a limited, but high quality introduction, supported by skill-building, identified and integrated within the wider curriculum. More detailed proposals along these lines will be explored in the final chapter.

Conclusion

Here I have offered a personal perspective on how knowledge is generated, and explained elements of my background and relationship with the project. I have explained and justified the choice of research methods in terms of the qualitative and interpretive nature of the subject. I have reflected on and evaluated the processes themselves, and explored some of the ethical issues considered as the project progressed. This provided a personal 'horizon' against which the data and analysis will be considered in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

'The role of analysis is to bring data together in a meaningful way to enable us as researchers to interpret and make sense of it' (Wilkinson, 2000: 77). Selection and reorganisation of the data led to a number of themes emerging where the data was richest and most powerful. For example, perceptions of career were provided by both students and teachers, while comments on the experience of teaching and learning, and the status of PSHE, while not automatically transferable to Careers Education, still offer insights into the management of potentially 'marginalised' subjects in school. 'One off' comments also proved significant, when placed in the context of a broader theoretical understanding. These themes also provided tentative proposals for practical follow up.

The qualitative nature of the research methods employed make it impossible to presume that these observations are representative, of either a majority of schools, or of a particular type of school. Their value will be in interweaving and interpreting them alongside a range of theoretical models, and suggesting 'fuzzy' generalisations, from which similarly 'fuzzy' propositions were drawn.

Perceptions of career

'Like so many words in the English language, 'career' is flexible and elastic' (Young & Collin, 2000: 1). This ambiguity is recognised by theorists and practitioners, but perhaps less so by young people and school staff. In the study, career was almost universally defined as a job, by both curriculum planners and young people, with assumptions of hierarchical movement: the 'objective linear pathway', shaped by 20th century, scientific ideas of the individual and the organisation (Collin, 2000: 36):

> 'what I'm gonna do and it's a job, when I leave school' (teacher giving a 'student perspective');

> 'I look at career as being something long term that you can move up in' (a teacher);

> 'good job, that pays lots' (Year 9 student).

The concept of broader life and role planning was not an idea that emerged spontaneously, which seems to bear out the suggestion that 'the challenge to the traditional view … comes largely from theorists rather than from empirical evidence' (Collin, 2000: 37). There was however agreement on the importance of enjoyment and happiness as a subjective response to the concept of career (my addition in brackets, based on the focus group discussion context):

> 'something you enjoy, something you work at and you enjoy really' (teacher);

> 'a career sounds more fun (than work), because you get more money and you can enjoy yourself at the same time' (Year 8 student).

> 'It's something you really, really like. It doesn't matter if it pays lots or little' (Year 9 student).

Work, on the other hand, was chiefly defined by students as ‘earning money’ and a conflicting view revealed an underlying distinction between job and career – expedience and satisfaction:

> ‘If you really need a job, it don’t really matter if you enjoy it or not. If you need it, need the money, you’ve just gotta do it’ (Year 9 student).

Vocational development

As expected, it became clear that Year 9 students had greater familiarity with the language and concepts of career management, and were more ready to take part in focus group discussions about both general ideas and their own plans. Whether this was a result of greater self confidence and social skills, or learning from the Year 9 Careers Education programme, it would be difficult to determine. The younger members may simply have been overwhelmed by group dynamics, although ground rules, and my own behaviour, were designed to allow equality of opportunity to contribute: through active listening, leaving pauses, and encouraging individuals. The focus groups also took place before any Year 7 and 8 students had had any specific careers lessons in the school year.

Evidence from their teachers suggests students in Years 7 and 8, however, revealed tendencies to fantasy stage thinking, although there is also evidence of career ideas originating closer to home (quite literally). The Head of Year 8 suggested:

> ‘it’s bricklaying or working in Tesco’s, …quite basic things, or pop star, that sort of thing’.

And the Deputy Head (Pastoral) offered a similar comment:

> 'it's the family. They are prepared to work in a hairdressers. They don't want to be the boss … that idea doesn't enter their mind'.

In individual encounters with Year 8 students, all had some thoughts around career ideas, and these supported the idea of transition at around this age between fantasy, and an exploration of what was 'close to home': jobs held by family members, seen in town, on television or at school. Van den Daele (in Killeen: 1996a: 35) suggests that family influence is such that 'social class of origin, and of peers, in this pre-adolescent phase, can influence the range of choices an individual is prepared to consider, by 'fixing 'a floor' below which options are excluded'.

Community inaction theory (Law, 1999), suggests that Careers Education could broaden out the range of experiences and ideas young people are exposed to. Building upwards from the 'floor', the 'mental map' could be extended in advance of the need to make realistic choices.

Family influences

As seen above, teachers were very much aware of the strength of cultural influences and experiences, including family, on career development and thinking, both overtly and covertly. Comments from two teachers reveal different types of influence:

> 'I had one lad who wanted to be a dancer, should have been a dancer. Dad had a building firm, Dad wanted to retire and hand it over.'

And a comment on instability in the work environment:

> ‘people changing jobs - … ‘cos obviously it’s affecting their home life anyway’.

Alongside strong family influence on students’ perceptions of their world, there also is evidence for potential identity formation going on through individual relationships in school, revealed in this interaction, recounted by a teacher (my italics to clarify the dialogue):

> ‘*A student said*:“Oh you have to go to university to be a teacher”, you know, *and I said*: “Well, you’re quite capable of going to university.”
> “Oh, am I? Oh you have to work really hard there!” *said the student.*
> “But it’s quite good fun!” *I replied.*

This seems to be an example of a teacher identifying and working with a student’s prior learning or ‘schemata’ (Hodkinson, 1995: 6) to raise aspirations and promote an equal opportunities approach.

Indecision and stress

One of the most significant comments about the purpose of Careers Education came as a negative. One teacher stressed the importance of not choosing at this stage:

> ‘so I think you’ve got to, at this age, not to make them say “right, this is what I’m going to be”’.

The idea that indecision is to be encouraged at this age, rather than expecting students to focus and make choices, would seem to support healthy identity achievement (Marcia, 1966) through a period of indecision and crisis. The purpose of careers education in this necessary crisis of indecision is to promote wide exploration, and also to recognise, and offer supportive coping strategies around the emotional effects of uncertainty. This Year 8 student had a note of frustration in her voice:

> ‘how do we decide what to do when we grow up? ‘Cos there’s a million and one things I want to do’.

The suggestion that careers education, and indeed education itself, can be stressful to pupils in this age group indicated an understanding of some of the pressures faced by young people currently (Pointon, 2004). One teacher was keen not to cause more stress (my italics, based on the immediate context of the interview):

> ‘It’s getting all that across to them (*the need for planning and motivation*) without stressing them out and making them panic’;

and to keep a

> ‘balance between stressing them out and letting them know what they can do’.

Career exploration

Even without a background of career theory, the teachers interviewed hinted at all three of the National Framework’s (DfES, 2003c) broad objectives for Careers Education. Self development was mentioned (my italics):

> ‘in the ‘new school’ (*induction programme in Year 7*) here, we look at what they’re bringing to us, we look at their strengths’ also in ‘profiling’, … how well we’ve done this year’.

There was also recognition that children’s career ideas change during primary school, an acceptance that they would probably continue to do so, and Careers Education could offer a useful opportunity to reflect on this dynamic.

Opportunity exploration and transition skills were being planned by the Head of Year 8, through a series of speakers on different career areas:

> ‘I think at the moment they should know what their options are’,

so that they would be able to plan ahead. Her experience as a teenager was that planning ahead ‘made life a lot easier’.

The encouraging finding here was that there was recognition, albeit unconscious, of the basic DOTS model of Careers Education (Law & Watts, 1977). The concern is that without further input and reflection, the significance of career exploration as a life-span process (Do Ceu Taveira & Moreno, 2003) may not be recognised. And intuitive, basic understanding may not become translated into an active new-DOTS (Law, 1999) programme. For example, gathering occupational information can become an exercise in sorting and sifting skills, through questioning the data, making comparisons and dealing with bias, rather than the simple data collection task that was planned:

> ‘I think they’ll quite like the fact that they (*the students*) can just take it in (*visiting speakers*), and they’ve not to sit there writing about it’.

Without an understanding of underpinning theory, and time for development, programmes designed by non-career specialists are more likely to offer a preparation for the stable occupational world of the 20th century, rather than the dynamic uncertainties of the 21st.

A common theme which emerged from interviews with all the teachers was an awareness of the broad economic and social background of their students, and the realisation that the Careers Education programme needed to widen horizons, for example, the Pastoral Deputy Head commented:

> ‘I think for many of our students … they don’t realise it’s a vast world’.

And the Head of Year 8 echoed this with:

> ‘I think it would be nice to let the children know what’s out there … it’s quite difficult to figure out what’s out there’.

In the focus groups, opinion was mixed about when was a good time to start finding out more about occupations, but opportunity awareness and careers information was frequently referred to, with an underlying expectation from Year 7 and 8 students of receiving categorical certainties, as in the following comment:

> ‘you should get taught like what jobs do, so we know what we have to do, … like learn about them things in our lessons and that’.

Raising aspirations

Teachers in the survey were clear that Careers Education should be aiming to raise aspirations above the levels learned so far, within the family and social background, for example this comment from the Pastoral Deputy Head:

> ‘They don’t want to be the boss … that idea doesn’t enter their mind. They just see themselves as a worker, and there’s nothing wrong with that, but I think from our point of view, it would be nice to think: ‘Oh, I can run my own business’.

Self-efficacy beliefs will influence motivation, effort, persistence and ultimately success (Bandura, in Colledge, 2002: 224) and teachers all commented on levels of self esteem in similar terms:

> ‘I think they almost let themselves down before they start. It’s self esteem, a lot of kids feel quite low.’

However the same Head of Year also described the school council as follows:

> ‘they’re, sort of, giving themselves a voice, giving themselves a chance to get over, y’know, their ideas, yes, and changing things’;

thereby highlighting another link between vocational development and the wider school curriculum, an opportunity, if managed effectively, for students to input to and influence the decision-making around them, and build a competent and confident identity.

Finance

A regular, and unprompted, item of most discussions, with both students and teachers, was finance, for example from the Head of Year 8:

> ‘They think especially about how much money they’re going to make.’

In one of the focus groups, ‘earning money’, almost in unison, was the prime element in discussions about work; and in an individual interview, a Year 8 student suggested ‘good job, no debt’ as her prime objective. This came as a salutary reminder of how closely vocational and financial planning are connected, and, given the rising debt levels in the country as a whole (Times, 2005), the wisdom of including financial planning into programmes even at this age.

Engagement

As in an earlier, similar but larger scale, survey, the students involved in my study were clearly unused to being seen as consumers, or being consulted on their experience of teaching and learning (DfEE, 1998b: 1).

Policy makers acknowledge Key Stage 3 as ‘vitally important years for laying the foundations for life-long learning and influencing the crucial decisions pupils will make at age 14’ (DfES, 2005: ‘Overview’). The National Strategy for this phase,

aimed at strengthening teaching and learning, suggests lessons should be enjoyable, and based on shared learning objectives (DfES, 2005: ‘Overview’). DfES sources suggest the strategy has had national success (DfES, 2005: ‘Raising standards’), since its inception in 2001, in raising standards in the main National Curriculum subjects. In PSHE, however, in the school in this study, there was little evidence of such pedagogical developments, indeed comments consistently suggested how little students enjoyed the subject, for example:

> GM: Is there anything different about it (PSHE)?
>
> Year 8 student: Yeah, it’s more boring.’
>
> Another Year 8 student: ‘We just sit on the back row and we don’t listen.’

Nor were students expected by teachers to be partners in their own learning, as comments from three different teachers revealed:

> ‘you (*the students*) do so many little things, that you don’t realise that you’re learning’;
>
> ‘They wouldn’t actually know that they were doing it, while they were doing it:’
>
> ‘We don’t tell the kids what it’s called’.

Year 8 and 9 students commented on the need for variety and engagement:

> ‘It’s the same thing every lesson’

> 'I think it's the way it's done, really. If you have class discussion, you're gonna get interested, 'cos you're gonna want to say your bit.'

Younger students, virtually unanimously, found even discussion less interesting and enjoyable than more active pursuits, like PE. The students involved seemed to understand that PSHE, in particular, was about preparation for their adult lives, and it seems hardly surprising that frustration levels rise, if they find the experience of these lessons tedious, unenjoyable and unproductive.

Managing 'marginalised' subjects

Finding resonance with previous surveys (Morris et al, 2001), there were numerous comments, and hesitation, from the teachers about the lack of time available, both for planning and delivery of Careers Education, for example, the Year 7 Head commented:

> 'It almost seems so much, and it's trying to fit everything in.'

The lack of status and regard for PHSE (and thus of career learning, when included in this slot on the timetable), was agreed by both teachers and pupils, but expressed in different terms. As previously quoted, pupils commented on the need for involvement, while teachers talked about a lack of significance and impact:

> 'I think PSHE has a bad ethos generally, 'cos it's generally seen as a subject that doesn't really do a lot.'

This is further explained by variations in approach from different teachers, (noted under 'Practical constraints' in Chapter 2), albeit within a common teaching framework, where different levels of interest, commitment and motivation led to inconsistency in planning and preparation among the teachers responsible. There was also a lack of reference to policy guidelines and resources available, for example the National Scheme of Work (DfES, 2003d) and the 'cegnet' website (2005). The danger inherent in a non-specialist approach to planning and teaching Careers Education is that teachers feel qualified 'because I've been there and been through it really' (Head of Year 7), and neglect to seek out specialist help from either the school Careers Co-ordinator or Connexions Personal Adviser.

Finally, the significance of informal relationships within the 'vocational process' was noted. These provided opportunities for individual discussions about aspirations and concerns in non-classroom settings. Clearly, the teachers relished this opportunity to relate to their students in a different way, and use their own educational and career stories as examples or illustrations. This powerful learning technique, identified by Erikson (1968), Bandura (in Colledge, 2002) and Vygotsky (in Smith & Cowie, 1991), could be employed more extensively to positive effect, especially if the role models are respected and 'significant' adults, like teachers and parents.

Conclusion

Initial disappointment about the absence of conscious, or unconscious, models of career theory being used as a basis for planning, gave way, on reflection, to an appreciation of the intuitive approach that the teachers in the survey had adopted. They started from where the young people were, understood their current situation and based much of their planning on the needs that they perceived. In the following

chapter, I draw conclusions around the purpose of Careers Education, and offer practical proposals for support and in-service training for non-specialist teachers, which might extend their understanding of careers work beyond this initial starting point. These proposals are aimed at enhancing the teaching and learning experiences for students and teachers, and raising the status of Careers Education in Key Stage 3.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Introduction

As the study progressed and fuzzy generalizations (Bassey, 1999: 52) emerged, it became clear that these would have most relevance for Careers Education planners and the Connexions practitioners who support them. This has shaped the format of this final chapter (Bassey, 1999: 80). The findings might also be of interest to other local Connexions managers, as part of our role is to support schools in raising the standards of Careers Education provision. Tentative proposals also emerged for possible follow up studies, and I have included reflections on my own practice as a researcher in the chapter on Methodology.

Implications for Careers Education programme planners

The selection of activities and materials by careers planners is likely to be influenced by their objectives for the programme. Potential objectives for Careers Education in Years 7 and 8 emerging from this study included raising aspirations, widening horizons and developing vocational and emotional maturity. But there is also evidence to suggest that *promoting indecision* is an important objective, as an essential stage in identity formation, and as a spur to career exploration. Through understanding, valuing and supporting indecision at this stage, Year 7 and 8 careers work could 'help them (students) deal with tolerating 'not knowing'' (Sonnenberg, 1997: 471). Their future working lives are likely to require flexibility, life long learning, and emotional resilience, demanding strategies for exploration, problem-solving and finding personal meaning, and activities and materials could be selected with this in mind.

Postponing focusing and choosing, in favour of experimentation, may also help to support adolescent identity formation, build self confidence and raise aspiration. A crisis of uncertainty and indecision seems to be a healthy stage to go through, before committing later to a set of chosen values (Marcia, 1966). However, it also seems important at this age for students to be recognised as making a positive contribution to the wider community, 'gaining an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count' (Erikson, 1968: 165). Within formal school review processes and informal conversations, positive feedback within a relationship of trust can have an influential effect on role identity, confidence and career learning. All teachers may have the potential to contribute in a positive way to this process, and whole school in-service training around career learning could have a potent effect.

Pupil focus groups in the study highlighted strongly the need for involvement and enjoyment in PSHE lessons. Careers work in particular demands this, if it is to promote a lively interest in having and managing a career, and in life long learning. Transferability could be a powerful tool of engagement, when students are helped to recognise contexts for the use of learning (Meadows, 1993), through building bridges between the classroom and the outside world. Narrative approaches might also offer engaging materials. Stories from parents, grandparents, or older adolescents could provide powerful lesson starters, with development activities that enable processing skills, challenging and learning from the lives, aspirations and decision-making of others. Activities like this could widen the range of role models, learning experiences and life-planning strategies available (Krumboltz, 1999). Through active exploration of their own story, perhaps of transition from primary school, or of family experiences and influence, Law's 'unified account of self-in-situation' (2003: 27), students may

also begin to understand and adjust some of the assumptions and prior learning that could circumscribe their later decision-making.

The strength of parental influence was recognised by all teachers, and is particularly strong at this age, before peer influence becomes more significant later in adolescence (Sugarman, 2001: 59). Social learning theory suggests home background is likely to have an effect on aspiration (Van den Daele, in Killeen, 1996a: 35), and probably decision-making styles, if not final career ideas. Widening horizons and raising aspirations is not automatically served by merely revealing a whole new world of opportunity. Encouragement and new learning about themselves and their development could help students, particularly those with limited social and cultural capital (Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2003b), to build the confidence and self belief, that these opportunities might be for them. Conversely, Roberts (1981) would argue that background and opportunity structures will limit individual choice, almost regardless of other processes of vocational preparation. Nonetheless, work with, and the closer involvement of, parents (Moon et al, 2004) at this stage could have important benefits. Offering parents information and insight into their children's potential choices and opportunities, alongside updates on progress, could help to support work in class, building a shared vocabulary of aspiration, life long learning, choice and decision-making. It might also offer reassurance to parents that 'supported indecision' is not inherently 'a bad thing', but a useful developmental stage which they can also help to support.

Moving on, it seems likely that a significant majority of teachers delivering Careers Education, as in this study, will be non-specialists. This has implications for the quality, consistency and coherence of the programme and its links to the wider

curriculum. The status of career learning might be raised, through allowing time for in-service training, whose possible content will be explored in the next section, and through careful selection of teachers with commitment and motivation.

Finally, even with effective Careers Education, it would be unhelpful to see option choices in Year 9 as a commitment to a single career path. Tomlinson made a convincing case for flexible paths within the proposed new qualification (DfES, 2004a). The reformed 14 to 19 curriculum allows some non-core GCSE's: Design & Technology and Modern Foreign Languages (DfES, 2003e), to be dropped and vocational options to be chosen. But if these choices are not to be socially divisive, or become an inescapable commitment, opportunity structures within schools need to be flexible enough to allow for review and redirection into other pathways, at later stages.

Implications for in-service training

The intuitive approach, adopted by non-specialist programme planners in the study, might benefit from the support of underpinning theoretical models of career development (Ginsberg, 1951; Super, 1979), identity formation (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966) and career learning and decision-making (Law, 1999; Hodkinson, 1995). This might offer insight into the rationale behind careers work, and enable links with aspects of the wider curriculum, including target-setting and review, and the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. Year 7 and 8 career learning might then be recognised as an integral part of the whole educational experience, rather than a 'bolt-on', additional initiative, with all the frustration and confusion they so often generate (Ofsted, 1995: 26). However, in service training time is often limited and focused on policy updates, or practical techniques and materials for use in the classroom. Sharing

the underpinning theory more frequently could help to raise the status of careers work in schools and offer non-specialists a deeper understanding of its purpose and significance. For senior managers, the theory also offers the possibility that a well run programme could raise self confidence and aspiration generally, with a corresponding impact on achievement and standards.

Wider promotion of policy and support material, for example the National Framework (DfES, 2003c) and scheme of work (DfES, 2003d) and the 'cegnet' website (NACGT, 2005), may help to enhance a more consistent, theoretically grounded, and reflective, approach to programme planning, and to replace the assumption that as a result of having a career oneself, a teacher is able to plan and/or deliver lessons. Much of the current education agenda is geared towards inclusion and national economic effectiveness (eg. DfES, 2004a), and 'Advice and Support on making learning and career choices' (DfES, 2003e), is relatively high profile. It is therefore somewhat surprising that time and resources for in service training continue to be so limited. A grounding in Careers Education could be made a requirement in initial teacher training, since on-line materials are now available (NACGT, 2005), and a specialist qualification made essential for Co-ordinators and planners.

During the process of research, I began to wonder whether the label 'career' was still helpful to planners, practitioners and students, in identifying and understanding the potential demands of future life and work. For the non-specialists involved in the study, 'Careers Education' often seemed to conjure up the idea of teaching 'about careers', and without in-service training, reflection and research, this can too easily take the form of passive lessons around occupational information. '*Skills for life*' or

'*Life/career planning*', although somewhat cryptic, might switch the emphasis to active skill development, and set career in the broader context of life role planning.

Follow up study

It is possible that narrative approaches could be helpful in offering active career learning with a subjective dimension. This could take the form of telling and reflecting on the student's own story, or using the accounts of others to see and understand one's own story. To create meaning from past experiences, could be helpful in the development of identity, and of vocational maturity, as 'to know who we are now, we must know who we were' (Sugarman, 2001: 103) and in the tasks of career exploration. There might be rich and powerful emotional appeal for the young adolescent in hearing (maybe through an 'interviewing' homework) from parents, or grandparents who may have more time to offer, about some of the life processes and choices they have experienced. There are also extensive resources in fiction and autobiography in different media, which might be used as teaching material for this age range (Law, 2003: 44).

The use of narrative in career learning could be a difficult area to research, as some of its potential effects on identity formation and vocational maturity may be longer term and difficult to evaluate, but this is true of most careers work (Killeen, 1996b). Criteria around involvement and engagement in the classroom might be valid as an immediate measure; but the richest and most appropriate form of study might involve a qualitative study of what and how students have learned.

While there is still much evaluation to be done on the effectiveness of Careers Education in Years 9 – 11, it might also be helpful to study the effect of the statutory

extension into Years 7 & 8. From other research articles (Morris et al, 2001; Andrews, 2002) and my own study, there is reason to speculate that the quality of provision could be variable, especially after only one year in force. A broad study of the effectiveness of Careers Education in Years 7 and 8 may be helpful after two or three years – looking at its effect on preparation for the Year 9 choices process. Evaluation might focus on the quality of the Individual Learning Plans produced during Year 9, as a result of extended career learning in Years 7 and 8.

Conclusion

I have found the study a powerful learning experience, getting to know at first hand, and in depth, the frustrations, pressures, and motivations of teachers of PSHE and Careers Education, reported extensively by Andrews et al (2003). The study has also offered an opportunity to revisit career theory and its relevance for planning active career learning at this early stage of adolescence. The power of social learning, and the potential value of '*becoming undecided*' at this stage have emerged as key findings. Through exploring the processes of identity formation, and reaffirming the need for engagement in careers lessons, the use of story has emerged as a promising new approach to active career learning. This is accompanied by the feeling that I have only just begun to explore its potential. We need to continue to ask how education in general, and careers education in particular, is preparing our young people for adult life:

> Trying to look ahead always reminds me of the tale of the parent complaining to the teacher on parents' night about new ways of learning in schools – the subtext pretty obviously being – "why isn't it more like the way I was taught in school – it worked fine for me" – the reply from the teacher "I have a choice

> – I can either prepare your child for your past or her future – which would you prefer?" (Collinson, 2004)

Looking ahead is fraught with uncertainty, but we need to offer Careers Education that helps young people cope with changing opportunity structures both in school and beyond, and with the social and emotional demands of a potentially more unstable and fragmented life path, where the key to finding meaning and progression could lie in more subjective reflection. The disappointment of finding Careers Education in Years 7 and 8 being planned with a minimal awareness of theoretical bases, was balanced by an admiration for the energy and motivation directed on behalf of students, and this too must contribute to their learning experience. The study has renewed my enthusiasm to contribute to the vocational development of young people, through this potentially valuable period of creative indecision and exploration. In support of school programme planners, I feel better equipped to mobilise an extensive 'toolkit' of relevant theory, policy and practical insight.

Word Count: 12,540

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Appendix 1 Summary of data collection

Interviews conducted and outline questions

Careers Coordinator (Autumn Term 2004)	15 mins	How will Careers Education in Years 7 & 8 be planned? What is your role as Careers Co-ordinator?
Deputy Head (Pastoral) (Autumn Term 2004)	25 mins	What is the purpose of Careers Education in Years 7 & 8? What do you hope your students will get out of it?
Head of Year 7 (Spring Term 2005)	28 mins	What is the purpose of the careers programme in Year 7? How do you think your students would define career? What status does PSHE/careers have? What approaches to teaching and learning are adopted in PSHE?
Head of Year 8 (Spring Term 2005)	32 mins	What is the purpose of Careers Education in Year 8? How do you think your students would define career? How do you build in career exploration? What status does PSHE/careers have?

Focus groups – composition

Focus group	Girls	Boys	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Total
1 (December 04) (40 mins)	2	4	0	3	3	6
2 (December 04) (20 mins)	5	2	5	0	2	7
3 (March 05) (30 mins)	5	3	3	1	4	8

The planned fourth focus group became a one to one discussion with a single Year 8 student (20 mins)

The study also draws on untranscribed material from two Year 8 interviews (55 minutes in total) conducted at a different school earlier in the year.

Appendix 2: Sample of interview transcription

Appendix 3: Sample of focus group transcription

Appendix 4 List of codes used in analysis

Elements coded:	Interviews	Focus groups
Action planning	A, B	1
Aspirations	A, B, C	3
Autonomy	C	
Career - definitions	B, C	3
confidence	B, C	
Decision-making	A, B	1
Determination	B	
Development	B	
Discipline		1
Emotion	C	1, 4
Enjoyment	A, B, C	1, 2, 3, 4
Family influence	A, B, C	1
Fantasy	B	4
Financial factors/money	B	3
Focus	B	
Form tutor role	A	
Heads of Year	A	
Indecision	B, C	1
Information/careers library	C	3
Interests	A, C	1, 3
Involvement/engagement	C	1
Links with curriculum	A, C	
Matching	B, C	1
Maturity	B	
Non-directive approach	A, B	
opportunity awareness	A, B, C	1
Options	A, B, C	1, 3
Planning	A, B	
Previous programme	C	
Progress File/profiling	A, C	
Real Game	A	
Reality testing	B	1
Relationships	A, B, C	
Review	A	
Role models	A, B, C	1
Self awareness	A, B, C	
Self esteem	A, C	
Self presentation	A	
Skills	A, C	
Status of PSHE	A, B, C	1
Stress	B	
Target setting	A, C	
Teaching and learning	A, B, C	1, 2
Time	A, B, C	
Transferable skills	A, B, C	
Transition	C	
Widening horizons	A, B, C	
Work related learning	A, B, C	1

Appendix 5

Dear

Careers Education is a very important part of your child's secondary education and now forms part of the curriculum from Year 7 at Xxx School.

With the school's co-operation, I am currently carrying out a study on the planning of careers education in Key Stage 3, and would be very grateful if you would allow your child to take part. In a twenty minute session on 15 December, I am hoping to hear from a small group of young people themselves what they would like to have included in the careers education programme. Their views would be valuable to both myself and school staff, but all their comments would be reported anonymously. If they were willing, I also hope to meet with them again on March 9th.

I would produce a summary sheet of the group's ideas each time and send your child a copy of this, and use their comments, anonymously, in my MA study. I hope to share ideas with school staff to information the school's review and planning process for PSHE.

If you have any queries about the project, please do contact me; but otherwise I will assume that you feel able to give permission for your child to take part.

With thanks,
Yours sincerely,

Gill Morrison
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