Tony Watts is probably best known for his role as Director of NICEC from 1975 to 2001, and for his work as an international policy expert on careers guidance, but in 1973, prior to establishing NICEC, Tony was Head of the Research and Development Unit at CRAC and he published one of the first articles setting out a suggested list of objectives for a careers education programme. This article examines his contribution to careers education policy, theory and practice over the 40 years that followed, from his work with Bill Law on the DOTS framework to his promotion of the Blueprint in several countries in the present century.

Introduction

‘Careers education’ is a relatively new addition to educational jargon.

(Law, B. and Watts, A. G. (1977) Schools, Careers and Community, 1)

This first sentence of the book which introduced the DOTS framework to the world of careers was written 37 years ago. Today careers education is a familiar term, not only in the UK but across the globe. It is, however, still open to different interpretations and what it describes is often given different labels in different settings. There is also no universal consensus about the position of careers education in educational policy and practice. This article examines Tony Watts’s contribution to the development of the concept of careers education and its implementation in policy and practice. Tony has made sure that it has stayed on the agenda for the past four decades: it is the responsibility of present and future researchers and practitioners to learn from his legacy and ensure that not only is the term understood, but also that educational policy and practice embrace its key role in equipping individuals to plan, construct and manage fulfilling careers.

Contemporaries of Tony, and those who were his students (I include myself here, as Tony was an occasional lecturer on the Postgraduate Diploma in Careers Education and Guidance at Hatfield Polytechnic that I completed in 1983), will read the article to check whether the author’s record accords with their recollections, in the same way that we are drawn towards travel articles about places we have already visited; but the benefit of placing this article in the journal is that it will remain accessible to future generations of careers professionals who will build on Tony’s legacy.

In researching this article, it has not always been easy to differentiate between work that can be attributed specifically to Tony and work that was accomplished individually and collaboratively with and by his colleagues within NICEC. While that presents a challenge for academic accuracy, it is at the same time a tribute to Tony’s capacity for fostering and encouraging the work of others, both within NICEC and the wider community of careers workers. In the article, therefore, I will examine Tony’s particular contributions to the development of careers education, his role in supporting the work of others and his tireless efforts in promoting careers education.

Pre-NICEC

In 1964 Tony was one of two co-founders of CRAC, the other being Adrian Bridgewater. In its early days the emphasis of CRAC’s mission was on providing careers information but even at that point it also saw a role in disseminating the best teaching and guidance practice (Smith, 2010). One of Tony’s first acts in supporting careers education in schools took place...
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during his temporary absence from CRAC, studying for an M.Phil at the University of York from 1967 to 1970. While at York, Tony attended a meeting held at Derwent College in the autumn of 1968 which was to lead to the founding, in March of the following year, of the National Association of Careers Teachers (NACT), later to become the National Association of Careers and Guidance Teachers (NACGT) and then the Association for Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG): before joining with three other careers professional associations to form the Career Development Institute (CDI) in April 2013. Ray Heppell, careers teacher at a boys’ grammar school in South Shields, had written a letter to the CRAC journal suggesting the formation of an association to bring careers teachers together. The meeting to explore this idea further was held at the University of York and Tony played an important role ‘behind the scenes’ in encouraging Ray and others in their ambition, which led to the inaugural conference of the NACT at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge.

Tony returned to CRAC in 1970 to head up a new Research and Development Unit. Around this time there was a significant increase in classroom-based careers education and schools needed new materials. CRAC editors worked with the Research and Development Unit to produce the Bull’s Eye series that was launched in 1972. Written by Tony Crowley, a careers officer in Hertfordshire, the first three titles were Choosing a Job, Finding a Job and Starting a Job. Later examples of curriculum materials, developed and published by CRAC, included the Decide for Yourself series by Bill Law, then of Reading University, and the Deciding programme, adapted from American materials that Tony came across during a Travel Fellowship in 1972 and produced in collaboration with David Elsom, then a careers teacher in Hertfordshire. David was later to become Vice Principal at Long Road Sixth Form College in Cambridge and for many years a director of CRAC’s flagship ‘Admissions to HE’ conference.

The 1973 CRAC annual report refers to careers education as a ‘subject which can justly demand time in the curriculum’. It was in this year that Tony set out a structure for careers education (Watts, 1973). He linked the growth in careers education to the increasing interest and application in careers guidance practice of developmental theories and the use of counselling skills. As he was to explain later, if individuals were to take greater responsibility for making career decisions rather than being passively dependent on the advice of ‘an expert’, then they would need a conceptual vocabulary and a set of decision-making skills to draw upon (Watts, 1996). Careers education is based on a premise that such understanding and skills can be facilitated, and perhaps accelerated, by programmes of deliberate intervention. This would not need to be undertaken in individual one-to-one counselling sessions: it could be done more economically, and possibly more effectively, in groups in classroom settings. In defining the concept of careers education, Tony suggested four basic objectives, which are worth quoting in full.

1. To help pupils to acquire vocabulary and knowledge for distinguishing: occupations; non-occupational roles, e.g. family and leisure roles; educational alternatives; personal characteristics, e.g. aptitudes, interests, values.

2. To help pupils to develop a knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses, and to understand the relationship of these characteristics to: occupational choices; choices of non-occupational roles; educational choices.

3. To help pupils to develop effective decision-making strategies and the skills for carrying them out.

4. To prepare pupils for the transition to their post-school environment and for the personal adjustment that will be required.

(Watts, 1973: 7-8)

Tony acknowledges that this scheme is adapted from earlier work in the USA (Herr and Cramer, 1972) and in the UK (Hayes and Hopson, 1971) but here we see the origins of the four elements that were later to become known as the DOTS framework. In the same chapter Tony identifies five main approaches to organising careers education in the curriculum, which remain broadly familiar today: through traditional school subjects; through social studies; through humanities, social education and moral education; as a course of careers education; as part of a course of personal, social and careers education, which may be delivered in tutorial time.
The DOTS framework

Law and Watts (1977) is frequently cited in bibliographies and lists of references as the source of the DOTS framework. Although this is technically correct as it was the first publication to list the four components of careers education as **opportunity awareness, self awareness, decision-learning and transition-learning**, the fundamental framework had been proposed at least four years earlier, as discussed in the previous section. It is also worth placing on record that the label ‘DOTS framework’ is not referred to in the book (Law and Watts, 1977) that introduced what has become the most widely known and used framework for careers education in many countries. It was only later that someone thought about rearranging the four elements into an order that produced an easily remembered acronym. When I was first introduced to the framework, in 1981 by one of the authors, Bill Law, another lecturer on the diploma course at Hatfield Polytechnic, they were called ‘the NICEC objectives’, which was highly appropriate as they were presented as part of one of the first NICEC projects.

NICEC was established in 1975, with Tony Watts as Executive Director and Bill Law as Senior Fellow. One of its first commissions, in 1975-76, was ‘Approaches to Careers Education in Schools’, funded by the Church of England Board of Education. Although the book that resulted from the project is frequently cited, the detail of the project is less familiar. This article provides an opportunity to summarise briefly this pivotal piece of work.

The Church of England Board of Education was interested in an approach to education which embraced the whole person and prepared him, or her, effectively for finding his, or her, roles in society. In early 1975 it set up a Careers Education Working Party to consider how careers education in schools could be encouraged. As a first step the group carried out a statistical survey but they then felt that it was important to supplement this with some case studies of particular schools; to reveal in greater depth what they were doing and to shed some light on the dynamics that underlaid the facts and figures. NICEC was commissioned to carry out a project in two parts; firstly, descriptive surveys of careers education in six schools; then two consultations with school senior managers, guidance staff, parents, careers officers, employers, trade unionists and former students.

Much of the book is taken up with the detailed descriptions of the careers education and guidance provision in each of the six schools. Where the findings are tabulated the various activities are classified under the now familiar four headings of opportunity awareness, self awareness, decision-learning and transition learning. Contrary to many people’s belief, this framework is not an outcome of the project. As we have seen, it existed prior to the project and was used as a framework to analyse the findings. The particular contribution of the project was to refine the four basic objectives set out by Tony four years previously, and to introduce easily remembered labels for the four elements. However, although the framework was used as a reviewing tool in the project, it has since become widely adopted as a planning tool. It is testimony to its strength that the four elements of the DOTS framework have formed the basis for every careers education framework that has been published in England since 1977, even if this has not been acknowledged by the authors of those frameworks (see HMI, 1988; NCC, 1990; SCAA, 1995; QCA, 1999; DfES, 2003; DCSF, 2010; ACEG, 2012). The four elements have also influenced the development of careers education frameworks in other countries within and outside the UK and are clearly recognisable in the Blueprint for careers (Haché, Redekopp and Jarvis, 2006), developed originally in Canada and adopted and adapted by Australia and several other countries.

With all the attention that the DOTS framework has received over the years, other parts of the project have been largely overlooked. The two consultations examined a range of issues concerned with the position of careers education in relation to the school and its wider community. The conclusions include a very useful four-stage developmental model for approaches to careers work in schools which deserves to be re-visited. Each of the four stages is divided into two sub-stages as follows:

- **Information**: ‘cardboard box’; clerical
- **Interview**: advice; counselling
- **Curricular**: occupational education; careers education
Bill Law later used a further development of this model as a basis for designing the open-learning material he wrote for the professional development of careers teachers (DES, 1990), but many of the other issues raised in this latter part of the book have not been picked up in subsequent work to any great extent.

Bill has always been concerned about the eagerness with which people have used what was designed essentially as an analytical framework for reviewing existing curricular programmes, as a prescriptive planning tool. He also identified the limitation of the framework, in that it relates only to the content of careers education, and not to the process. Eventually Bill went on to develop his career learning theory (Law, 1996), which introduced the concept of progression in career learning.

From careers education in schools to careers education in other settings

Tony's early work on careers education was based in the context of secondary schools and in the first decade or so of NICEC he continued to undertake projects in the sector but, as NICEC grew and new Fellows and Associates joined the organisation, Tony also took on the role, as Director, of supporting the work of colleagues. In these years it was Bill Law that took forward most of NICEC’s work on careers education in schools and in later years other Fellows worked with Bill, and separately, on school-based projects. The research and development moved beyond secondary schools to include, at first colleges of further education and then primary schools. Tony's role became one of bringing people together and offering support and encouragement. At the same time he explored the application of the concept of careers education, originally developed in schools, in other settings.

In the same year that the DOTS framework was introduced he used the four objectives to analyse careers education activities in higher education (Watts, 1977). Tony maintained his interest in careers work in the HE sector and later worked with another NICEC Fellow, Ruth Hawthorn, on a two-year project to evaluate aspects of the Enterprise in Higher Education Programme (Hawthorn and Watts, 1992). Some of the origins of the current work on employability in universities can be traced back to this research.

Continuing the theme of exploring careers education in settings that other NICEC Fellows were not working in, Tony also turned his attention to careers work for adults. Again using the DOTS framework to analyse the content of courses run for adults by educational and careers guidance services, he identified that several of those courses had a clear careers education function (Watts, 1980).

While venturing into areas that other NICEC Fellows were not working in, Tony retained his interest in careers education in schools. In 1983 he edited a book on work experience in schools, in which he argued that work experience is an experiential component of careers education, enabling an interplay between self-awareness and opportunity awareness and helping to prepare pupils for the transition into work (Watts, 1983a). The rising levels of unemployment at the beginning of the 1980s led Tony to examine the implications of unemployment for education in schools in general and for careers education in particular. When considering several different scenarios, he raised the question whether the role of schools is simply to prepare pupils for their place in society or whether it should also include equipping them with the knowledge, understanding and skills to help shape the future of society (Watts, 1983b). He suggested that the school curriculum might be developed to include something that he called ‘future studies’. This is an issue we in England would do well to return to now, 30 years on, when our school curriculum seems to be regressing to an age where the focus was on transmitting large bodies of facts about the past.

From the 1980s Tony developed the international dimension to his work and in the early 1990s he contributed to a comprehensive review of careers education provision in European countries. The review (Watts et al, 1994) found that careers education programmes had been growing in many parts of Europe, but were organised in different ways. In more recent times Tony’s work has concentrated on
guidance systems and policy across the world, but throughout this time he has continued to promote the importance of careers education alongside access to careers guidance and counselling. He returned to the provision of careers education in schools in 2000, in a presentation to an international conference in Paris. He argued that, while we have a clear understanding that careers education and programmes are now widespread across Europe, such programmes have yet to become embedded and effective. He went on to identify six underlying issues that needed to be addressed: timing; content; method; models of delivery; progression; and assessment (Watts, 2001). His examination of each of those issues provides a useful template for the work that still needs to be done.

Tony’s legacy

Tony has given notice that he intends to retire from all professional work at the end of 2014, after half a century of careers work. What is his legacy to careers education?

It is stating the obvious to say that we have a wealth of research reports, journal articles and books to draw upon. He has given us a conceptual framework on which to base our work. He introduced us to the main objectives of careers education and this definition has stood the test of time. We know what we are talking about. The labels may change: Tony himself dropped the ‘s’ from careers education around the turn of the century and started to use instead the term career education, reflecting the idea that individuals have one career that they construct, rather than several careers from which they choose. The term career learning is preferred in the FE and skills sector; career-related learning in primary schools and career management skills in several other countries, but there is a broad consensus around the overall concept. That is not to say that we will not continue to refine the framework. It has been argued, for example, that what we mean by career education could be more accurately described as career training, i.e. equipping individuals with a set of skills to manage their careers. I have argued that career education should be extended beyond learning for career to learning about career (Andrews, 2011).

But Tony has given us much more than a widely accepted definition. He has reminded us that career education is still not fully embedded in schools and other settings, and he has provided a template for addressing the issues that need attention if all individuals are to have access to the career education they need and deserve. In a recent conversation with Tony he said that theories and concepts do not date but policies and practice do. We will need to continually revisit these issues of implementation. We have the tools to do this. I will illustrate with one small example of the interplay between policy, practice and theory. In England the current government has removed from schools the statutory duty to include careers education in the curriculum. The Department for Education is placing greater emphasis on employers visiting schools to give talks to pupils (DfE, 2014). There is a danger that the curricular stage of the development of careers work in schools in the four-stage model set out by Bill Law and Tony (ibid) will be confined to the first of their two sub-stages, namely occupational education, and not include opportunities for students to examine their personal attributes, interests and values and to develop decision-making and transition skills. Returning to the theory will help to address these issues of policy and practice.

The other important part of Tony’s legacy is that there are now, across the globe, many researchers and practitioners who have been influenced by his work, his passion and his commitment to the cause. It is up to us and those that follow to take career education forward.

References


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