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The role of career development in
relation to the developmental contextual
position of young people in New Zealand

Considerations for Policy Development and
Career Services in New Zealand Secondary Schools

Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

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Abstract

This is a study of young peoples' career development needs and awareness and the relationship to personal development at the interface of school provision and wider economic, political and educational change that impinge on those relationships. It is theoretically embedded within the developmental contextual position of adolescent development, but much of the study is concerned with generating a comprehensive data base to inform policy development and practice considerations in careers assistance in New Zealand secondary schools.

It begins, therefore, with an overview of the analytical framework of developmental contextualism, and goes on to explore more fully the dimensions presumed to be operating in relation to the career development of New Zealand youth. In doing so, it contributes a multidisciplinary perspective, the essence of which it is argued, is an integral and necessary consideration in the provision of a developmentally appropriate and socially accountable approach to careers services in secondary schools.

An examination of senior secondary school students' career development characteristics and experiences to which schools are in a position to respond forms the central empirical study of the latter part of this thesis. School careers staff, parents' and students' believed that schools were important environments for young people's career exploration and development and that an integrated, comprehensive careers service was an acceptable responsibility of secondary schooling. The careers information bases in schools were considered to be well resourced. Other dimensions, including career education, career advice and career counselling were nominated the most crucial areas needed for improvement.

Limited opportunity for professional development and training in careers work was considered by staff to be the greatest barrier toward the provision of developmentally appropriate careers assistance. Other barriers included limited time allocation for careers work, low status in the school and unclear specifications regarding the role of careers staff and career services.

Parents did not feel adequately informed about the nature and role of careers assistance in schools and this was considered a hindrance toward constructive involvement with their childrens career development.

For the majority of students concern around career-related issues represented the source of considerable anxiety in their life. Careers assistance was highly valued by these young people, with most expressing concern about access to good quality careers advice and careers counselling. Limited access to specialised assistance at the personal level was reflected by students' self reports on measures of career development and personal coping resources. Generally, the young people reported that they had not engaged adequately in appropriate career planning activities; had few 'useful' career exploration experiences; possessed insufficient knowledge about the nature and requirements of the world of work or occupations; and were not particularly knowledgeable about what to consider in making career-related (including education, training and work) decisions.

Statistically significant relationships were found between scores on indices of career development and scores on a measure of how students coped with career-related concerns. While most young people approached career problems constructively, those students who were less likely to have engaged in useful planning and exploration and who had limited knowledge of the world of work generally were more likely to approach career development concerns non-productively, such as worrying about what might happen or closing oneself off from the problem.

Perhaps the most salient theme to emerge in this thesis is the conviction that the career development of young people is a social as well as a personal process. Both the individual and society have much to gain from the young person's capacity for realism and purpose concerning school and post-school pathways and ultimately in the possession of a beginning repertoire of personal resources to manage career transitions in future journeys during their adult years. Ultimately, the complex interaction of individuals and society in relation to career pathways demand school-based career services which are clearly defined in policy, operationalised in official documentation, adequately resourced in relation to personnel and training and properly integrated alongside existing school practices.

Acknowledgments

We live in challenging and inspiring times of change, many aspects of which are documented in this thesis. The process of writing about these issues has underlined for me the inseparability of human development and the developing context and how important it is to take seriously the irreducibility of human experience, not only in science, but also in policy and practice.

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