

The role of values ANTHONY BARNES

Anthony Barnes examines the central role of values in career decision-making and argues that we should pay more attention to values in our careers teaching.

Introduction

How well do we understand our own careers programme that we have designed? Deconstructing the careers programme is like analysing a novel. For 'story' read 'progression and sequence'. For 'characters' read 'qualities, skills, self-awareness and the influence of others'. And for 'plot' read 'needs, interests and values'. Of course, it is artificial to look at the constituent elements when the whole is so much greater than the sum of the parts; but it is only by looking in this way that we can discover whether some of the parts are missing.

Some time-starved careers programmes are understandably limited in their scope and ambition. Skills and interests-based careers work dominates. Young people are taught the procedures for applying for a job or a course. They learn about employability and enterprise skills; and they do 'matching' activities to prepare them for decision points in the system such as options in Year 9. What is often missing is any sustained examination of personal and societal values around the meaning and nature of careers and work. As important as skills and interests-based careers work is, so is careers work based on young people's examined values. As Martin Katz (1973) puts it, careers work is about fostering freedom as well as competence.

What are values?

Values are what people think is right and wrong, good and bad, desirable and undesirable. In other words, we can deduce from the values of an individual or a group what they are broadly 'for' or 'against'. What we also know about our values is that:

- they can sometimes remain hidden even from ourselves unless we find a way of making them explicit
- they can conflict with each other which can be a source of tension or stress in our lives
- although they are relatively stable in individuals, they do change over time as we grow and develop
- they can make a big difference to our sense of job satisfaction if we are able to express and 'live' by our values. (We also know that individuals can tolerate a certain amount of dissonance between what they stand for and the work they are expected to do!)
- they exist in large numbers in most people. Young people will probably not be able to live by all their values in the job they choose; but it is important for their wellbeing that they can satisfy their most highly-prized ones.

Values are different from but related to needs and interests. Katz points out that 'needs' are an expression of a person's motivating drive whereas values are usually described in terms

of a goal or a satisfaction that is sought. 'Interests' refer to the pleasure from performing an activity whereas values are about the worth of the outcome and the results of the activity, e.g. 'making money' could be a value while repairing machinery (as a means of gaining an income) would be an occupational interest!

Why is the role of values in careers teaching important?

As Wendy Patton (2000) points out:

'Changes in the future of career – in the way individuals engage in society through work – and in its relationship with other life roles prompt a re-examination of values and personal meanings in role involvement.'

The far-reaching economic, demographic, technological and social changes that continue to affect us make it even more important that young people need should examine and clarify their existing and emerging career values.

How can teaching about values be done well in careers education?

Teaching about values in relation to careers education is not easy. At a basic level, some young people will have difficulty with terms such as 'clarify' and 'values'. Other language can help: 'What is really important to you? What else?' It can also be contentious:

- Should teaching staff be expected to maintain impartiality and neutrality in any discussion of values? When should they be allowed to challenge other people's value sets?
- How do we deal with the situation where an individual is clearly uncomfortable about discussing their values in front of their peers?
- What about the consequences of poor teaching about values, e.g. not challenging young people who think that basing values on personal opinions and prejudices is enough?

Values clarification exercises have their place in careers education especially when carried out for a real purpose such as the build up to making an educational or career choice. The process of valuing in career decision-making involves several steps:

- Identify values
- Consider alternatives
- Make personal choices (prizing)
- Act upon those choices

A range of activities can help young people in this process including doing a work values questionnaire. Many examples of these can be found in careers book or on websites that can be adapted for different age ranges as required.

Group discussion is also a useful way of exploring values. Examples of interesting discussion topics include: Should men still see themselves as the main breadwinners for their families? How important is job security over the other benefits you can get from work? What value should individuals place on their own education? What is the value of motherhood? Should the Government take away the option of a life on benefits?

More in-depth discussion of values can come from talking with a personal adviser or tutor. Guidance practitioners with a particular interest in following this up may like to find out more about Colozzi's DOVE technique for helping individuals to explore their inner core values.

Another technique involves helping young people to rank and record their values. This involves providing students with a list of relevant values to consider and encouraging discussion of what they mean. Katz, for example, identifies ten values dimensions:

Money-income
Power-authority
Stability-security
Adventure-excitement-change-variety
Autonomy
Knowledge-new ideas
Altruistic service
Prestige-fame-recognition
Leisure time
Intrinsic activity interest

Amundson and Poehnell have devised a 'wheel' for helping individuals to build up a picture of themselves in a portfolio. It includes an exercise to rank the top 3-5 values that are most important to them. They are given a list of values to consider as well as extra spaces to write in any other values of their own that they have thought of themselves.



This variant of 'The Wheel' is used in the Careers and Employment Service at the University of Western Sydney.

It is worth considering the pros and cons of this approach so that you can maximise its advantages and minimise its disadvantages

Amundson's Wheel

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps students to understand themselves better • Enables teacher to discuss difference between 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' values • Use of a portfolio encourages reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have little opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the values listed although they will understand any values that they write in themselves • Students need to be reminded that their values can change and they should not rely on an old list of values stored in their portfolio

The opportunities to expand thematic learning approaches in the new secondary curriculum will also provide considerable scope for young people to explore their career values in a cross-curricular context. Possible topics include:

- Exploring 'sustainable careers for sustainable lives' in a themed learning project on the environment and sustainable development
- Applying the Olympic and Paralympic values to people's everyday careers and lives as part of a themed learning project on the London 2012 Games.

Values-based career learning checklist

- Where is values-based career learning taking place in the curriculum?
- Are the components of career learning sufficiently well joined up?
- How is career decision-making taught within the careers programme?
- Are values explicitly part of the decision-making model that the school uses?

Further reading

Amundson, N. & Poehnell, G. (2004). *Career Pathways*. 3rd edition. Richmond BC: Ergon Communications.

Colozzi, E.A. (2003). 'Effective techniques: Depth-oriented values extraction'. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 52,2,p180-189.

Katz, M. (1973). 'The name and nature of vocational guidance'. In Borow, H. (ed.) *Career Guidance for a New Age*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Patton, W. (2000). 'Changing Career: the role of values'. In Collin, A. & Young, R.A. (eds.). *The Future of Career*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.