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# **"SO YOU WANT TO BE A PILOT, SHORTY?" : A QUESTION OF CAREER GUIDANCE**

PETER KHOR SINN YEOU

## **Introduction**

You may think this is a strange title to an article but these were the words my Form Teacher (Secondary Four) said to me when he asked each one of us what we wanted to be and I replied, "I want to be a pilot." He took one good look at me, asked me how tall I was and uttered the above words in an incredulous tone. Then he rambled on for a minute or two about what a pilot's life was all about: "if you are a pilot, you have to wear a tie at all times . . . when you go to the cinema, you have to wear a tie also . . ." I came to the conclusion that he knew as much as anybody about a career as an airline pilot, BUT . . he was right about one thing — I was too short to be a pilot; I did not meet the minimum height requirement, plus a whole lot of other things as well!

This was the only instance I can remember when my teacher gave me some "guidance" (if it can be called this) on the subject of choosing a future career. In the end, it was left very much to me to decide my own destiny. I vacillated over the idea of being a lawyer (Perry Mason was a very popular TV programme at that time), much to the objections of my mother who was convinced that lawyers were an unscrupulous lot since they had to defend people they knew were guilty anyway (if only she had watched Perry Mason !). Instead, she deftly announced that I should be an accountant. Finally, I ended up as a teacher through a gradual dawning that it suited my interests and that it would give me the opportunities to exercise whatever talents I might have. However, I arrived at this point in a roundabout way. If only my school had given me more help.

## Need for Career Guidance

This leads me to the subject of career guidance, the importance of which was recently emphasised by the Minister for Education and the *Towards Excellence In Schools* report (February 1987). The school does have an important role to play in helping pupils to discover their real ability, special talents and interests, and with these in mind to guide them into suitable courses of study, and then on to suitable careers (in relation to parental expectations).

This is especially so in the case of Singapore where there is a need to enhance productivity and maximise our limited human resources. This calls for a better match between the right talents and the right job. And since career choice will invariably involve educational choice, helping pupils prepare for the world of work is, necessarily, one of the tasks of the school.

A further need for career guidance is highlighted in a study conducted by IE two years ago on secondary four pupils in 71 schools where the findings showed:

- 1) higher ability pupils were poorer in career orientation when compared to the Normal course pupils;
- 2) pupils were often unrealistic about their educational aspirations, job preferences and salary expectations;
- 3) school-leavers were generally found by prospective employers to be ignorant or lacking in job knowledge, job application skills and had no clear career directions;
- 4) few career guidance activities were practised and schools were lacking in both human and material resources to provide effective career guidance for their pupils, who consulted mainly their peers regarding careers.

(Khor, 1986)

It was therefore not surprising that two-thirds of the schools studied considered the need for a career guidance programme to

be urgent or very urgent. There is no reason to believe that the current situation has changed much. There is a need for career guidance in our schools.

It is fine to say all this, but what are we supposed to be 'guiding' our pupils into? What is 'career guidance' and how do we understand this in our local context? What does it involve?

### Career Guidance Defined : A Simple Model

'Career guidance' may mean different things to different people. Whatever it may seem to be, it is certainly (in my view) not a one time exercise or merely handing out career pamphlets or literature. Career guidance is:

a *developmental* process where at each stage of education (primary, secondary, post-secondary) pupils are helped in the development of attitudes, skills and knowledge which will provide them with the capability to explore, understand, and make informed decisions with regard to their own potential and prospective career.

There are three major areas of focus:

*Self-Awareness and Career Development:* the knowledge and skills an individual needs in order to plan and establish life-career roles;

*Career Awareness and Exploration:* knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences an individual needs in order to become aware of and actively explore the world of work and life-career roles;

*Career Planning and Placement:* knowledge and skills that assist the individual in the development and implementation of educational and career plans. The elements concerned here are mainly decision making skills and implementing plans to reach personal, educational and career goals.

All three components are mapped out and explained in the model in *Figure 1*.

In short, career guidance as one writer cleverly puts it is "seeing through Johnny and seeing Johnny through". Guiding pupils towards a better understanding of themselves in relation to the world of work should lead to their making informed career decisions and develop a realistic occupational self-concept in the long run. How best can we do this?

### Towards A Career Education Programme

The main responsibility of those involved in career guidance should be the provision of structured content that infuses all three components above in a career education programme. Ideally, this should be incorporated as part of the regular school curriculum with at least one hour a week teaching time set aside for it. Whichever way the school wants to conduct this, the programme should include the following:

- self-awareness and assessment of pupils values, interests, personality, aptitudes, talents, academic abilities etc.
- career awareness and exploration, by understanding individual differences in education and training needs; acquiring information about the occupational world and the economic system; exploring work related roles and settings etc.
- developing career decision-making skills; acquiring skills in developing options; gaining experience in making systematic decisions etc.
- how to develop career, educational planning and placement by identifying prerequisites for reaching goals; developing personal action plans to reach identified career goals; acquiring information and skills necessary to gain employment or further education or training etc.

**FIGURE 1**  
**A CAREER GUIDANCE MODEL**

**SELF-AWARENESS AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

**1. ACADEMIC PREPARATION**

- Choice of subjects like Maths, Science, Art, Music, Home Economics etc

**2. SELF-AWARENESS AND ASSESSMENT**

- Interests profile
- Self-concept
- Personal values
- Aptitudes: IQ, talents, personality

**CAREER PLANNING AND PLACEMENT**

- Decision making skills
- Planning for immediate period after school-leaving
- Educational planning in terms of right courses to take

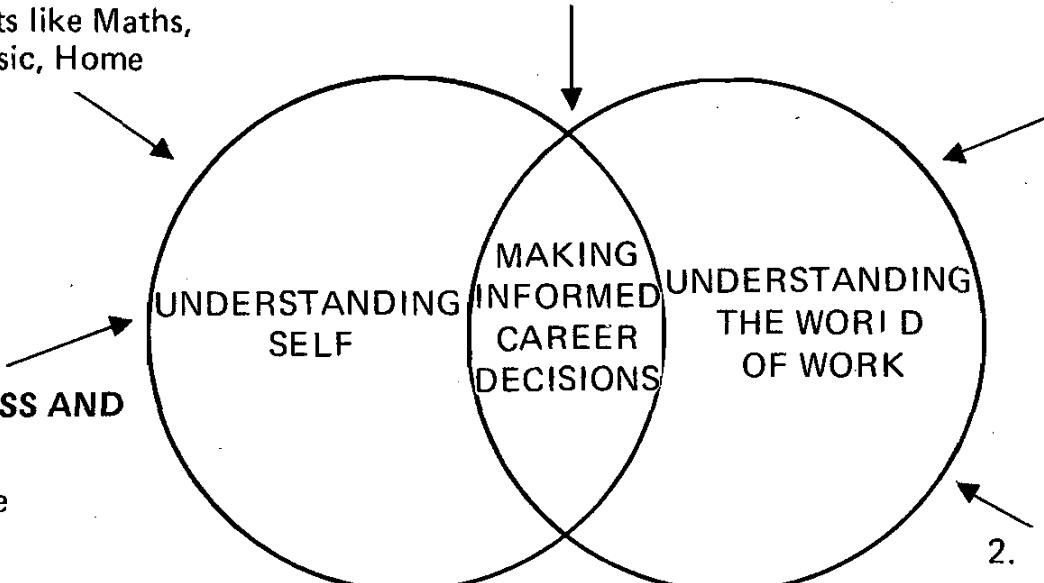
**CAREER AWARENESS AND EXPLORATION**

**1. OCCUPATIONAL WORLD AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM**

- Types of jobs and opportunities
- Acquiring job information
- Exploring work related roles and settings
- Developing realistic occupational concepts
- Knowing work environment, job prospects, entry requirements, remuneration etc

**2. TRANSITION SKILLS**

- Job application skills
- Occupational skills training



Curriculum materials can be found and adapted for local use. With some planning and organisation, it is not too difficult for a school to develop its own home-grown career education programme, tailored to the needs of its pupils. Ball (1984) and Rogers (1984) are useful introductory materials to start with in this respect. The important thing is that the school must see it as essential its role in career guidance to really make it work. Further, the programme should take into consideration collaboration with parents for their aspirations are important here. A career education programme may be one small step to take but this could be a giant leap (to borrow some famous words) for the individual pupil into his future world of work!

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