

Bill Law and his contributions to NICEC

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Bill Law's early work is reviewed. The training and development work carried out by NICEC under Bill's direction is outlined. Finally, his substantial contributions to theory and research are described.



Pre-NICEC

I first met Bill Law in the early days of CRAC, in the early 1970s. As noted in the history of CRAC by Smith (2010, p.61), 'the formidable Miss C.C. (Betty) Bather, who had been a supporter of CRAC from her position as a Personnel Manager for Courtaulds, was recruited to run a CRAC Schools Liaison Office covering South Western England'. She identified Bill, then a school counsellor at Lampton School in Hounslow, as a particularly creative careers practitioner. I was at this point Head of the Research and Development Unit at CRAC, and Bill and I started a series of discussions that led to CRAC's publication of his booklet *Decide for Yourself*, designed for use as a curriculum resource within a careers education programme. When in 1973 CRAC launched the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, we invited him to be a member of its Editorial Advisory Panel. During this year he was appointed as a Lecturer in Education at the University of Reading, teaching on a training course for school counsellors.

Much of Bill's early writing was addressed to the role of school counsellors. These had begun to be introduced in the late 1960s, based largely on the US model of combining educational and vocational guidance with therapeutic counselling (Hughes, 1971; Hamblin, 1974). Experienced teachers were seconded to one-year full-time university courses, initially at Keele and Reading and later also at Exeter and Swansea, to be trained to take up roles as school

counsellors. Bill's PhD thesis, completed in 1978 (Law, 1978c), was concerned with the conceptions held by these school counsellors of their role in their school. In particular, it focused on the extent to which they continued to identify with the role of a teacher or saw themselves as having a distinctively different role, and the extent to which this was related to what he termed 'system orientation' – legitimising the demands of the school upon both counsellor and client, and working in close partnership with the conceptual and formal organisational structure of the school. The project originated in dilemmas Bill had experienced in his own work as a school counsellor (Law, 1973; 1974; 1976). Based on qualitative data but also on a rigorous statistical analysis of questionnaires completed by nearly 400 school counsellors, it was a ground-breaking piece of work, resulting in a number of influential publications (Law, 1977; 1978a; 1978b). Unfortunately, school counsellors were one of the early casualties of the education cuts in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Meanwhile, around 1973-74 CRAC began to explore the possibility of separating its publishing from its research activities, with mechanisms to enable some of the profits from the publishing side to be used to support the research side, and also for this to be multiplied by resources from elsewhere. Accordingly, Hobsons Press was established to publish on behalf of CRAC, in exchange for royalties and licence fees. Some of these would then be used to support a new research institute, the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling, which would be jointly sponsored by CRAC and Hatfield Polytechnic (later the University of Hertfordshire) (for more detailed accounts, see Smith, 2010; Watts, 2014).

To launch and build the new Institute, the Polytechnic agreed to appoint a Senior Lecturer to work alongside me. We effectively head-hunted Bill, encouraging

him to apply, and were delighted when he was appointed following due process. It proved an inspired appointment.

Training and development work

NICEC started work in January 1975. Our aim was to advance the development of guidance services in Britain through a programme of education and training, and of research and development work. We were committed to a developmental approach to careers guidance work, together with recognition that this could not be satisfactorily divorced from a wider definition of guidance incorporating, for example, personal development and personal counselling.

We decided at an early stage that, as a National Institute, NICEC should not attempt to compete with the one-year courses for careers teachers, careers officers, counsellors and the like which by this time had been established at a number of higher education institutions. Instead, it should seek to improve the quantity and quality of short-course provision nationally. This was based on the recognition that for the foreseeable future most schools and colleges would not have even one member of staff who had been on a long course. Moreover, it was clear that a single careers teacher or counsellor could not possibly satisfy the full range of guidance needs in, for example, a large comprehensive school or college of further education, and that increasingly guidance work in such institutions would need to be organised on a team basis. Ways therefore had to be found of diffusing guidance skills more widely, using those who had been on the one-year courses not only as beacons of good practice but also as potential trainers of colleagues.

Bill accordingly created a Training Resources Centre on which providers of short guidance courses all over the country could draw. In particular, he developed a series of training modules – flexible packages of training strategies and materials – and then selected and trained experienced guidance practitioners to use these materials as members of NICEC's field staff. Each module provided training in a particular set of guidance skills, was designed to consume about six hours of training time, and was constructed in a way

which enabled it to be incorporated into existing courses or to be used as the basis for a short course in its own right. Topics covered by the modules included:

- Introduction to careers guidance.
- Co-ordinating a careers guidance programme.
- The use and abuse of occupational information.
- Collecting and interpreting information about students.
- Designing a careers education curriculum.
- Selecting materials for use in a careers education curriculum.
- Careers education in the classroom: methods and styles.
- Interviewing relationships and skills.
- Small groups in guidance work.
- The use of occupational interests questionnaires.
- Teaching decision-making skills.
- Careers guidance with disadvantaged students.
- Integrating careers guidance with the community.

By 1977-78, 46 field staff had been recruited and trained, and links had been established with Dundee College of Education and Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic to act as regional centres for the organisation of NICEC modular training. Field staff seminars were held to enable the field staff to share and evaluate their experiences and develop their skills. Bill had become the centre of a very extensive web of activity.

In addition to the training modules, Bill edited a termly *NICEC training bulletin* (later retitled the *NICEC training and development bulletin*) aimed at those in training and development roles all over the country. Then in 1977 he helped to establish a Careers Education Resources Centre at NICEC's base at the Bayfordbury annex of Hatfield Polytechnic, which teachers and others could visit to see the full range of available careers education resources, and which provided support to other institutions seeking to develop similar centres (27 were listed by 1980-81). Reciprocal links were

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also established with a one-year course in careers education and guidance established elsewhere within the Polytechnic, with Bill doing some teaching on that course, in exchange for which the staff appointed to teach the course – Eileen Tipper and Tony Crowley – were released to spend time on NICEC activities.

Alongside this work, Bill developed a further distinctive set of activities linked to an organisational development approach to guidance work in schools and colleges, seeking to develop them as guidance communities both within the institution and in their links with the wider community. A significant stimulus to this work was provided by a seminal project carried out for the Church of England Board of Education (Law & Watts, 1977). The main project involved analysing six schools in terms of the activities and experiences they provided which potentially or actually helped students in making their career choices and in preparing for the transition to work. Attention was paid not only to formal careers guidance activities, but also to relevant features of the curriculum, of extra-curricular activities, and of links with parents, local employers and the wider community, including the relationship between these features and the general philosophy of the school. As we shall see later in this article, the DOTS model developed as a research tool for this project proved highly influential as a planning tool.

As an additional part of the Church of England Board of Education project, two consultations were carried out in collaboration with the Grubb Institute of Behavioural Studies, in each of which representatives of a variety of agencies concerned with helping students from a particular school in the transition to work – the school's management staff, its guidance staff, the Careers Service, employers, trade unionists, parents – examined their respective roles in a dynamic way. While the project used the consultations as a further research tool, it gave NICEC an opportunity to explore ways of applying organisational development techniques alongside on-site training to guidance work.

These activities attracted a great deal of national attention, and in 1978/79 were extended through the award of two substantial external grants. One was the Careers Guidance Integrated Project, funded jointly by the Department of Education and Science

and the European Commission. This was designed, over a period of four years, to help some 20 schools and colleges in three contrasting Local Education Authorities (Haringey, Bedfordshire, Knowsley) to address their attention to ways in which as organisations they could help students more effectively for their career choices and transitions. The project was one of a series of European projects on vocational preparation, which gave it wider European visibility. Kathryn Evans, the project officer recruited to work with Bill and his NICEC colleague John Miller on the project, had organisational development experience in industry and other settings. The project report (Evans & Law, 1984) provided a major resource on the implementation of change in the guidance field.

The other major grant was for a three-year project to disseminate the work of the Schools Council Careers Education and Guidance Project (SCCEGP), which had ended in 1977. Funded by the Schools Council, the dissemination project was designed to sustain the SCCEGP's work in supporting local curriculum development in careers education, to provide support and training to enable the materials produced by the SCCEGP to be used effectively, and to do this in a setting which also introduced teachers to other careers education materials and enabled them to make an informed choice between the available materials. In the course of the project, the primary emphasis shifted from materials to disseminating the philosophy and methods underlying the SCCEGP. Two full-time members of staff – Beryl Fawcett and John Pearman – were appointed to carry out this work. Effectively they enabled NICEC's training and consultancy services for schools, co-ordinated by Bill, to be substantially extended. The project also facilitated the development of a more devolved structure for this work, which included a wider network of regional centres.

In subsequent years Bill was involved in a wide variety of training and development projects: for example, on profiling (Law, 1984), on careers education and the multi-ethnic classroom (Watts & Law, 1985) and on widening concepts of work (Law & Storey, 1987). He also led the development of two influential open-learning packs to support the training and co-ordination of teachers involved in careers programmes in schools and colleges (Law, 1991b; Law, Hughes & Knasel, 1991).

Theory and research

One of Bill's great strengths was that, in addition to his experience as a guidance practitioner and his commitment to training and development work, he was an innovative thinker who had a strong interest in developing theory and research.

Bill made important contributions to the NICEC Career Development Research Seminar. In its early years the seminar was directed by Professor Donald Super from Columbia University, New York, USA, who was based at NICEC as Honorary Director from 1976 to 1979, supported by a grant from the Leverhulme Trust. Bill contributed three chapters to the groundbreaking book *Career development in Britain* (Watts, Super & Kidd, 1981) that resulted from this work. The book aimed to synthesise British empirical evidence on occupational choice and on the transition from school to work, and to explore and re-interpret the existing concepts of career development – many of which had been developed in the USA – in a British setting. Bill's first chapter covered the role of motivation in career development (Law & Ward, 1981). His second addressed the role of autonomy in theories of career development, as a 'third dimension' alongside those of psychological v. sociological theories and developmental v. differential theories (Law, 1981a). The third examined the implications for guidance practice of the full range of chapters in the book (Watts, Law & Fawcett, 1981).

Linked closely to this work, Bill developed a new 'community interaction' theory of career development which he presented as a 'mid-range' theory between existing self-concept theories and opportunity-structure theories (Law, 1981b). This theory focused on 'that part of the external world which is proximately in a process of exchange with the individual – in other words, with the sources of expectation, feedback, support, modelling and information which form part of the warp and weft of the client's day-to-day experience' (p.156). The theory drew from, and provided a strong rationale for, NICEC's work in encouraging schools and colleges to view themselves as guidance communities in interaction with their neighbourhoods and community resources (see previous section). Some of the implications for careers programmes in schools were

spelt out in a further paper (Law, 1981c), in a report on initiatives in the USA to establish collaborative links between school and community (Law, 1982), in a book on organising community-linked education for adult and working life (Law, 1986) and in an evaluation of education-business partnership activities (Law, 1991a).

Subsequently, Bill developed a complementary career learning theory which focused attention on the processes of learning within career development, and in particular the stages of sensing, sifting, focusing and understanding. He proposed this as a basis for designing progressive careers programmes (Law, 1996a). His seminal paper presenting this theory was part of a major NICEC book entitled *Rethinking careers education and guidance: theory, policy and practice* (Watts, Law, Killeen, Kidd & Hawthorn, 1996), which sought to synthesise and rethink NICEC's work over the preceding 20 years or so. Bill also contributed chapters on careers work in schools (Law, 1996b), careers education in a curriculum (Law, 1996c), recording achievement and action planning (Law, 1996d), staff development (Law, 1996e) and developing careers programmes in organisations (Law, 1996f).

In 1999, Bill sought to integrate aspects of his community interaction and learning theories into the DOTS model which, as noted above, had been developed early in NICEC's work and which had proved very influential not only in the UK but also internationally (Andrews, 2014). The DOTS model was based on a distinction between four core elements of careers education: self awareness, opportunity awareness, decision learning and transition learning. Bill's 'new-DOTS' model (Law, 1999) added the four stages of his career learning theory as 'post-DOTS processes', thus creating a three-dimensional 'learning space' for careers education.

Conclusion

In 1992 the partnership between CRAC and Hatfield Polytechnic was ended, and NICEC was restructured as a network organisation supported by CRAC, initially with links to the University of London Institute of Education. Bill became a self-employed consultant, but remained a NICEC Senior Fellow. Subsequently, in 2010, the link with CRAC was terminated, and NICEC

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became an autonomous learned society for reflective practitioners in the careers field (see Watts, 2014). Bill continued as a NICEC Fellow until 2010 when he was invited to become an Emeritus Fellow.

Bill's contribution to the development of careers education in the UK was immense. His main commitment was always to schools, though his work influenced developments in other sectors too. His contributions to career development theory were unparalleled outside the USA. He had a great respect for teachers and guidance practitioners, and had a powerful influence on many of them both through his writing but also through his lecturing and consultancy work. He always sought to challenge and inspire, but also to empower, the people he worked with.

A personal postscript

At a dinner when I retired as Director of NICEC in 2001 I said that the two people to whom I owed most in my own career, in very different ways, were Adrian Bridgewater and Bill Law, and that I felt that I had been arguing with both of them throughout my working life. Bill loved arguments. But they were good arguments, based on common values and mutual respect, and I learned so much through them.

Both as a journal editor and as Director of NICEC, I spent quite a lot of time editing Bill's work. Bill relished words, and sometimes I persuaded him that some judicious pruning would enable his core arguments to be understood more readily. With some authors, such pruning can reveal the shakiness of what lies within. But that was never the case with Bill. The core of his writing was always robust, rigorous and cogent.

Bill was a wonderful colleague and friend: warm, energetic, stimulating, and a man of total integrity. I miss him very much.



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