

Bill the Communicator: Bill Law's Learning Theory has made its way abroad

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Bill Law often illustrated his points through narratives. He was a great communicator. Nellie often crept up in his stories, as in 'Sitting-with-Nellie', i.e. learning on the job: learning by doing and reflection. Models, too, were also among his favourite communication tools. But Bill made theory practical. In doing this, he used models. One of his more well-known models (with Tony Watts) picks up social and learning aspects of career guidance and career education. It is known as the DOTS model (Law and Watts, 1977), which introduced four aspects of guidance activities, i.e., support in relation to: Decision making (D), Opportunity awareness (O), Transition skills (T), and Self awareness (S).

Or put in Bill's everyday language:

S: "who am I?" - knowing about self

O: "where am I?" - knowing about opportunities

D: "what will I do?" - ready for a decision

T: "how will I cope?" - ready for the next transition



The New DOTS model

The DOTS approach reaches back through the history of career guidance: it would be recognised by Frank Parsons' (1909), and his three-stage model, in particular in relation to the S, the O, and the D of DOTS. But Bill had the ambition to develop DOTS into a career learning model. Whereas DOTS focused on *what* can be learned through guidance, the New DOTS model focused on *how* we learn: sensing, sifting,

focusing, and understanding (Law, 1996; Law, 1999; Law, 2001; Reid, 2000). This added a strong learning dimension to DOTS, in turning it into a learning taxonomy.

On a European level, the learning aspects of career guidance have been labelled Career Management Skills (CMS). 'Career management skills refer to a whole range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals and groups to gather, analyse, synthesise self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions.' (Sultana, 2011: 5). Clearly, DOTS and New DOTS are mirrored here in the areas of self, opportunities, transition, and decisions. Whereas Bill Law's writings on career learning are thus reflected in current EU-policies on CMS, his work has had other long-lasting effects, in particular, in the Scandinavian countries, where his ideas were much appreciated. He was held in high esteem and often cited in scholarly work. Together with Watts et al, Bill Law's contribution (Law, 1996) was soon translated into Danish: this book is much used in training of guidance practitioners. More recent examples of Bill Law's profound influence may be seen in, for example, Thomsen's (2014) Nordic report on Career Competences which suggests a strong career learning component to CMS approaches; or in Haug's (2014) Norwegian report on CMS as a possible national framework for career learning and career guidance. The thinking of both these scholars, of the generation following Bill's, are inspired by Bill Law's theories on career learning. These works are extensively cited.

Currently, a Danish project on career learning for younger students explicitly builds on Bill Law's career learning theory (Udsyn i Udskolingen, 2016). This extensive career learning project was documented in a free downloadable book (Poulsen et al, 2016). These

examples illustrate how Bill Law's theoretical work has had long-lasting impact in the Scandinavian countries, where, incidentally, community interaction is high on the agenda, also inspired by Bill Law (Law, 2009).

A model reduces complexity, and it runs the risk of being simplistic. Bill's aim was to communicate complex matters in understandable ways. Simply, but not simplistically: he was a master communicator. And he never forgot Nellie.



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