

## **Boys and the Career maze – what are they *really* doing?**

Dr Heather Carpenter, IBSC Conference, July 2009

### **Workshop Notes**

My intention is to raise awareness of a vital issue for the progress of boys. Solid foundations in the building blocks of career, and self awareness contribute to motivation and achievement in their school years and beyond, good choices for post-school training, and increased chances of early satisfaction and productivity. The workshop presents a number of research and information threads that relate to young men's progress in career decision making in school and post school years.

- The key building blocks for a good start in careers - aspirations, self belief and self knowledge- and how parents and educators grow these in a useful way; the relationship of early skills to lifelong resilience and career confidence
- Young men's career decision-making, the skills they require, the knowledge and understanding they may lack; the influence of peers, particularly significant for boys; the effects of poor choices, and early failure
- How best to help, the role of feedback, best practice suggestions

### ***Key building blocks for a good start***

A successful future for a young person implies the following: three things happen.

- **Good decisions that lead to a good start.** A good start is the productive child in their twenties who has made the right decisions at the end of school, undertaken training that suits their talents and interests, moved into work that suits them, utilising and building on their education or training efforts.
- **Career confidence and resilience** grow and develop in the child, and we know these are important over the entire career,
- **Baseline essential skills for employability** are developed. The way we parent our children has a significant impact on the development of these aspects; schools have an important part to play in the process.

**We call all of this a good start,** and it comes from having **the right building blocks in place.** It is important to understand what these building blocks are, and how they are critical to careers over the lifespan. The image of building blocks illustrates how the young person is constructing their identity and in particular their career identity, and there are specific building blocks with which they do this:

**Aspirations** -these emerge at a very early age, these are their dreams about themselves in the future, and then as they get older they become an important motivating force, an engine that drives young people towards their goals, impacting so much on later achievement. Both parents and teachers can act to diminish aspirations

**Possible selves** -young people need to be able to see a vision of themselves in the future, their possible selves, and they need to believe that like everyone else they can go on and be a successful

person. Young people have realisations early in life – ‘I’m good with my hands, I could be a mechanic’ - it’s a realisation of a possibility, not to be confused with a career decision.

*Change is only possible if goals and directions can be conceived. Without some conception of self in the future, the individual does not have anything to work towards. Concepts of possible selves provide both the possibilities and the goals. (Cornford, 1995, quoted in the Career Maze, Carpenter 2008.)*

**Self Belief** is half the achievement battle – achievement is only partly from our innate abilities, the other half is the belief that we can do it. Children with high self-belief try harder tasks, recover better if they fail, are more optimistic and more resilient and persevering when they meet obstacles. This is an important attribute of lifelong career resilience.

**Self knowledge** is the key ingredient for career choice-what will suit me, where do I fit? While parents are the key people to help their children know better their capabilities and their strengths, the ability of educators to provide genuine positive feedback is critical.

*‘Feedback is the cement of self knowledge-a young person may feel they possess some special quality or have done something well, but what confirms this view and helps cement a building block of self is feedback, when an important adult takes the time to notice and affirm a growing skill.’ (Carpenter, 2008)*

### ***Career decision-making – what are they really doing?***

Summary of research/ surveys

- Tendency for young men to make ‘economy’ rather than ‘talent’ choices, and to *not* do what they really wanted, or to simply not know much about the choices they had made. They had been influenced by others, and not by self. Compared to the young women in the sample more young men appeared less self aware, less able to articulate what they wanted and less able to see the consequences of their choices to longer term satisfaction and aspirations.
- Peers are used to filter information and to cope with the information overload. There is a reluctance to read ‘stuff.’
- Struggle with choices at tertiary level – university papers may be chosen on random factors – mates’ choices, what’s easiest, timing. Many have a poor understanding of importance of choices that they are inspired or motivated by.

If young men are not choosing what they really like, then they are likely to be choosing subjects or courses papers that they are not suited to, and that will certainly impact on their achievement, both at secondary and tertiary study. Poor choices contribute to first year failure and non completion rates in tertiary education (evidenced across OECD countries) and can be devastating to the confidence of the young people involved.

## Finding the answers

Key learnings for young men in career exploration is asking the right questions, joining the dots, i.e. seeing the career connections between skills and long term work; being able to articulate their own emerging strengths and skills, and relate these to possible future careers.

### *Strategies that help*

- Better career conversations (with parents and teachers)
- Naming their skills

*'Naming your skills is an important part of putting together a career identity. Remember that, for a young person, a belief in their competence NOW leads to a belief in their future competence. By naming the skills they are developing and voicing them in a way that they can understand, you can help them realise the ways in which they are achieving competence and becoming a useful adult. As they gather evidence of their competence, they see further possibilities for this in the future.'* Carpenter, 2008

- The family tree exercise
- Giving accurate and real feedback to grow self belief and self knowledge
- 'Joining the dots' between self, skills and possibilities

*(The Career Maze, 2008)*

**They do recognise their best direction when they see it - but they need more help to do this.** The transformation in young people when they come out of the maze is significant - more motivation, and more commitment as they have a clear vision of their future successful self to work with.

- Simple step-by-step processes. They like non-threatening activities where *self-driven* ideas have the time and space to emerge for them – simple, short, attractive, interactive programs that allow them to clearly rank and sort preferences work well. (*See Choices, & Hands On, www.thecareermaze.com*)
- Many like side-by-side processes rather than front on questioning. They seem to do better individually where they can reveal themselves free of peer comment or class put-downs. Revealing their dreams – and they do have them- can be a risky process for young men, and many are therefore more likely to say what will seem acceptable.

Carpenter, H. A. (2008) *The Career Maze - Guiding your children towards a successful future*. New Holland Publishers, Auckland.

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# BOYS and the Career Maze

WHAT ARE THEY *REALLY* DOING?

DR HEATHER CARPENTER  
JULY 2009

## Presentation

- Key building blocks- what's needed for a good start (what every parent and educator should know)
- Career decision-making –how it works, and what boys are doing
- How we can all help more

A successful future is built on

- Good decisions which lead to a good start
- Career confidence and resilience
- Foundation skills for employability

So many choices....

MARKETING ?  
TEACHING ?  
EVENT ORGANISER ?

sounds good.....

What about  
management?



The young person's challenge..

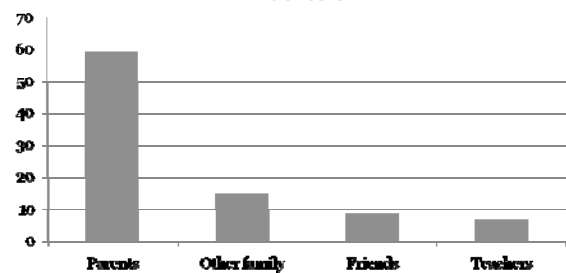
What can I do to become  
a competent adult in the  
working world?

How do I choose?



Important influencers

**Influencers**



## The most 'marketed to' generation ever

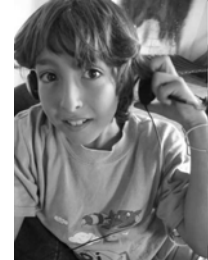
They want to talk to people they trust

Need help with internal guidance system- the "inner compass"



## How do you influence them?

- Role modelling
- Conversations and comments
- Attitudes
- Relationships



## The ideal journey to success

- Aspirations, dreams and self belief
- Developed in the early years



## In the teen years

- Growing
- Self knowledge & identity
  - Awareness of skills, abilities, strengths, and work attractions, growing values
  - Self belief



## The right training happens

- Good choices made
  - Courses enjoyed & completed
- leads to:
- Achievement
  - Commitment
  - Motivation towards future



## Success in the twenty's tasks

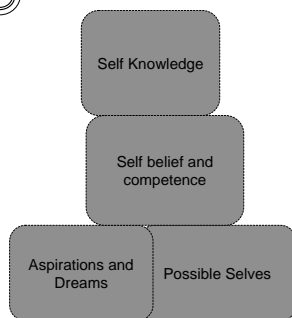
- A good start in a job that suits
- Financial independence
- Establishing themselves



## You can help more towards a good start...

By understanding

- The foundations of career decision-making
- How to build career confidence



## Aspirations & Dreams

- the 'engine' of careers
- they influence educational achievement, career choices and future earnings
- barriers to aspirations may begin with the low expectations of parents and teachers

Aspirations and Dreams

## RESEARCH SNAPSHOT!

### Aspirations & Achievement

Where there is a culture that encourages aspirations, children will flourish, even when living in poverty. Where a culture exists which negates achievements, children will not prosper.

SOURCE: Centre for Research into Parenting and Children, University of Oxford National Family and Parenting Institute London.

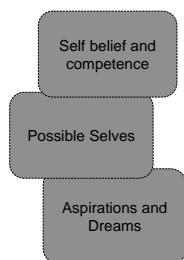
## Possible selves.....

- Aspirations reflect children's ideas about their 'possible selves' and are closely related to hope and motivation



## Self belief and achievement

Children must have visions of a possible self, and **believe** in their ability to become a competent adult to have hope in the future, and motivation to achieve.



## You help by

- Allowing dreams
- Taking care NOT to crush self belief
- 'Seeing the promise'

## Hope

- Is an essential gift key adults can give
- Is positive imagination, and connected to self belief
- Optimistic children do better
- DON'T give a message of worry

## Self knowledge

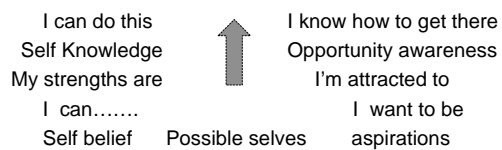
- Acts as a compass, pointing a person in the right direction and helping them to say "*I know what suits me*"
- Building blocks are strengths, talents, attractions, abilities



## So with these building blocks...

They are better able to make

career decisions that fit



So how does career  
decision-making  
work?

## Finding the answer means understanding the journey of exploration .....

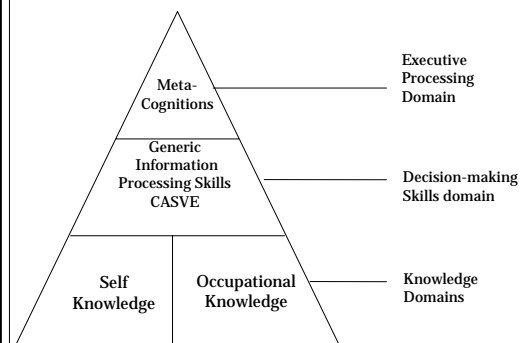
**And what is Andrew going to do?**

**DON'T SAY**

"He doesn't know, he has no idea"  
(if Andrew is listening he will blame  
himself for not knowing)

**DO SAY (with confidence)**

"He's working it out, he's exploring a  
number of things"



**Pyramid of Information Processing Domains in Career Decision Making (Peterson, Sampson & Reardon, 1991)**

## RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

### If I could have any job in the world

- Celebrity roles or mainstream roles
- 39% of the males and 9% of the females chose 'celebrity' roles
- 47% of the males and 74% of the females chose mainstream roles

## Can I do what I really want?

Only 24% of the total sample matched their ideal and their expected jobs

- 16% of the males and 41% of the females indicated an expectation that their first job and the one they *really* wanted would be the same
- 70% of the males and 41% of females expected to do something different.

## Why?

- Some were unrealistic choices, but not all
- Jason nominated policeman as the job he really wanted, but the expected first job was accountant
- Karl wanted to be a biologist, but the job he expected to work at was as a lawyer
- Daniel wanted to work for the Red Cross was the but he expected to train as an accountant
- Chen wanted to work in information technology but he was going to train as an auditor

## RESEARCH SNAPSHOT!

### Year 13 Girls and Boys

- Many did not expect to do what they really wanted (*70% boys, 41% of the girls*)
- More boys made 'outer directed choices.'
- More boys could not say what they would like about their choice.

## What gave you the idea of choosing that job/career

### Inner directed

- Choice is made with reference to chooser's own talents, interests, abilities.

"I like working with my hands"

"I'm good at accounting and economics"

- Greatest response – 76% females, 41% males

## What gave you the idea of choosing that job/career

### Other directed

- the primary reference is to outside sources of information and influence, e.g. a pamphlet, the salary or prospects that the job is reputed to offer

"the pay is good"

"it has a promising future"

- 38% of the males and 20% of the females



### What do you think you would like about that work?

Responses fell into 2 main categories:

- the intrinsic nature of the work

Responses revealed students *knew* the content and tasks of the work and *was attracted* to those aspects, eg

“the whole range of sport and accident related recovery- helping people regain strength and mobility to become what they were...”

### What do you think you would like about that work?

Responses pointed to

- extrinsic factors, e.g.

The characteristics and perceived rewards of the work environment:

“its not a very hard job and he makes a lot of money...”

“You are able to travel.....also this career is about advancement and a rapid travel towards power”

### Knowing why

- More girls could describe the work and why it suited them
- More males gave answers such as

“its not a very hard job and he makes a lot of money...”

‘ it has good prospects’

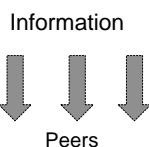
### Good decisions

- The chosen role is one they *really* want to do
- Students can relate it to themselves i.e. *knows why* it would suit them
- This brings motivation and the best chance of success



### RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

#### The influence of peers



Social networks act as a filter and interpreter, boys use these to help them through the paper maze

### Word of mouth

Is easier.....

But the guy that Matt surfs with says I'd be better to do an apprenticeship.....

### The information maze.....

- UK study, 23 schools, 1152 students
- Internal information considered relatively unimportant
- **"We don't want to read leaflets"**
- Informational models – teacher talk, leaflets, libraries, web pages-has less reported impact than experiential activity

### Where? What papers?

Peers seem to play a pivotal role in processes of educational choice — what university is considered a good choice, and what course a young person should take, are decisions that are all affected by positions taken by their peers.

### Boys' strategies include

- Where my mates are going
- Worry about it when I get there
- Text my friends and ask them what they are doing
- Choose the later papers so I don't have to get up early

### Once in tertiary education .....

- Wrong paper, wrong course
- I don't really know what I'm doing here
- Management seemed like a good idea
- It all sounded good
  - I didn't really investigate papers- you hear who the good lecturers are
- **I didn't understand how to work out what was best for me**

### Poor choices have impact

- Tremendous cost in decisions that do not 'fit'
- Drop out rates are high
- Survival rates (proportion of entrants who successfully complete) are poor – there is a 50% non completion rate of first degrees in NZ and about a third of all entrants leave university without completing (across OECD countries).
- Male completion rates lower than female at undergraduate levels.

So what can we do to assist good decision-making?

## What really helps

Good career conversations

- Don't judge – understand the moment

'I'm going to have my own restaurant one day'

- Let them try on ideas

'Maybe I could be a lawyer'

(but last week you said ...)

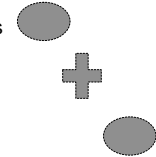
## Naming their skills

Have a conversation about the skills in families, e.g. a family trees exercise

Discuss the skills related to occupations

Discuss *their* skills strengths,

Your feedback helps to join the dots



## Give them feedback

- Accurate feedback helps (NOT unearned praise)
- This is good because.....(say why)
- approval for real effort, real tasks, and genuinely displayed attributes such as perseverance helps children learn their strengths,

**"I can do this better than that."**

## Joining the dots

● Self I'm this kind of person



● Skills: I'm attracted to these skills

■ Possibilities: These industries/jobs

## Encourage self assessment

It's a key strategy for self-knowledge

*How did I do on that? How can I get better?  
What did I do well? What do I need to learn?*

The young person who enters the workforce with this ability is way ahead of their peers and a huge asset to potential employers

## Exposure to work

- Part-time jobs build career confidence and a sense of competence-young people want to be useful
- Seeing the reality of work helps decision-making

## Help them 'see' themselves

- Experiences help – is that me? Would I like that?
- Visiting training places, seeing the work and roles
- Student for a Day processes
- Tools that illuminate

## Good news

- They get the picture quickly once they see their direction
- Knowledge of the direction that feels right for them is transformational
- Attraction - motivation – achievement – success
- Right direction, right form of study, right choices of papers- more motivation to research alternatives when they understand how (self assessment abilities)

## A model of progress

From confusion to solutions.....

They cannot find solutions out of confusion- there are some steps/understandings in between

## From confusion to solutions

Stage	Process	Self Knowledge	Resource/Tools
1. <b>Confusion</b>	<i>Entering the career maze</i>	"I don't know"	
2. <b>Attraction</b>	<i>Finding a direction – one or two paths focus attention</i>	"I like <i>this</i> better than <i>that</i> "	Simple measures of attraction, interest inventories, self knowledge tools
3. <b>Orientation</b>	<i>Discovering my orientation - which path fits me?</i>	"I can see <i>why</i> that fits me, and why I'm attracted to it"	Personality orientation, self knowledge tools e.g. Self Directed Search
4. <b>Solutions</b>	<i>Finding the ongoing path (the maze makes sense)</i>	"I know what I want to do and I know why, now I can look at <i>how</i> "	Databases of job information, tasks, training information, prospectuses

## Attraction- is this me?

choices

How interesting would you find a job which involved...

Mechanical & Electrical

Using SKILLS like: In JOBS like:

- assembling
- installing
- repairing
- servicing
- inspecting
- testing

- Auto mechanic
- Aircraft mechanic
- Electrician
- Electronics technician
- Mechanical engineer
- Fabrication engineer

NOT AT ALL A LITTLE QUITE VERY BACK NEXT

## ..would I like this?

choices

How interesting would you find a job which involved...

Arts & Media: Media Design

Using SKILLS like: In JOBS like:

- creating
- drawing
- designing
- programming
- developing
- communicating

- 3D animator
- Art director
- Copywriter
- Website designer
- Digital media producer
- Graphic designer

NOT AT ALL A LITTLE QUITE VERY BACK NEXT

## Do you recognise yourself?

choices

How interesting would you find a job which involved...  
Working with People: Managing and Co-ordinating

Using SKILLS like:

- managing
- planning
- co-ordinating
- organising
- leading
- influencing

In JOBS like:

- Team leader
- Manager
- Human Resource manager
- Operations manager
- CEO

NOT AT ALL A LITTLE QUITE VERY

BACK NEXT

## Giving them clarity

Hands On - Creative & Craft

hands on  
and highly skilled

Furniture Maker / Cabinetmaker

Tick below if you would like...

- ✓ Making and repairing furniture and cabinetry
- ✓ Operating hand and power tools
- ☐ Developing creativity and design skills
- ✓ Learning to read blueprints and drawings
- ✓ Working accurately, using woodwork skills

Record website [www.fta.co.nz](http://www.fta.co.nz) on my report for more career information.  
Modern Apprenticeships are available. Three years secondary education recommended.

How interested are you?

not at all a little quite very

back next

## Knowing themselves

What's my orientation? What kind of person am I?

Enterprising - the code of *influence*

Ambitious, competitive, often take leadership roles, attracted to status, management, entrepreneurship, interest in the world of commerce.....

## Another orientation

Investigative – *The 'knowledge' code*

Like gathering information dealing with theories or data, task oriented, analytical thinkers, like to solve difficult problems.....



## And others

Social - keyword is people

Realistic – hands on and practical

Artistic - the creative ones

Conventional – likes data and structures (the accountants)

## Solutions

**Finding the ongoing path (the maze makes sense)**

"I know what I want to do and I know why, now I can look at *how*"

- Here they need still help with choices and the paperwork!

## TOP TIPS

- Allow boys their own dreams and aspirations-they will achieve & succeed best with these
- Find ways to help them research options-they have many more to check out than you did
- Let them know their strengths and talents - it helps them understand their capabilities and make better choices
- Learn how to have good career conversations –they do want to talk to you.

## Available....

- Here
- Bookstores
- [www.thecareermaze.com](http://www.thecareermaze.com)

