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Designing a career education programme

PR4. Training - Module 2

1. From information to career education

Career development is a continuous process strongly interconnected with life experiences and the environment where the child grows up. Career education strategically aims at equipping children with those tools which will enable them to handle complexity and build their future.

During primary education, the purpose is for students to learn how to read, write, do math and have knowledge about basic cultural notions, but also to start developing the values, skills, attitudes, knowledge and critical understanding to thrive and actively take part in a complex society. To meet these goals, career education in a lifelong perspective plays a pivotal role as it is strongly connected to lifelong learning. In this regard, career education relies on its formative dimension with the aim of developing a powerful link between curricular teaching and transversal skills.

As an educational activity, career education speaks the language of pedagogy: career education activities consist in fact of educational activities planned clearly having in mind educational objectives and didactic methodologies.

In this regard, when thinking of career education and early career education, the main reference when thinking of educational outcomes refers to the methodological framework of Career Management Skills.

Career Management Skills (CMS) is the term used to describe the skills, attributes, attitudes and knowledge that individuals require in order to manage their career. With many crossroads and infinite directions, careers are nowadays constructed rather than chosen and individuals need to carefully coordinate their life, work, learning choices and experiences, at all ages and stages throughout their lives. “The capacity to exercise agency and to influence the development of one’s own career is what is often described as career management” which represents a main challenge for new generations and societies.

In this challenging contemporary scenario, schools, families and society as a whole share the mission of equipping students with the skills which will enable them to handle complexity, to successfully manage their career while making choices towards sustainable development and growth, both at a personal and community level.

These skills are called Career Management Skills. A variety of definitions exist (see Sultana, 2013) and we report here the definition provided by The [ELGPN](#), the European Lifelong Policy Network: “Career management skills (CMS) are competencies which help individuals to identify their existing skills, develop career learning goals and take action to enhance their careers.”

The Resolutions of the Council of the European Union passed in 2004 and 2008, highlight the need for strong guidance services throughout the life course to equip citizens with the skills to manage their learning, their careers and their transitions between and within education, training and work. The Resolutions mention CMS as one of the four priorities of guidance services in Europe.

To support the implementation of CMS there have been a number of frameworks that have been developed in different countries (Hooley et al., 2013). An early example of a career management framework was developed by Law and Watts (1977) in the 1970s as a framework for career education in schools. This is called the DOTS model and focuses on 4 main areas:

1. Decision learning;
2. Opportunity awareness;
3. Transition learning;

The DOTS framework

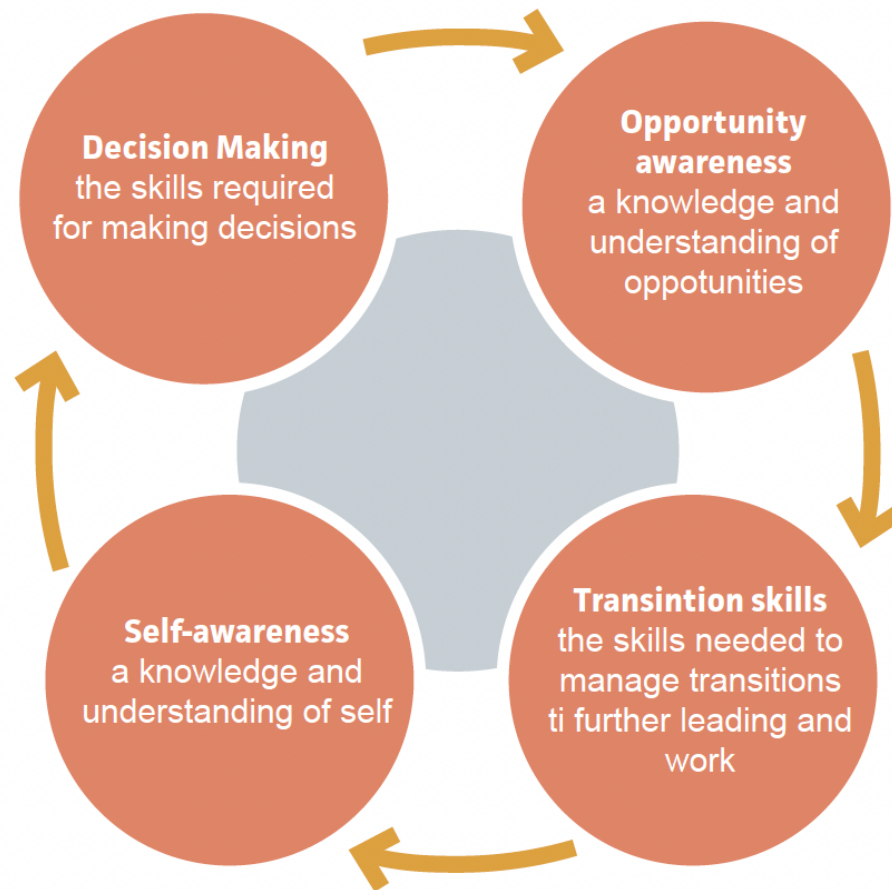


Figure 1. The DOTS framework (Andrews & Hooley, 2018, p. 59).

Despite the differences between countries and frameworks, the innovative aspect of the use of a CMS framework is that there is an important paradigm shift in lifelong guidance which abandons a “test and tell” or matching paradigm. This approach moves away from a limited view of career guidance as activities focused on choice making in a circumscribed moment of transition in favour of a learning and development paradigm (Jarvis, 2003) which represents the foundation of the PRIME project. In this view, guidance activities are considered learning opportunities, a process of learning and development which goes on throughout life (Super et al., 1996).

Thus, CMS frameworks provide an instrument which connects career theory, practice and policy (Hooley et al., 2013) as they define a focal point for interventions in a complex and multicultural society: instead of focusing on the end-process of a choice (e.g. choosing a school or abandoning school), the framework supports activities which aim at equipping students with those “capabilities” (Sen, 2008), with those tools that will enable them to gather, analyse, synthesise and organise self, cultural, educational and occupational information to make and implement decisions and transitions.

The concept of CMS helps us move from thinking of guidance as a spotlight that advises students while focusing on a smaller and smaller range of future options, to a view where career learning has the role of shedding light on a greater range of opportunities. It aims at widening horizons, increasing aspiration, and fighting stereotypes. Career learning is then defined in this handbook as a powerful tool to help students “to understand who they could become and to help them to develop a healthy sense of self that will enable them to reach their full potential” and to feel part of their community (Kashefpakdel et al., 2018). This entails the learning component we mentioned earlier, cannot be done in once-in-a-lifetime intervention prior to school transitions and requires thoughtful educational activities.

A number of career management frameworks have been developed in different countries (Hooley et al., 2013). They refer to different skills areas. The Figure below presents the areas proposed within a Policy Reform European project which worked to develop and validate a framework which could be useful in different countries and with different target groups.

The framework proposed below presents a set of career management skills grouped into 6 career learning areas (defined after an intensive comparative analysis of existing frameworks). Among the 6 areas, the PRIME project specifically focuses on two areas which will be described below. The clear reference to these areas supported the development of all tools and resources of the project.

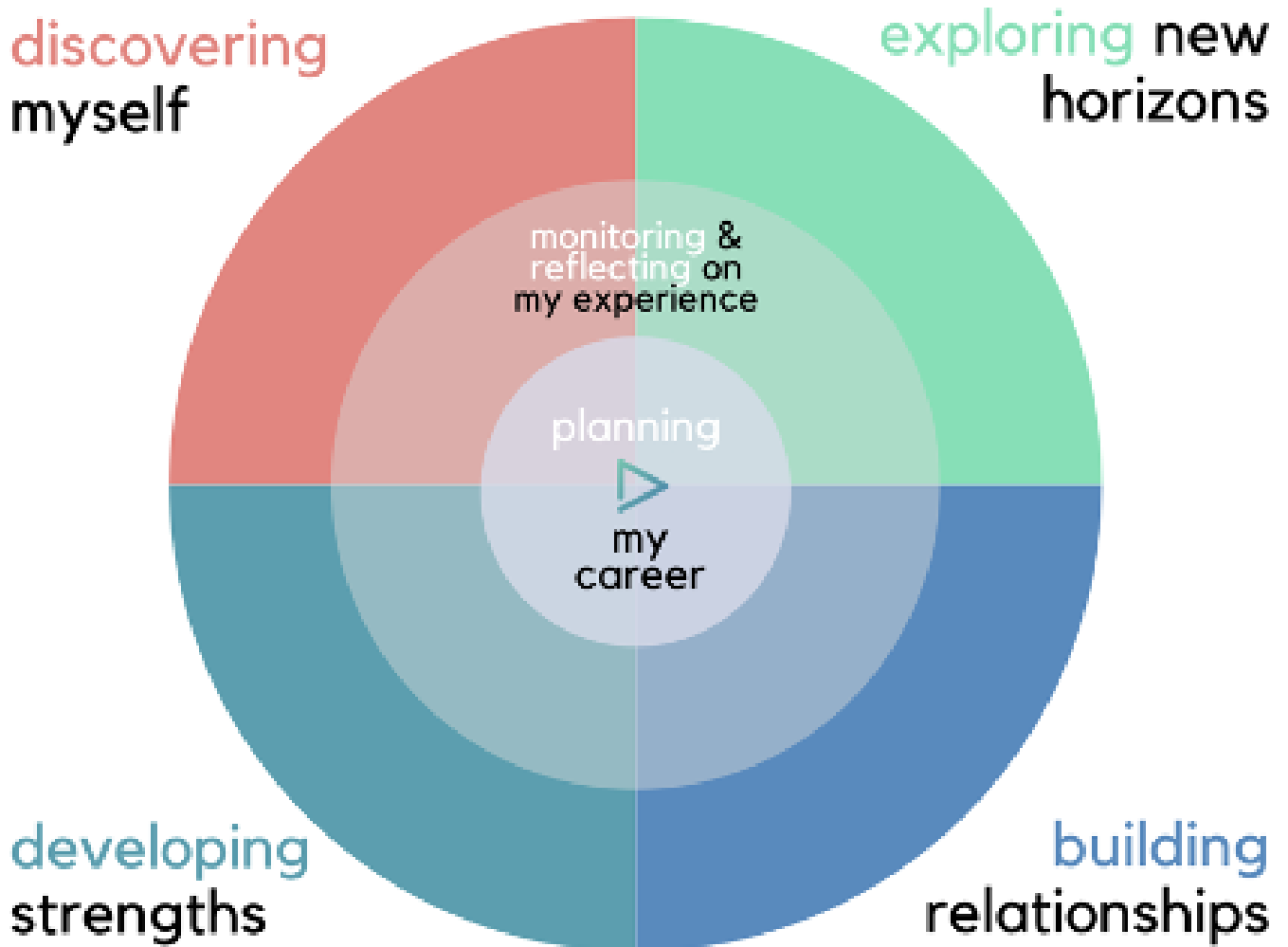


Figure 1. the CMS areas proposed by the CAREERS AROUND ME project.
<https://www.careersproject.eu/>

Focus n. 1. Helping students exploring new horizons

Gathering, selecting, and analyzing information about post-school opportunities is fundamental in making choices related to one's educational and professional career in an informed way. Over the past few decades, the sources from which students can draw information about educational and vocational opportunities have exponentially increased. Students construct their ideas about educational paths and their representations about careers by retrieving information from a variety of sources: e.g. stories and experiences from family and friends, experts they meet during open days or job fairs, teachers, the media, and social networks. Sometimes the messages they receive from these many sources run counter to what they are taught at school. For those reasons it is crucial to support students in the exploration of these opportunities and to help them find

relatable information which are known to play a role in shaping aspirations and in the decision making process later on.

This macroarea of CMS is labelled as “EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS”. This area is about exploring career opportunities and understanding the complexity of the socio-economic scenario including reflecting on the ethical and sustainable impact of career choices.

The skills set as learning outcomes are:

- Understanding careers and the labour market. Giving students the chance to explore knowledge about different career opportunities in the labour market means letting them explore different areas of professional profiles and go beyond stereotypes. Promoting this skill also means to make students able to reflect on future careers and understand how the labour market and careers change over time. Understanding careers also means to let students be receptive to how they can describe careers, also in uncommon ways.
- Understanding complexity. This means to be aware of the multivariate factors that can influence individuals' careers. Being aware that the world of work is changing, that the future is not already written are fundamental elements of this learning objective. They translate into activities aimed at supporting students exploring how careers are changing and how they can shape the future direction of the world with their career.
- Ethical and sustainable thinking. This last area refers to the importance of letting students understand that personal choices have an impact within the community and the environment. This area has to do with the idea that any professional is a change maker who, via his work, is contributing to shaping the world. In this regard, it is particularly important to shed light on how careers can contribute to sustainable development goals.

Focus n. 2. Monitoring and reflecting on experiences

The other main area of skills which has guided the PRIME project refers to the area called “Monitoring and reflecting on your own experience”. Since the future of work is constantly changing, it is necessary for students to be able to activate themselves to monitor and reflect on past experiences in order to design their future. Learning to attribute meaning to past experiences, both positive and negative, is important for planning, designing and redesigning one's life, study and work goals. This area focuses on the individual's active engagement in monitoring and reflecting on the career path, on results of learning and achievements. While for older students this encompasses a variety of subareas, with primary school children this opens up the possibility to help them reflect on their learning achievements and help them link these achievements to future perspectives. In particular, this area relates to the ability to analyse the

skills required to act a certain role or to accomplish a certain task at school. This awareness is then widened by another layer of reflections where students are supported to link the same skills they act to careers and possible futures. Activities built with this aim powerfully work to help them feel empowered to access possible futures. Moreover, these activities design a protected space to boost self-efficacy and self-awareness while building bridges between schools and the outside world.

2. Building a career learning activity

1. Define the learning objectives

In the realm of pedagogy, particularly in the context of career education, the design of an activity involves a thoughtful and strategic approach. A foundational step in this process is the definition of specific learning outcomes or objectives. These outcomes define the conceptual framework for what learners are intended to acquire. We then begin with the formulation of learning outcomes or objectives, reflecting our conceptualization of the essential knowledge or skills we aspire for individuals to acquire. In our case, Career Management Skills represent the reference skills framework as explained above.

2. Create a resource

Once defined the learning objective, the next step has to do with building a means to transfer that learning component. To do so, we create an educational resource which is intended to articulate and convey the predetermined learning outcomes. It is imperative to elucidate that these resources extend beyond conventional lectures or textual materials encompassing diverse formats such as videos, or visual representations, each strategically chosen to effectively communicate the desired educational message.

3. Plan how students will engage with that resource

It is fundamental to recognize that the act of resource creation, in and of itself, does not represent and constitute an educational activity. True educational engagement ensues only when students actively interact with the resources. This transformative moment signifies the transition from a passive reception of information to an active and participatory learning experience. In essence, our pedagogical approach is underscored by the meticulous articulation of learning objectives, the strategic creation of diverse educational resources, and the facilitation of meaningful engagement with these resources to foster a dynamic and participative learning environment.

In the subsequent phase of the educational process, the construction of an activity entails the development of a structured mechanism designed to actively engage learners. This deliberate engagement serves as a pivotal element in our pedagogical framework, aligning with a social constructivist pedagogy that prioritizes collaborative interaction.

This interaction, intimately tied to the concept of engagement, involves students in discussions and information-sharing activities. Through this interactive process, we gain insights into students' learning outcomes, witnessing the evolution of their ideas as they inspire one another. This collaborative dynamic not only serves to elucidate individual comprehension but also cultivates the emergence of novel ideas within the student community. Moreover, it establishes a support system wherein students can assist each other, fostering a collective learning environment.

At this stage, assessment becomes a pivotal component in this pedagogical framework. As educators, our role extends beyond content delivery; we are tasked with comprehending the depth of learners' understanding. Assessment provides the means to evaluate the effectiveness of the resource dissemination, discerning whether students grasp the material, contributing valuable insights, and steering discussions in productive directions. This evaluative process serves as a foundation for informed instructional adjustments and further interaction.

In the context of career learning, the pedagogical approach extends beyond content absorption to include actionable steps. Specialized forms of engagement may involve prompting learners to develop action plans and implement tangible steps based on their understanding of the resource. Interaction with peers proves instrumental in supporting and encouraging these action plans, fostering a collaborative environment conducive to practical application.

This intricate interplay between resources, engagement, interaction, and assessment, amalgamates to form a career education activity underscoring a comprehensive and dynamic educational approach.