Language of the Universe...........Maybe?

Chapter 1.   Career Prediction.

In May 1975, I was a Trainee Careers Officer studying for my Diploma of Vocational Guidance at the South Bank Polytechnic, London.

During that month I had been asked to compile a list of questions which would help me to interview school-leavers who needed vocational guidance. Up to that time, I had used my tutors approach. Now I had to think up my own approach.

First I had to decide upon a definition of vocational guidance. I decided to use the Employment and Training Act, 1973 as my main guide, and I paid particular reference to the definition of the vocational guidance service given to British citizens by the government information centres.

The Citizens' Advice Bureau, which informs parents and school-leavers of their rights in this respect under British law, stated in its handbook - "Young persons under 10, or over 15, and still at school may obtain advice on what is likely to be the most suitable career" (CANS - 1975).

Thus school-leavers would expect advice on "what is likely to be the most suitable career..."   Careers were defined in my dictionary as   "occupations leading to success". Fine, but what was meant by "most suitable?"

That question had been answered for me a month or so earlier by Miss Rachel Leyman, a Specialist Careers Officer at my employers' offices in Willesden, London. I had asked Rachel two questions, namely:

"What do school-leavers seek in a career?", to which Rachel had answered - "Status, variety, interest and jobs with people".

"What makes a good Careers Officer?", according to Rachel, the answer lay - "somewhere within the realms of philosophy and psychology".

In compiling my interview questions, I could manage those aspects of a career concerning status, variety and jobs with people; but how do you define 'interest'? This was a problem. People are interested in so many different things. The question of why they are interested in one thing rather than another would need an explanation, -- if satisfactory interview questions were to be compiled. Presumably the answer lay in the realms of philosophy and psychology, as Rachel had said.

I decided to answer the question of Interest by going back to first principles. I looked up the dictionary definition of psychology - "a branch of science studying the processes, motives, reactions and nature of the human mind". All right. But what did science mean? I couldn't remember. The answer - "any branch of knowledge based on systematic observations of facts and seeking to formulate general explanatory laws and hypotheses that could be verified empirically". Great.

In discovering the answers to vocational needs, I was really involving myself in career prediction. I was satisfied that the answer to a career prediction hypothesis lay in the correct judgement of a school-leaver's ability, personality and job environment.

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Ability could be tested fairly satisfactorily. The job environment could be easily determined, although not necessarily changed to suit the needs of the school-leaver. So that left personality.

I considered that personality and interest were essentially the same thing. Personality decided interest and interest decided personality.

The words "verified empirically", used in the definition of the word 'Science', indicated the effort which lay ahead in the verification of any hypothesis I might dream up. I would have to make a large number of observations of facts and amass a great deal of evidence. Bearing this in mind, I decided not to be too ambitious. I would look for something very simple and basic.

I reflected on the differences between myself and my brother. I have tended to be a bit of a day dreamer while he tended not to day-dream. I thought back to the time when I started to day-dream. I used to rock in my sleep from about the age of three onwards. My brother did not rock. I was awake as I rocked - my head resting on my fists - crouching under my eiderdown and rocking from side to side. I used to do this before going to sleep and before getting up in the mornings. I've seen other children doing the same thing.

So why was this? What caused it? Why didn't my brother rock or daydream? Did the day-dreaming make us different, and if so, how?

I worked out a hypothesis based upon day-dreaming, and tried it out on my fellow students. It was partly successful out not good enough to be right. So back I went to the drawing board.