



Richard Sevicke-Jones



I am one of the numbers you hear about when the term ‘tertiary churn’ is mentioned. Without any clear direction at school, I thought I was cut out to be the next Le Corbusier and started a five year Architecture course at Victoria University.

Alas, two years into the course, I realised that my lack of natural ability in Maths and Physics – along with no real drive to be an Architect, unlike my peers – was starting to catch up with me, and I promptly cross-credited to a BA so I could leave university and head off on my OE as soon as possible. Perhaps this false start in my own life is why I was drawn to the careers sector, and why I have empathy for the 50% of young New Zealanders who make poor tertiary choices.

While I was living in the UK I trained as a career guidance practitioner and developed the micro-counselling skills and knowledge of the theorists – Super, Holland et al – that contribute to the profession. At the time (mid-2000s) the prevailing model in the Connexions service where I worked was based on traditional one-to-one, face-to-face career guidance intervention for secondary school students, and it’s fair to say that my initial background – and strengths – were in this one-to-one model. However, my return to New Zealand in 2008 – and subsequent employment with Careers New Zealand (then Career Services) – opened my eyes to the creative possibilities within the sector, including a greater emphasis on career education, the notion of career competencies, and career services for adults. One of my highlights with the organisation has been (along with half a dozen very passionate, very capable colleagues) the pilot and subsequent implementation of the online webchat service.

Krumboltz is well known for his theory of ‘planned happenstance,’ and the current phase in my contribution to the New Zealand careers sector can be attributed to this. I happened to attend the 2009 International Symposium in Wellington and inadvertently ended up in John McCarthy’s seminar on career guidance and public policy. Although I worked in the public sector I hadn’t given too much thought to the importance of public policy to the profession. By the end of the session I was hooked on why we, the practitioners, were failing to convince government policy makers about the impact and worth of our work. Nearly three years later I am heading towards the conclusion of my Masters in Public Policy, and am about to commence evaluation research into the impact of a career education policy in New Zealand. At the same time, I am seconded to Careers New Zealand Strategic Development and Planning team, and therefore now have the opportunity to contribute to the link between higher level strategy and the operational practitioner work ‘in the field’.

I think my own career to date is evidence of the importance of skill acquisition, lifelong learning, and the need to be self aware about your interests and values throughout your life. These are attributes we try and impress on the clients, especially young people, that we serve daily as career practitioners. For example, whilst two years of Architecture study may appear at first glance to have contributed nothing more than adding several thousand

dollars to my student loan balance, the creative thinking skills I acquired were subsequently extremely useful in my early career working in the British secondary school environment. This, in turn, gave me teaching, facilitation and the associated 'people' skills that were valuable in my work as a career practitioner. And it's the knowledge and networks I gained from this part of my career – along with the research and writing skills gained from a History degree – that have proven invaluable in my current study and secondment. If nothing else, I think my career demonstrates that there is no 'standard' route to working in the New Zealand careers sector, and that we all bring a diverse range of skills and experiences to our workplaces.