

# Interview

## Richard Young, University of British Columbia

*Telephone Interview on August 22, 2001 with Richard Young, University of British Columbia for the Canada Journal of Career Development, Volume 1 #1*

**CJCD:**

Richard, thank you for agreeing to do this interview this afternoon.

As this is our inaugural edition we wanted to begin to profile leaders in the field in Canada. So let us begin. Can you tell me a little about your own career development?

**Richard:**

I think that my career development mirrors, if you will, what I believe about careers. In that sense, career isn't something you can plan absolutely in advance and then just pursue that goal without changing and altering it. Even though I have been a professor for more than 25 years, I really didn't aspire to be a university professor; it grew on me. Initially, I thought I would be a counsellor and work in counselling, etc. It was only through having the opportunity and actually doing this work that the goal of being a university professor emerged for me. Even as a university professor, within that perspective, goals are modified and changed as you engage in your work. When I first started teaching at the university, I didn't think I would be involved in research as much as I am. So that is a goal that emerged for me as I engaged in the work. And I actually think that's very reflective of how people develop their career, their goals. They get engaged in something and the goals emerge from the kind of activities they are engaged in. Then they form those goals into patterns across their life span.

**CJCD:**

Have there been mentors in your life that you can point to?

**Richard:**

Certainly as a graduate student, there

are professors whom you model yourself after whom you look to, etc. But there has been for me some people outside - other universities and other places that have been particularly helpful to me, encouraging my work, showing interest in my work.

**CJCD:**

What do you consider some milestones in Canadian career development?

**Richard:**

I can give you my idea of what I think the milestones are. I am sure other people have different perspectives, and my perspective is limited in the sense that there are other things that are going on in Canada that I'm not going to say to you and I don't want to slight any of those developments. So I'm just going to mention some of the things that I believe to be instrumental.

One of the things that was very instrumental was the founding of the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association which, of course, is now known as the Canadian Counselling Association. That really gave a push to people who were looking to bring career development onto the national scene in Canada as a kind of domain of practice and study. When we think of the founding of CGCA, which happened in the 60s, it was largely focused around career issues. I won't say only around career issues, but that was one of the big focuses of that association. So career counselling generally and then the career development part of it came together in that particular organization. I think it has been instrumental over the years through its journal and conferences, etc. That's one of the big ones.

Another big one was the Social Science Humanity Research Council of Canada with its Research Grant Program and its strategic grant program. They had one special grant program, for example, a number of years ago on women in the world of work; and they had one on fam-

ily and the socialization of children which dealt with some issues related to career development. That kind of funding, with the regular research funding at SSHRC, allows people in Canada to do some career research. I think that has been a very important milestone in terms of our reputation internationally, as a country, which not only consumes career development materials, but actually creates it at national research level.

I think another would be the fact that the universities and the people who were involved professionally in Canada got behind university programs, to prepare counsellors who were actually doing all this career development work. A lot of these programs actually began in the 60s and some in the 70s in various universities in Canada, some offering master degrees, others offering doctoral degrees. The development of the professional training of counsellors at the graduate level would be a significant milestone for counselling and career development in Canada.

**CJCD:**

From your perspective, what is some of the current thinking and/or research ongoing in Canada today?

**Richard:**

I want to mention a few things that I see going on generally. I think what the University of Montreal is doing and has done with respect to career and values has been very profitable work. At Laval University, they have several professors working on various funded projects dealing with career development, which are quite innovative. For example, there are people doing work on the relationship between addictions and work place, counselling issues related to career, etc. I think that is quite useful. The work at Laval University on the use of narrative in career development is pointing to the future about how narrative has to be incorporated into career work. The work that Vance Peavey has done at the

University of Victoria on what he calls the social dynamic theory of counselling, which involves career quite explicitly, is a positive representation of current thinking and research that is going on across Canada.

I look at my own university, University of British Columbia. We have and have had several people here who have been doing some excellent work in career development. For example, Larry Cochran has developed a narrative approach to career counselling which is really quite forward looking and innovative. Norm Amundson has done and is doing work on the notion of thinking action as part of a career journey. Again, it is very forward looking and Norm has received a lot of international press over it. Bill Borgan has done some work on transition and careers, and that is representative of some of the very current issues in career, development. Some of the work I have been doing on the action theory of career as a concept, that incorporates more than occupation is, I believe, very interesting.

We have been working specifically, or I have been working specifically, with the notion of a career development project and how families actually work together on career development issues. That is quite a shift from the notion that these influences were more incidental and unplanned. We are looking at a much more common project that parents and adolescents work on together that links back to the notion of looking at family as an active group instead of a passive group. From the newspaper and the media we get the impression that when families come to have adolescent children the family cannot do anything to influence these children anymore. This is really a model that looks at the way people actively engage and influence together. It doesn't mean that we're back to the model where parents have all the influence and telling children what to do, but actually looking at it as a common project between parents and their children. We can actually see how parents and adolescents can work together.

#### **CJCD:**

Anything else you would like to add to your perspective on current thinking or research piece?

#### **Richard:**

I think I have covered a lot the areas that are going on in Canada right now. I'm sure there are others that I'm not thinking about at this moment, but those are the ones that stand out for me.

#### **CJCD:**

If you can look into a crystal ball and see what the future will hold for career development in Canada, what kind of future do you think you would see in that crystal ball?

#### **Richard:**

We are in the process of very dramatic change in our society: technological change, globalization of the economy and political changes. All will have a great impact on what career is and what career means. One of the things with the future landscape is some kind of redefinition or re-evaluation on what we call career. In the past, and even perhaps today to a large extent, people generally think career means occupation. Even as it means occupation, it may mean for some people a good occupation, an elite occupation, or a professional occupation. Some people may not even think that they have a "career". In the future we are going to be changing that.

Whether the word career actually survives is very difficult for me to know, but there is something important in what career represents that will survive and that is the real challenge for people in counselling and people in education. What needs to survive is what we as people, use to organize meaning in our lives across time. I think that is the critical feature if you will. In the industrial society we came out of, career or occupation was what gave meaning to your life across time - I was a teacher or I was a nurse. That is going to be less so in the future, but we still have the need to make meaning across time in our lives activities.

The future will construct career in a different way than being tied very closely to occupation. Career research, career ideas and career thinking, in the future are not going to be the domain of people in the counselling area solely. We have to work at a much more interdisciplinary level. Recognizing at the same time that the counselling of people will have a unique contribution to make. And I think the unique contribution to make is that

we are dealing with people who are actually engaged in making decisions about that. That's sort of very front line, if you will.

I see career as a Eurocentric construction that came out of the industrial revolution that was European and came to North America that way. When I am looking into a future landscape, I'm seeing a much more culturally diverse Canada, and a world in which there is greater communication so people are aware of career in many, many countries. The challenge is how we, as counsellors, use this construct of career to respond to issues of cultural diversity. Is this construct, as useful as it was for us, relevant for people who come from quite different cultures? I think that is one of the real challenges.

Another aspect that I see in terms of the future, is that there is going to be a shift from people thinking of engaging in long term careers, as we have known them in the past, and more so engaging in shorter term projects. Being employed in this kind of area for a couple of years and moving into something quiet different and moving on to a third thing, etc. And seeing those projects in different domains of life. One, may be work, but other projects are related to family and leisure time as a citizen, etc. There will be a shift away from one big defining occupation as a way to organize meaning in life, to several things that together make meaning. But of course the challenge for counselling is how do we help people join those various kind of things together.

#### **CJCD:**

It's interesting when we look at the new maternity programs that enable people to take a year off compared to 6 months. I think that's going to be very interesting as an indicator of many changes to come.

#### **Richard:**

Exactly! We can think of the maternity project and the work project being in relationship to each other, not necessary sequential, but overlapping to some extent. So both are the kinds of things that are creating the way the world is going to look and how we are going to look at this world. The job of counsellors is not just helping people determine one occupational choice, but really how will

this work for me and what meaning can I make out of it. At the same time there's going to be a greater emphasis on relationship and how relationships work in the work place. That is a main point we have missed in the past. We have looked at it as an individual phenomena, and I think we have to see it in terms of a relationship phenomena; as a matter of fact, I would go as far to suggest we are coming to a period of time where a relationship creates the career that we are involved in. I mean, create, in the sense of how do we make meaning across time of the relationships that we have with employers, with teachers, with family, etc. It has always been there, but I think it is going to be more explicit in the future.

**CJCD:**

Great! Challenges? You have mentioned one with respect to culture and diversity.

**Richard:**

Diversity is an issue of relationship. I think the challenge is getting people involved in agency oriented active projects, goal oriented projects, and making those explicit. In recent research, for example, on dealing with adolescence - how adolescents become more mature. They were finding that when adolescents engaged in out of school projects with adults, for example: putting on play or coaching a baseball team or something of that nature, when they engage in those kinds of activities, their level of talk changes from a more of passive type of talk to that of an active person.

It is not an occupational decision that we are interested in ultimately, its what kind of things you are doing right now from which goals for your life will emerge. I can imagine a situation where my goal as a counsellor is not to help the person make an occupational decision, but really look at what are you doing right now that is meaningful for you; how are you an agent in that? When it comes to young people we want to encourage that. It will be a shift in thinking for counsellors. That is one of the challenges: to reconceptualize career development. There is still a lot of traditional career things going on in terms of testing and trying to identify the right occupation.

Another challenge for us is to recog-

nize the importance of career as a construct in the field of counselling and education. There is a real tendency to let go of this idea. I know, for example, that at some universities in their counsellor training programs, at the masters level, you don't actually have to take a course in career development or career counselling. The challenge is to make career courses relevant and how to make them relevant, of course, is to understand that the word career is not tied to occupation. The word career is a way of trying to organize something at a broader level in ones life and that's critical in counselling. One of the challenges is to keep career, the construct, and not let it revert to the kind of notion that career equals occupation.

**CJCD:**

Any other challenges for the future?

**Richard:**

I'm sure there will be many. Generally speaking, I think one of the areas we need to be more explicit about is policy. The Career Development Foundation is doing some work on policy and I think there has to be more work done. It seems to be one of the areas that is lacking when it comes to career. There is a continued need for the development of social policy in the career area.

**CJCD:**

Richard, thank you for your time in answering these questions.