

**Locating Social In/justice Within Career Education in  
New Zealand High Schools: A Critical Exploration**

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## **Abstract**

Career education sits on the metaphorical boundary between school and adult life. As such, it should prepare young people to collectively shape their futures, and individually manage their lives. Implicit within this are issues of social justice as career education intersects with the socio-political dimensions of life which extend beyond economic engagement. My study has identified how the contested concept of social justice was articulated within the career education and guidance (CEG) policy guidelines produced by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, and conceptualised and enacted by career advisors in practice. My concern was with the multiple, complex and competing ways in which economic, social and political discourses shape career education, and inform concepts of ‘self’, ‘work’, ‘opportunity’, ‘justice’, ‘inclusion’, and ‘good citizenship’, within this curriculum area.

Located within a critical theory framework, my study draws on the work of the political philosopher Iris Marion Young. Deploying Young’s concepts I examined how social in/justice is located within policy guidelines for career education, and the practice of career advisors, from the standpoint of those social groups who are least advantaged. Data was collected from two primary sources: the CEG guidelines and other related documents; and semi-structured interviews with careers staff in New Zealand high schools. A critical qualitative methodology was adopted to facilitate this inquiry, and critical discourse analysis employed to make sense of the data. A critical approach helped to uncover, and interrogate taken-for-granted assumptions about the relationship between career education and the world of work, that are written into, and reinscribed through, dominant discourses.

My findings indicated that the term ‘social justice’ was absent from the CEG guidelines, and the career advisors were unfamiliar with the concept. Looking through a critical-recognitive social justice lens, career education was found to be primarily utilitarian in nature, focused on the development of ‘self’ and located within an ‘apolitical’ neoliberal labour market context. The CEG guidelines called

attention to the economic ‘health and wealth’ of the nation, associating this with goals for ‘career development’ and ‘employability’. In relation to practice, career advisors sought to ‘do what was best’ for their *individual* students, by providing a curriculum aimed at assisting them to make the ‘right’ educational/occupational choices. Hence, I found a degree of confusion as career advisors navigated the tensions between a liberal humanist philosophy (which underlies career education), and the state’s neoliberal emphasis on economic self-management. There was also a lack of conceptual resources available to career advisors to help them actively locate social justice within this curriculum area. This inhibited a broader understanding of how career education might both contribute to, and challenge, those *social injustices* that sustain oppression and domination.

This study makes a significant contribution to research in the career education field, demonstrating how the concept of social justice is relatively invisible in this curriculum area, a finding that has received little attention in the New Zealand or international literature. Assisting career advisors to deepen their understanding of the multiple iterations of social justice opens career education up to closer critical scrutiny. Thus I have identified ways in which social justice might be more meaningfully located within career education, and contribute to culturally respectful and politically responsive transformative practice. The recommendations made, and areas for further research identified, extend the conceptual resources available to career advisors, providing them with a social justice framework that can be used to guide their practices.

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The struggle continues: Hasta la victoria siempre

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction to the research: A discursive journey of discovery**

### **Setting the scene**

This introductory chapter sets the context for my PhD study in which I establish the research question(s), summarise my own understanding of social justice, outline the focus of my inquiry, and present an overview of the thesis. I also position myself in relation to the study, and provide a reflexive insight into why I chose to explore this topic. In the crafting of this work I have followed poststructural conventions by writing myself into the text (Jones, 1992; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). This acknowledges that my research, and writing, does not reflect the views of an impartial disembodied ‘other’, but provides a reflexive representation informed by my own worldview which is infused by the (sometimes contradictory and shifting) values that I hold. As Shah (2005) noted:

The closer our subject matter is to our own life the more we can expect our own world view to enter into and shape our work, to influence the questions we pose and the interpretations we generate from our findings.  
(p. 114)

Thus, by being critically reflexive throughout the research process I have endeavoured to openly show how I have ascribed meaning(s) and attributed

value(s) to the multiple perspectives within the literature. This also helped me remain alert to how my past history and experiences have informed my analysis of the data, influenced the reporting of the findings, and shaped the concerns and challenges identified. Consequently, this PhD is a product of my own discursive practices. Therefore it should not be assumed that my reading of the data, and the conclusions that I reach, are the ‘correct’ or only interpretation (Peters, 2004).

### **Framing the research problem: Charting contested terrain**

In New Zealand, the National Administrative Guidelines 1(f) state that each school’s Board of Trustees must “provide appropriate career education and guidance for all students in year 7 and above” (MoE, 2015, n.p.). Thus the requirement to deliver appropriate career education is enshrined in law. Yet, what constitutes ‘appropriate provision’ remains open to question. For example, what goes on in career education, whose interests are progressed, and where social justice concerns reside in this curriculum area, are informed by how the goals of career education are presented in state policy guidelines, and interpreted and understood by career advisors<sup>1</sup> in practice. This is also inextricably linked to the fluid concept of career.

In recent times there has been a re-examination of how career might be conceptualised, alongside a re-appraisal of the historic values that have been attached to this particular term. In contrast to a traditional conception of career

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘career advisor’ is used throughout this thesis as this is the official title used in New Zealand schools.

that has served to elevate the social standing of some (such as those within the professions), or has only been of relevance to those in organisational settings that provided structured pathways within an employment hierarchy, the ‘new’ career paradigm reflects increasing fluidity, openness, and unpredictability (Irving & Raja, 1998; Krumboltz, 2009; Pryor & Bright, 2011; Watts, 2001). Thus, greater consideration is now being given to how the concept of career might become more inclusive and all-encompassing, intersecting with concerns about the place of social in/justice (Arthur, 2014). Set alongside this is the modernist notion that *individuals* must strive to construct “dignified lives for themselves, irrespective of social origin” (Sultana, 2014, p. 5), thus paying little attention to the effects of social structure.

At a surface level, the policy guidelines for career education and guidance in New Zealand schools (hereafter referred to as the CEG guidelines) produced by the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2009a) respond positively to this changing landscape. Here, career is defined as,

the sequence and variety of work roles, paid and unpaid, that a person undertakes throughout a lifetime. More broadly ‘career’ embraces life roles in the home and the community, leisure activities, learning and work. Work, learning and life, though sometimes distinct, are closely intertwined. *Everyone has a career* [emphasis added]. (p. 6)

Accordingly, in a somewhat symbolic way, multiple and overlapping life roles are encompassed, reaching beyond formal economic participation. The concept of career can thus be applied to any meaningful activity in the private/personal domain (Coutinho, Dam & Blustein, 2008; Richardson, 2009). For example, those who choose not to be active within the labour market for whatever reason, or engage in actions that may directly challenge the hegemonic practices of capitalism (through environmental activism or as members of anti-capitalist movements for instance), can also be positioned as enacting their career. Ostensibly, therefore, having and enacting a career is not necessarily an economically quantifiable activity, but a signifier of the complexities of life an individual leads within a social context, whether by accident, design, or circumstance.

When located within a career education context, this holistic interpretation is extended. The CEG guidelines define career education as providing “planned, progressive learning experiences that help students develop career management competences that will assist them to manage their lives” (p. 6). Thus, career and life are intertwined, with career education practice focused on assisting students “to learn how to become resilient career managers . . . gaining the competencies that will enable them to live full and satisfying lives and contribute to a sustainable future for Aotearoa New Zealand” (p. 7). Career education can thus be seen to be concerned with the acquisition of broad-based competencies that enhance the well-being of the individual *and* contribute to the social good of the nation, both now and in the future. However, beneath the definitions of career and



career education discussed earlier, multiple discourses are at play that progress particular interests.

What happens in schools in New Zealand, and elsewhere, does not occur within a contextual vacuum that is isolated from the political aspirations of the state, nor is cosseted from wider economic, social and global influences (Colley, 2000; Davis, 2007; Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher, 2008; Sultana, 2014) that are increasingly caught up with technological developments (Castells, 1999). In the 1980s, New Zealand moved away from a politics of collective welfare by actively embracing a neoliberal economic model where responsibility was primarily shifted from the state and onto individuals for their own well-being (Bray & Walsh, 1998; Kelsey, 1997; Lerner, 2000, 2003; Fitzpatrick, 2011). Running alongside this, desirable character traits and behaviours associated with economic productivity are normalised, and ‘acceptable’ lifestyles epitomised.

Neoliberal values continue to hold sway in New Zealand, resulting in an ongoing focus on the development of human capital through education (Benade, 2011; Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012). Here, the individual is positioned as “always a presumptive worker; pro-active of one’s career” (Bengtsson, 2012, n.p.), who is expected to ‘pay their own way’. This discursive play can appropriate career/identity, and be used as a marker to distinguish between those who are ‘included’, and those who have ‘chosen’ to exclude themselves. Bound up with neoliberal values that are espoused by governments in many developed and developing countries (Hursh & Henderson, 2011), it appears that career education,

regardless of ‘place’, is expected to produce an idealised responsabilised subject (Sultana, 2011a). The ‘responsibilised student’ is made aware of, and exhorted to internalise, whose ‘knowledge’ counts, what type of person they need to be/come, and what kind of life they should aspire to lead. Hence, how individuals are expected to shape their career, and what constitutes a “full and satisfying life” (MoE, 2009a, p. 7), is caught up in a complex web of power relationships with/in society that act to (re)construct, (re)circulate and (re)position knowledge(s) and truth(s) (Foucault, 1988), all of which have implications for how social in/justice plays out in this curriculum area.

There is some ambiguity in the CEG guidelines concerning what career education should achieve, however, thus providing career advisors with a degree of leeway with regards to how they construct their programmes in terms of overall focus, content and delivery. In practical terms, career advisors have the latitude to design activities that go beyond the acquisition of the competencies required to manage the (increasing) uncertainties, responsibilities and insecurities of ‘adult’ life within a globalised labour market characterised by neoliberal predispositions (Sultana, 2014). For example, the ‘holistic’ career notion opens up spaces for learning opportunities to be developed that enable students to critically interrogate notions of a given global ‘reality’ (Colley, 2000), providing opportunities to envisage and explore desired futures for themselves, their families, and their communities. Such learning can assist with their understanding of what it means to participate as democratic citizens and workers (Apple, 2000; Giroux, 2014; Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher, 2008) who are active and contributing

members of New Zealand society (Ministry of Education, 2009a). By enabling students to imagine, critically explore, and envisage alternative versions of the world (Brookfield, 2012; Brown, 2004; Freire, 1996; Hyslop-Margison & Pinto, 2007), to become “one who can act as a cultural critic of his [sic] society” (Bristol, 2012, p. 80), career education can help to contextualise the complex ways in which ‘career’ is formed and framed. Moreover, as a critical social rather than an economic practice (Irving, 2013a), career education can facilitate awareness of the diverse ways in which lives might be meaningfully constructed and enacted. As these are all issues of social justice, I will now move on to outline this concept in more detail.

### **Social justice: A concept in need of definition**

Social justice is a slippery concept (Griffiths, 1998) which is open to multiple competing interpretations (Arthur, 2014; Espinoza, 2007; Irving, 2005; Reisch, 2002; Sandretto et al., 2007), and is often loosely applied (Sandretto, 2004). Thrupp and Tomlinson (2005) have noted that “Like ‘equality of opportunity’ or ‘choice’, ‘social justice’ is one of those politically malleable and essentially contested phrases which can mean all things to all people” (p. 549), thus it has been used to justify a range of competing standpoints (Reisch, 2002). Gale (2000) provides a useful categorisation of different forms of social justice which helps to give the concept some clarity and substance. For example, the retributive form is premised on notions of individual liberty, the protection of property rights, and punishment for those who transgress. This aligns with the notion that career construction is a product of the individual’s own making,

influenced by personal drive, determination to succeed, and latent talent and ability. Distributivist justice is built on notions of individual freedom, social co-operation and an equitable baseline in relation to needs, including access to resources and opportunity. Within the distributivist form, career would be conceptualised as an individual construction that takes into account relationships with others, and accommodates a range of life-roles and desires. Underlying this, ‘career’ is primarily construed as having an economic base (see Irving, 2010a). Recognitive justice is premised on notions of a pluralist society where positive recognition is awarded members of diverse social groups, where *all* are given the means required to exercise their capabilities. Career, within this context, should be understood to be multifaceted, and constructed in relation to the desires of ‘self’, family, and community. There would also be an acknowledgement that economic participation is not a prerequisite to career enactment.

Viewing the world through a critical lens (Apple, 2000; Giroux, 2011), and informed by the critical theorising of Young (1990), I have extended the recognitive form. Within a critical-recognitive social justice understanding, ‘career’ exists as a part of, rather than apart from, the complex nexus of social, economic and political relations (see Irving, 2010a). Conceiving of career as a social construction (see Richardson, 2012b; Stead & Bakker, 2012), rather than a psychological concept or individual project, helps to illuminate the influence of market-driven discourses on those from diverse cultures and communities (locally and globally). Furthermore, it can uncover how the working of power, politics, and privilege position those from non-dominant groups, whilst progressing (and

protecting) particular vested interests. Hence, I am in agreement with Arthur (2014), that “A just society would be one in which the constraints of oppression and domination are eliminated, allowing people from all groups to develop and reach their full human potential” (p. 51). Entwined with this, I would add, is the inclusion of processes and practices that: facilitate group recognition and participation (Gale & Densmore, 2000); accommodate an equitable distribution of material goods (Gewirtz, 1998); *and* actively respect multiple ways of living, thus critically connecting with Young’s (1990) theory of justice.

Locating career education within a social justice framework will contribute to the challenging of oppression and domination through the provision of learning opportunities that enables students to be/come socially connected, politically aware, economically informed, and critically engaged. Involving students in socially just career education practice, therefore, would facilitate critical exploration of multiple ways of ‘being’, becoming and belonging in the/ir world, assisting them to imagine how we might “all live well in a world worth living in” (Kemmis, 2012a, n.p.). This brief outline of social justice and how it relates to career education provides valuable insight into my own worldview as it connects with, and acts as a marker for, how I have utilised critical theory, and interpreted the work of Iris Marion Young (1990)<sup>2</sup> whose theory of justice provides the theoretical framework for my study.

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<sup>2</sup> Critical theory and Young’s theory of justice is discussed in greater depth in chapter three.

## **Focusing the study: Foregrounding social justice in career education**

When I began my PhD research I was aware that scant attention had been paid to how social justice was conceptualised and positioned within career education, either in the international literature (see for example Guichard, 2001; Harris, 1999; Irving & Malik, 2005; Ruff, 2001), or in reviews of practice in New Zealand (see Education Review Office, 2006; Vaughan & Gardiner, 2007; Watts, 2007). Whilst more attention has been paid to social justice concerns in recent times, the gaze has primarily rested on a career development model which tends to individualise the process of career learning, focus on future employability, and privilege the guidance and counselling aspects (see Arthur, 2014; Hooley, Watts & Andrews, 2015; McMahon & Patton, 2006; McMahon, Arthur & Collins, 2008a). Moreover, Arthur (2014) identifies that where social justice concerns have been raised in the career literature, the concept tends to be under-theorised, loosely applied, and/or lack articulation, thus obscuring its intentions. Yet, career education has the potential to encompass an individual *and* collective understanding of our sense(s) of identity, and what it means to be an active citizen. Furthermore, career education can engender culturally informed insight into multiple ways of ‘being’ and ‘belonging’ (Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012) within a heterogeneous society in which group difference is acknowledged and respected, even though such differences may not be fully understood, or accepted, by all (Young, 1990).

As a critical social practice (Irving, 2013a), career education in New Zealand has the potential to engage students in a process of transformative learning. Freire (1972) notes that “Learning can only come about through praxis, reflection and action upon the world in order to change it” (p. 28). Therefore, by locating the concept of ‘career’ within a wider socio-political context, career education could provide students with opportunities to critically reflect on the/ir world, actively engage with social issues (Blake, Sterling & Goodson, 2013; Meyers, 2008), interrogate their own worldviews (Sterling, 2011), and imagine alternative futures for themselves their families, their communities, and society as a whole. At the heart of transformative learning is a belief in social justice. Thus, my study breaks new ground as I aspire to identify how social in/justice is located (and conceptualised) within career education in New Zealand high schools through an examination of the career education and guidance (CEG) policy guidelines produced by the MoE (2009a), and associated documents, and from interviews with career advisors who work in this curriculum area.

When deciding how to position my research I reflected on Cannella and Lincoln’s (2011) observation that “The ethics of a critical social science requires the cultivation of a consciousness that is aware of both the socio-political condition of the times and one’s own self-productive reactions to dominant disciplinary and regulatory technologies” (p. 84). Locating my research within a critical social theory framework, therefore, my study examines the socio-political and economic dimensions of career education in New Zealand high schools through a critical-recognitive lens, inspired by the political philosophy of Iris

Marion Young. For Young (1990), social justice is concerned with the institutional processes and practices that contribute to the oppression and domination of members of social groups. Highlighting the intersections between the distribution of social and economic goods and group recognition, Young contends that there is a need to begin by uncovering injustice before social justice can become a reality. Thus, my study explores whether career education in New Zealand high schools is socially inclusive, critically informed and politically dynamic.

The following questions have been used to guide my inquiry of how social in/justice is discursively constructed and located within career education in New Zealand high schools:

- 1) What are the dominant discursive messages communicated through Ministry of Education (MoE, 2009a) Policy Guidelines for Career Education and Guidance (CEG) in New Zealand schools?
- 2) How are the discursive messages within the CEG policy guidelines received by career advisors in practice?
- 3) Do school-based policies related to social justice concerns (such as equity, equality, inclusion, diversity, bullying) inform how career advisors conceptualise and construct career education?



- 4) Have humanist and essentialist conceptions of the ‘self’ informed how social in/justice is conceptualised and located within career education by career advisors?
  
- 5) Has neoliberal discourse influenced how social in/justice concerns are conceptualised and located within career education?

My data was drawn from two primary sources:

- An analysis of the CEG policy guidelines (and other associated documents);
  
- Semi-structured interviews with 11 career advisors and 1 career assistant in 11 secondary schools that were fully or partially funded directly by the state.

Nine of the schools were located in a major cosmopolitan city with a multicultural population, and two in a provincial city where the students were primarily of European descent.

Using critical discourse analysis (CdA<sup>3</sup>), I chose to examine the ways in which dominant discourses are constructed and conveyed through policy

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<sup>3</sup> I have used the acronym CdA to distinguish my methodological approach from that of Fairclough (1992, 1995) where the term CDA is generally associated with his work – see chapter four.

guidelines, and how career advisors are implicated in the conceptualisation and location of social justice within career education, for two major reasons. Firstly, whilst policy guidelines do not ‘fix’ practice, whether constructed at national or local levels, they do provide a context for, and attempt to set boundaries (Blackmore & Lauder, 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), to the scope of career education as a curriculum area. Thus policy seeks to establish what should ‘legitimately’ be included in, and through omission what might be excluded from, the career education curriculum. Moreover, through its textual practices, policy can also be used as a mechanism of control and measurement when accompanied by narrowly determined outcomes. Secondly, as career education is not currently a part of the national curriculum in New Zealand, and the CEG guidelines remain open to broad interpretation, career advisors continue to enjoy a degree of autonomy from the state. In schools, career advisors interpret policy, define ‘career’, construct ‘career-relevant’ learning opportunities, determine curriculum content and process, and relate this to the world that exists beyond the confines of schooling. Whilst I would agree that it is important to ensure that the voices of the less powerful within education are heard, such as students from subordinate groups and/or their parents, this can shift attention away from the discursive practices of those who occupy influential positions within society, hence the focus on policy pronouncements, and career advisors, in my study.

## **Shifting career/s: An auto/biographical journey of personal awakening**

As a middle child in a ‘white’, British working class family of seven children, I grew up in Australia during the 1960s and 1970s in a country where the effects of colonialism, racism, sexism, and social class inequities were rife. Yet I had little understanding of how these impacted on people’s lives and livelihoods, and recollect little attention given to these issues whilst I was at school. I entered the labour market aged 15 because being financially ‘independent’, and contributing to my family’s well-being, outweighed any interest in acquiring formal qualifications. An understanding of the value of qualifications, and the economic and social benefits tertiary study can bestow, occurred on my return to Britain in the mid-1970s. Through my friendship with a ‘working class family made good’ I entered the realm of a different, more affluent social class where I was exposed to new ways of knowing and being (Freire, 1972). Thus I gained access to the capital held by groups who are (or become) economically and culturally privileged (Bourdieu, 1986), and whose expectations, goals and authority are informed by this positioning (Young, 1990). I ‘discovered’ that tertiary study was possible due to the open access policies operated by many tertiary institutions at the time, and the financial support provided by the State.

As a mature ‘working class’ student (in my mid 20s) reading sociology I gained an insight into white, male, class-based privilege, and how the workings of inequality and social injustice can act to delimit opportunity. This became clearer after graduating when I began working as a career advisor with students

categorised as being ‘disaffected’, or having ‘special needs’. Many of these young people came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and were marginalised from/by mainstream schooling and/or society on the basis of their difference. Little attention was paid to how they were positioned by/within the career education curriculum, and rarely were they exposed to meaningful opportunities. On reflection, I recognise that I unintentionally contributed to this oppression, in some instances, by determining ‘career success’ in relation to externally imposed notions of ‘realistic’ education, training or employment choice.

In my latter role as a tertiary lecturer engaged in the professional education of careers staff, I became more aware of the inordinate influence of psychology and counselling on career theorising. I also experienced how government agendas seek to shape the nature of professional training, influence career practice, and delimit the scope of career education. I also completed a Master’s Degree in social justice and education which raised my awareness of this complex and contested notion, highlighting the limitations of discourses of ‘equality’ and the need to identify, name and challenge injustice(s) (Young, 1990). As I gained a deeper understanding of how discourse encompasses multiple versions of ‘truth’, ‘reality’, and ‘possibility’, I became aware of how these can progress particular interests, yet also create spaces for resistance and change (Jardine, 2005). Thus, in my teaching I took up a critical educational stance (Apple, 2006; Gale & Densmore, 2000; Giroux, 2011), engaging my students in discussion and debate

about issues of in/equality and social in/justice, and the role they might play in this.

Reflecting back over my personal history, educational experience(s), and professional engagement, helped illustrate the intangible nature of my own career enactment which was not simply characterised by individual choice, but influenced and informed by many social and economic factors. This process of ‘personal awakening’ motivated me to engage in PhD research that explored career education in a more thoughtful way by looking through a social justice lens.

## **Mapping the thesis**

In chapter two I critically examine the career-related literature that is located within the educational domain<sup>4</sup>, and make connections with social justice. The chapter begins with a discussion of ‘career’, as this provides the underlying rationale for career education. Consideration is given to how the term ‘career’ has been reconceptualised in changing times, yet remains subject to competing explanations. I contrast career education with the career development model, which is increasingly taking hold within schools, and contend that the move towards a competency based career management approach will dissipate the transformative learning potential of this curriculum area. Connections between career education and social justice are then made explicit by locating this

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<sup>4</sup>The literature on ‘career’ spans many diverse discipline areas including education, vocational psychology and human resource management. Therefore, my discussion is primarily focused on the literature within the broad educational arena.

curriculum area within a broader social, political and economic context. I conclude by identifying the relevance of the literature for my own study.

Chapter three begins with an overview of critical social theory which provides the broad theoretical framework for my study. I then locate the political philosophy of Iris Marion Young (1990, 2000) within this paradigm as her work provided the theoretical lens for my research. I expound on Young's (1990) theory of justice, and foreground her concern with intersecting sites of oppression and domination that act as a nexus for injustice. Young's critique of distributivist forms of justice are presented as this is embedded within Western liberal thinking. Throughout this chapter I identify why Young's critical theory of justice, in which concerns with distribution are interconnected with group recognition, provides an appropriate lens through which to explore my research problem.

The research methodology and method employed are discussed in chapter four. Within this chapter, I outline the philosophical foundations of critical discourse analysis (CdA), address key critiques of critical inquiry, and demonstrate how a critical qualitative research approach can facilitate a deeper examination of the relationship between social justice concerns and career education. I discuss key ethical issues for my research, and outline my research design. The process and practice I engaged with in the course of my research is presented, and I explain how I have used CdA in the analysis of my data. I conclude by tying the different strands of this discussion of methodology and method together. This leads me into my findings chapters.

The first of my findings chapters, chapter five, is focused on the macro influence of state policy. After outlining how schools, and education policy in general, is organised within a New Zealand context, I critically examine the dominant discursive messages that flow through the CEG policy guidelines (MoE, 2009a). Consideration is given to how the neoliberal discourse, that predominates within this document, are conflated with a surface language of liberal humanism which is associated with notions of choice, opportunity, individual responsibility, and the discovery of a deep psychological ‘self’ .

Chapter six is concerned with how the participants in my study positioned themselves/were positioned through their identification with the stated intentions of the CEG policy guidelines and the discursive reasoning that lies beneath it. In this chapter I consider how the discursive messages within the CEG guidelines were interpreted by participants, and discuss how the subject positions that were made available were taken up and/or rejected. The ‘surveillance’ role of the Education Review Office (ERO), and its disciplinary authority, is examined in my analysis of how two participants’ perceived this in relation to their freedom to practice. Consideration is given to how their positioning reflected their conceptualisation of career and their understanding of career education, and how they perceived their role.

In chapter seven I turn my attention to the meso level of the school. I explore the relationship between school-based policies concerned with social justice-related issues (such as equity, equality, anti-discrimination, cultural

diversity and bullying) and whether/where these ‘fit’ with/in career education. As teachers are actively engaged in (re)interpreting and (re)inscribing policy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) and relating these to their own field of practice, I consider the extent to which formal whole-school policies and (un)official statements of intent relating to social justice were visible within career advisors talk. I also explore whether such policies informed their understanding of social in/justice within a career education context.

Chapter eight is concerned with the importance career advisors attach to notions of the ‘self’, which are prevalent within humanist discourse. Consideration is given to the influence of liberal humanist thinking and the social justice implications, and how career advisors use their own life/career experiences and ‘sense of self’ to inform their approach to career/identity construction. The partial nature of the ‘voice of experience’ is explored, and I identify how this contributes to the range of subject positions that career advisors make available to their students. I also examine how forms of essentialism, where the attribution of (often deficit) personality traits and characteristics are accorded to students, are used to explain why the career/identities of some students are positioned as being ‘at risk’.

In chapter nine I examine how the political discourse(s) of neoliberalism, which has been dominant in New Zealand since the 1980s, has appropriated and reframed many of the philosophical principles of liberal humanism, leading to contradiction and confusion within career/education. From a social justice



perspective, consideration is given to how the market-oriented goals of neoliberalism, and its premise of the competitive and ‘selfish individual’ overlap, sit in tension with liberal humanist notions of ‘self-discovery’, and distributivist concerns with equality of access to opportunity. I show how the deep inscription of an individualised depoliticised discourse has re/shaped the processes and practices of career education, re/framed the concept of social justice, and made available to career advisors (and in/directly their students) complex and contradictory subject positions which are both taken up *and* resisted.

Chapter ten brings my thesis to a close. Here, I return to address my primary research question by considering how social in/justice is located within career education in New Zealand high schools. Building relationships between the multiple strands that have emerged from my findings, I conclude that within career education social justice is, at best, premised on an equal opportunities discourse (associated with liberal humanism), that is also being shaped, and at times overshadowed, by the discursive arrangements that sustain neoliberalism. Drawing on a critical-recognitive framework the implications of my findings for career advisors and their practice are identified. Finally, informed by a transformative career education pedagogy I consider areas for future research, and outline possibilities for practice, that will contribute insight into how social justice concerns might be actively progressed within this curriculum area.

## Chapter Two

# Connecting career/education to social justice: A critical review of the literature<sup>5</sup>

### Introduction

For many young people in New Zealand, the challenges faced in the transition from compulsory schooling have become increasingly complex and uncertain in contemporary times (Vaughan, 2010; Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012). In chapter one I indicated that in a technologically advanced globalised world, which is increasingly dominated by neoliberal thinking, the certainties of the past are being replaced by a sense of indeterminacy and insecurity in relation to occupational choice, employment, and life in general (Savickas, 2011). In response to changes within the labour market a more inclusive concept of career is emerging that is no longer tied to employment. In New Zealand, for example, a holistic definition is advocated in which career is deemed to embrace all facets of life, hence ‘life’ and ‘career’ have become intertwined (MoE, 2009a). Consequently, as Ruff (2001) contends, career education should be understood as being “both inclusive, embracing the multiple dimensions of the lives of all individuals, and exclusive, promoting learning *about* the world of work, community and adult life [emphasis added]” (p. 97). Therefore, if career is understood as a multifaceted concept which is located within a wider social,

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<sup>5</sup> This chapter provided the basis for the following article: Irving, B. A. (2010). (Re)constructing career education as a socially just practice: An antipodean reflection. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 10(1), 49-63. doi 10.1007/s10775-009-9172-1.

political and economic context, the transformative potential of career education becomes more apparent.

Career education inhabits an important space within secondary education. Occupying the metaphorical borderlands, it traverses the gap between school and the 'adult' world beyond. Assisting students to locate career learning within the/ir world has the potential to engage them in a critically reflexive process through which they can engage with a multilayered understanding of 'career' construction, providing insight into what 'career' means to them and how they envisage their own 'career(s)' unfolding over time. Locating this curriculum area within a broader critical educational context (Kincheloe, 2007, 2008) extends the learning environment by facilitating a collective examination of how the concept of 'career' is historically derived and shaped by the social, political and economic milieu of the times (Irving, 2005; Ruff, 2001). Thus, 'career' takes on a materiality, connecting the desires of the 'self' and the shaping of 'opportunity' with the philosophical context through which the socially constructed nature of career can be understood (see McIlveen & Schultheiss, 2012).

When viewed through a social justice lens, career education can enable students to explore the multiple and fluid dimensions of 'self', 'career', 'opportunity', and 'justice' by deepening their understanding of how this might be conceptualised, constructed, influenced and enacted in/through life. It is important to add that little attention has been paid to issues of social in/justice, and the multiple competing iterations of this concept (see Gale, 2000), within a career

*education* context in either the New Zealand or international literature. Given its contested nature, there is a need to ask whether career learning perpetuates oppression and domination (see Irving, 2011a), or contributes to the development of critical and democratic citizens within a pluralist society, where social group ‘difference’ is acknowledged, accepted, *and* respected (Young, 1990). This raises questions for my study concerning how social in/justice is conceptualised and located within career education policy and practice in New Zealand.

Therefore, I begin chapter two by examining the concept of career, as this provides an underlying theoretical context for career education. Competing explanations are discussed, as I outline different perspectives which prevail within the career education and guidance literature. Building from this, I explore the unstable concept of ‘career education’ (Harris, 1999), a curriculum area that is subject to multiple meanings and interpretations (Barnes, 2004; Vaughan & Gardiner, 2007). I identify how this curriculum area is increasingly being shaped by a career *development* and *employability* discourse, focused on the acquisition of ‘competencies’, informed by a neoliberal worldview. Career education is then located within a broader social, political and economic context where connections between career education and social justice are made explicit.

### **Concerning career(s): Competing conceptualisations**

The discussion in this section raises questions about how ‘career’ is conceptualised, positioned, and discursively presented as this has implications for policy guidance, and career advisors in practice. If, as Inkson (2007) suggests, we

define our lives by our career, then how this concept is understood takes on a new sense of meaning and importance. Yet, as Australian academics, Patton and McMahon (2006) assert “The meaning and definition of career is still understood differentially. The lack of conceptual clarity maintains ambiguity and continues to prevent a common ground in thinking in this area” (p. 4). For example, earlier in this chapter I identified that a holistic understanding, which intertwines all facets of life with career, is advocated by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand (MoE, 2009a). In contrast, a quasi-traditional understanding of career is constantly communicated through media representations, where the term is often located within a discourse relating to professions and/or occupations. As New Zealand academics Humphries and Dyer (2005) comment, it is commonplace in the career talk of most people to relate this to the job they do. With regards to young people, English academics Barnes, Bassot and Chant (2011) note that school students tend to associate ‘career’ with ‘money’ and immediate post-school progression, a view supported by findings from New Zealand research (see Vaughan, 2010). This appears to reflect a broader social inscription, where the term ‘career’ is commonly utilised as an identity marker which is associated with ‘good choices’ that signify economic and personal ‘success’ (Richardson, 2012a). Therefore, if career is to provide a meaningful foundation for career education, there is a need to explore competing conceptualisations, consider how these might sit within this curriculum area, and connect with issues of social justice.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) identify that traditional career theories, which continue to guide career education in New Zealand (Careers New Zealand,

n.d.a), have dominated thinking in this area. Underwritten by psychological and individualised concepts of the self (Guichard, 2005; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Inkson, 2007) which reflect a Western worldview (Barker & Irving, 2005; Watson, 2006), these cohere with the liberal humanist notion that there is a need to discover a ‘true essential self’, develop individual autonomy, and to aim for self-actualisation (Gothard, 2001), if a meaningful career is to be realised. Within this traditional career discourse, differentialist theorists emphasised the importance of individual psychological difference and the application of psychometric testing to measure interests, abilities and personality traits (see Patton & McMahon, 2006). Career theorists, such as Holland (1973), constructed instruments to measure an individual’s latent talents and abilities, which were then matched to appropriate occupational environments, which is commonly referred to as a ‘person-environment fit’ approach. Developmentalist theorists, such as Super (1990), have focused on notions of individual career maturity which is related to life stage, and mediated by an individual’s life-span and experiences. The hypothetical concept of ‘career maturity’ is a key component of Super’s work (Patton & McMahon, 2006), which Furbish and Reid (2013) define as “the capacity to form a vocational self-concept based on the synthesis of self-knowledge and environmental knowledge” (p. 17), which can also incorporate the notion of ‘realism’ (Super, 1990). Whilst person-environment fit and developmentalist theories provide philosophically competing explanations, both approaches are still widely used in New Zealand schools (Furbish, 2012; also see MoE, 2009a).

Changing times have led to a reassessment of what a career is, and how this might be constructed and enacted. Although the career development literature (within the broad education, guidance and counselling field) continues to be dominated by variations of the career theories outlined above, there has been a noticeable shift away from the notion of an ‘objective’ career, to one that is much more subjective in relation to the form it takes, and how meaning is attributed. Drawing on the work of Hall and Associates (1996), Collin (2000) observes that,

career is not solely an individual project; that the individual constructs career in relation to other people; that career development arises from interdependency, mutuality and reciprocity, rather than from autonomy and individual mastery. (pp. 35-36)

Psychological *constructivist* and social *constructionist* (see Raskin, 2002) explanations have emerged which are gaining greater traction as the traditional concept of career fragments (Young & Collin, 2000). In the psychological constructivist perspective, reality is deemed to emerge as part of a cognitive process, where the *individual* gives meaning to their career through interactions with others, and their environment (Patton & McMahon, 2006). McIlveen (2012) identifies that through social dialogue the individual constructs an identifiable ‘self’ by making sense of who they are in relation to the world as they understand it. Cognitive processes of mind are at work as the individual relates their experiences *to* society, and interprets ‘reality’ by connecting it to their own unique situation (McMahon & Patton, 2006). Social constructionism, meanwhile, focuses

more on the ways in which social processes and practices position the individual's experiences, and shapes their understanding of reality from the 'outside in', resonating with Young's (1990) view of social in/justice which provides the theoretical frame for my study<sup>6</sup>.

Although there are similarities between constructivism and social constructionism, insofar as individuals derive and interpret knowledge in an interactional sense (Young & Popaduk, 2012), there are also differences. Colley (2007), in her review of McMahon and Patton's (2006) edited book concerning constructivist approaches in career counselling, identified the underpinning influence of psychology, and the absence of the contributions made by critical theory and sociological studies related to career choice and development. For example, constructivism highlights the importance of liberal humanist notions of mind, uniqueness, self-concept and (relative) agency. Social constructionism, meanwhile, places greater emphasis on the socio-political milieu of the times, and the discursive influences that make available subject positions through which agency is bounded. As Richardson (2012a) explains, discourse "acknowledges that language is always permeated by social beliefs and values . . . Thus conversation co-constructs our experience; it co-constructs our individual subjectivity and consciousness" (p. 88).

So far I have identified how career theorising (in the career education, guidance and counselling field) has sought to explain the ways in which

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<sup>6</sup> This is discussed in greater depth in chapter three.



individuals make sense of career, and outlined how this appears to be changing over time. The question that remains is whether ‘career’ is developed from ‘within’, constructed as part of a cognitive process of meaning-making, or primarily externally inscribed where it is socially mediated through discursive influences that shape the scope of the meaning-making process. I now move on to examine how the concept of career is being discursively re/imagined and re/conceptualised as a result of economic and social change.

*Re/constructed career(s) for contemporary times: The intertwining of life*

Watts (1996a) contends that due to the economic upheavals of the 1980s, which led to changes in the nature of the labour market, the traditional linkage between ‘careers’ and opportunities for progression *within* an employment hierarchy was progressively severed resulting in a ‘careerquake’. This careerquake served to disrupt the certainties of the past, and dislodge preconceived expectations about how careers might be conceptualised. In later work, Watts (2001) illustrated how the informal psychological contract that existed between employers and employees, whereby long-term job security was offered in exchange for loyalty and a sense of reciprocal commitment, was progressively replaced by a new form. What emerged in many workplaces, noted Watts (2001), was a tenuous short-term transactional form of employer-employee relationship, where the ‘contract’ was restricted to the life of a particular job or task. He also observed that “Even where the relational contract survives, it commonly involves exchanging relative job security for greater task flexibility” (p. 211). Consequently, Watts (1996a; 2001) argued that the traditional concept of

‘careers’ needed to be redefined if it was to continue to have meaning in contemporary society.

Watts (2001), thus redefined career “as the individual’s progression in learning and in work” (p. 211). Whilst the meaning attributed to career has steered away from a traditional understanding, the concept remains firmly tied to an individual’s economic potential. To illustrate, the focus has shifted from employment to employability, where individuals are expected to proactively manage their own career, take responsibility for their own career *development* (McMahon, Patton & Tatham, 2003; Patton, 2005), and learn to be entrepreneurial in outlook (Bengtsson, 2014). Alongside this runs the notion of ‘progression’ which implies some form of forward movement, yet the nature of this remains somewhat uncertain. Moreover, the discourse of learning is coupled with earning (Biesta, 2005) within this particular career context which continues to be synonymous with economic participation (Stead & Bakker, 2012). Echoes of this discursive position can be found in New Zealand where, observes Zepke (2009), lifelong learning has become a “functional technology” (p. 751) which continues to be informed by neoliberalism (an issue I return to in later chapters), thus limiting its critical social purpose.

Vaughan (2010), another New Zealand researcher, also makes connections between the notions of lifelong learning and lifelong career, commenting that if these two dimensions are to be compatible, it “requires a broad conception of career-as-life (now commonplace in career theory anyway) and an understanding

that workplaces, occupations, and people's relationship with their occupations, are constantly changing" (p. 173). However, whilst there are many variants of career theory, the dominant discourse that prevails locates 'life' within the economic sphere. As I explain in greater detail in chapter four, dominant discourses are used "to frame representations of 'how the world is', present socially constructed 'truths' as incontrovertible, and establish 'common sense' explanations and solutions" (Irving, 2013b, p.187).

An example of dominant career discourse at play is found in British research reported by S. Lewis (2003). In her study of work-life balance, Lewis found a blurring of boundaries had occurred between paid work and those aspects of life that have traditionally been regarded as *private* personal and leisure time. Reflecting Richardson's (2012a) observation noted earlier in this chapter, Lewis comments that the choice of some individuals to engage in paid work needs to be understood within a broader context which "includes the value placed by society on work-based achievement which becomes a major source of self-esteem and identity" (p. 353). This reflects the primacy given to the relationship between 'work' and economic production that is embedded within career discourse (Richardson, 2009), the intrinsic satisfaction that, it is assumed, individuals derive from their employment, and the ways in which status is conferred in Western, and particularly North American(ised), society (Young, 1990).

Although challenges to dominant career discourse bounded by notions of 'self-enrichment', and the attachment to 'meaningful paid work', can be found in

the literature, these are few and far between. In earlier work (Irving, 2005) I have advocated for a more holistic and inclusive view of career that accommodates multiple ways of being which allows for whether an individual is economically active or otherwise. This resonates with the work of Blustein (2006) and Richardson, (2012a) who express the view that the dominant use of the term ‘career’ is exclusive as it is generally used to signify engagement in paid employment (what Richardson refers to as ‘market work’). Moreover, as Athanasou (2012) observes, the term ‘career’ has middle-class connotations with its talk of “aspirations, progress and achievement” (p. 59). Hence, dominant discursive conceptions of career fail to connect with the lived realities experienced by those where paid employment is about having a ‘job’ to provide a means of income and/or survival.

Richardson (2009) has thus argued the need to move away “from the discourse of career to the discourse of work, and . . . shift from a focus on the occupational domain to a more holistic rubric of work and relationships across occupational and personal domains of life” (p. 77). She contends that the emphasis on occupational identity, i.e. ‘I work in banking, therefore I am a banker’, is reductive as it is focused on an individual’s job title, rather than the activities they engage in. This discourse plays out in everyday life, suggests Richardson (2012a), where individuals “experience themselves “working” at their jobs and “busy” at home and in their personal lives” (p. 97). Moreover, the privileging of paid over unpaid ‘work’ reinforces the economic basis of career discourse, marginalising those who are not deemed to be economically

productive. This can result in their social exclusion (Levitas, 1996) positioning them as ‘careerless’, the insignificant ‘other’ to the economically productive subject (Dyer, 2006). For example, in the literature, having children, or becoming a full-time parent, tends to be positioned in opposition to a ‘real career’ which involves being in employment, rather than acknowledged as a *different* career path (see Baker, 2010).

Notwithstanding, there are tangible examples of alternative forms of career enactment, where meaning is attributed to activities that are external to economic engagement. Boon’s (2006) study of skiers in Queenstown, New Zealand, provides an example of how meaning can be given to career in ways that both affirm *and* transgress dominant career discourse. In her study, Boon reports that her participants engaged in ‘leisure careers’ by choosing to take up casualised hotel employment in alpine areas as it provided them with the material resources, and the geographic location, to enable them to pursue their primary ‘career’ interest in skiing. This study exemplifies how career identity can be constructed in relation to an individual’s personal desires which may exist *outside* of the labour market, demonstrating the relative fluidity and indeterminacy of career identity. The notion of ‘career’ extending beyond occupational and employment boundaries is illustrated by Leonard (2004), who was formerly a careers teacher in a New Zealand secondary school. He describes how, as a retiree, his career now encompasses voluntary work, leisure pursuits and extended family responsibilities. Retirement, he argues, provides an opportunity to realise ‘self’ in

relation to opportunities that are no longer bound, nor defined, by paid employment.

This insight into the shifting arena of career theory and enactment provides an important marker for how career education might be constructed. What is noticeable in the dominant theoretical perspectives relates to the ways in which career construction has been positioned as an autonomous individual project. Hence, ‘career’ is positioned as an individual *possession* in contemporary times, a valuable commodity that will assist them to thrive and survive through their own careful management. Here, individuals are expected to learn to become their own pro-active career manager, adopt an ‘entrepreneurial outlook’ (Bengtsson, 2014), and actively engage in ‘appropriate’ career development activity (see for example Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Huibers & Blonk, 2013; McMahon, Patton & Tatham, 2003; McMahon & Tatham, 2008; Patton, 2005; Patton & McMahon, 2006), an issue I return to later in this chapter.

The discussion in this section raises questions for my study about how ‘career’ is conceptualised and discursively presented through career education policy, and understood by career advisors in practice in New Zealand. There is a need to examine how career advisors give meaning to the concept of ‘career’, and to explore whether career construction is perceived as being a technical-rational cognitive process undertaken by individuals (Hokinson & Sparkes, 1997), or understood to emerge as part of a complex social process through which students come to learn what *might* be possible. Connected to this is an understanding of

whether the career *education* curriculum is located within a broader context that engages students in a critical exploration and examination of the complex social, political, and economic interplay between aspirations, expectations, duties, ideas, values and opportunity. These are all key issues from a social justice perspective, because how career is conceptualised and located within career education will inform the learning opportunities provided within this curriculum area.

### **Re/Conceptualising career education: Challenging paradigms**

Career 'education' in New Zealand is underpinned by a benevolent and well intentioned liberal humanist discourse (Tomlinson, 2001). The individual is positioned as a unique psychological being, who acts as a rational and autonomous free agent (Irving, 2011a; Ruff, 2001), occupying centre-stage in the/ir world. Informed by the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2010), this curriculum area is ostensibly concerned with the preparation of individual students to manage their life/career beyond school (MoE, 2009a). Career 'education' *practice* is thus constructed around the acquisition of competencies that encompass: the development of self-awareness, the exploration of opportunities, and deciding and taking action in relation to their chosen career path (see MoE, 2009a, pp. 7-10). It is assumed that through this process students will develop the foundational skills, knowledge and understanding required to effectively manage their career(s) throughout their life. Although not explicitly stated, this coheres with the influential DOTS (Decision making, Opportunity awareness, Transition learning, and Self awareness) model developed in England

by Law and Watts (1977). DOTS is generally concerned with ensuring students have the capacity to make effective career decisions through “a clear self-perception, a good understanding of the options available and a capacity to apply strategies needed to implement decisions” (McCowan & McKenzie, 1997, p. 141).

Yet far from being transparent, research by Vaughan and Gardiner (2007), reported that career education in New Zealand was a confused and contradictory curriculum area, lacking in both clarity and a sense of purpose. This situation is neither new, nor unique to New Zealand. For example, British academics, Best, Ribbins and Ribbins, observed the problematic nature of this curriculum area back in 1984 when they noted,

‘careers education’ needs to be distinguished carefully from other, related activities with which it is sometimes confused . . . because it is (or at least should be) concerned with much more than the giving of information, advice and practice in the skills of choosing and procuring an appropriate job. (p. 69)

English academics Barnes, Bassot and Chant (2011), meanwhile have re/constructed career *education* as ‘career learning and development’, and whilst acknowledging that there are multiple dimensions to ‘career’, their material is primarily located within a globalised labour market context. Hence, the term ‘career education’ has been used to incorporate a diverse range of career-related



activities, extending from career guidance and counselling, through to career development, career learning, career management and employability skills.

The lack of a sound theoretical base and the absence of a discrete body of knowledge (see for example Barnes, 2004; Harris, 1999; Ruff, 2001) highlights an inherent weakness of this curriculum area. This is reflected in Harris' (1999) convincing argument that the concept of career education should thus be regarded as essentially contested because it has no one agreed meaning. The conceptual ambiguity concerning what career education 'is', and what this curriculum area should seek to achieve, has left it open to direction by pragmatic policy decisions (Ruff, 2001; Vaughan, 2010) which are influenced by the whims of government, and trans-national bodies such as the European Union, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and World Bank (see Watts & Sultana, 2004).

Pragmatic concerns with the economy and the exploitation of human capital can be seen in New Zealand career education policy and practice which is premised on notions of the autonomous individual, planned rational (yet guided) choice, talent-matching models, the productive worker-citizen, and labour market information (see MoE, 2009a; Vaughan & Gardiner, 2007). For example, Vaughan and Gardiner (2007) identified from their postal survey of New Zealand secondary and composite schools that the focus of career education was primarily on providing students with access to information, and facilitating a linear progression from compulsory education into learning or employment. They identified that, collectively, careers staff "are noticeably indeterminate,

particularly in relation to the immediate priorities of career education” (p. 4).

Whilst acknowledging that there is value in preparing students for the demands of a knowledge society, economic requirements for flexible and skilled workers, the work-life balance, and lifelong learning, Vaughan and Gardiner (2007) suggest there is a need to go further. They posit the view that students should be encouraged to learn how they can actively participate as ‘learners-workers’, and directly engage in the production of their own careers. This is of particular importance when related to their further observation that if career is to be understood in its broadest sense then career education will also need to incorporate a life view. What remains unclear, however, is whether Vaughan and Gardiner (2007) are suggesting that career education should simply incorporate a life view which privileges economic participation, or whether this curriculum area should extend its practices beyond market rhetoric by incorporating a multilayered social understanding of career, which is critically engaged.

The fragile nature of a multilayered career discourse, in which *everyone* is assumed to have a career of their own making (MoE, 2009a), can be seen in a more recent evaluation of career education and guidance in 10 New Zealand secondary schools. The Education Review Office (ERO, 2015) reported ‘positive outcomes’, noting that:

Students at these schools were given considerable opportunities to plan for their future, and were supported to reach their goals . . . Students knew where to find information about careers and courses and were able to

identify a range of possible careers. Visiting tertiary providers and experiencing workplaces helped them to clarify which options would suit them. Some students had been offered jobs as a result of work placements.  
(p. 3)

In the above, futures and goals are irrevocably tied to courses and workplaces. Although there is a degree of vagueness in relation to how ‘career’ is being conceptualised, career progression appears to be equated with schools ensuring that students made the ‘right’ choices, and ‘travel’ in particular education/work-related directions. The focus of the evaluation ultimately rested on *individual* rationality, responsibility, planning and pathways, and employment/employability. Little was said about how career education might introduce students to meaningful careers that might be constructed outside of the formal educational/occupational sphere, whilst references to social in/justice, equity and/or equality, were noticeably absent. This is of relevance to my study, as there is a need to look more closely at how the career education and guidance (CEG) policy guidelines (MoE, 2009a) position career education, to understand how career advisors conceptualise career education, to know what resources they draw on as they construct their curriculum, and identify whose interests are privileged.

*Shifting discourses: Critical learners or competent workers*

Although the term ‘career education’ is used to describe this curriculum area in the CEG policy guidelines, it would appear from the definition provided

on page 6 of this document that the use of career *development* would be more appropriate. To clarify, whereas career *education* would be better understood as a social practice that encompasses a broadening of the mind through a *critical* engagement with/in the world (Bristol, 2012; Freire, 1996; Giroux, 2009; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; Irving, 2013a), career *development* is focused on concerns with ‘self-knowledge’, opportunity awareness and the acquisition of career management competencies (Watts, 2014). This shifting use of terminology is made clear in Patton’s (2001) discussion of career education in Australia, where references to career psychology and counselling theory predominates. Patton places emphasis on skills development and preparation *for* career management, rather than learning *about* how social, economic and political influences shape *how* career(s) might be conceptualised and enacted, which can lead to a deeper critical *educational* understanding. When located within a career development discourse, therefore, career *education* can be construed as referring to the acquisition of competencies that will facilitate the *individual’s* “lifelong progression in learning and work”<sup>7</sup> (Watts, 2014, p. 2).

British academics, Hooley, Watts and Andrews (2015), have also argued for the development of a career and employability learning (CEL) approach, which might be euphemistically regarded as an alternative term for career *development*. Furthermore, they have advocated for *all* teachers to become more involved in its delivery within schools. This, they contend, will help to “mobilise young people’s potential for the benefit of society and the economy, and that

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<sup>7</sup> Whilst both Patton (2001) and Watts (2014) see ‘work’ as encompassing both paid and unpaid activities, the career development discourse primarily locates ‘work’ in an economic context.

supports social equity and social mobility” (p. 40). There is little recognition, however, that the conflation of career with employability learning can result in an instrumentalist ‘skills’ discourse, supported by narrowly conceived career management *competencies*, which may contribute to the production of ‘compliant’ workers, rather than critical learners. Moreover, a disciplinary process is at play in Hooley, Watts and Andrews’ disparaging reference to those teachers who believe “that the school system should not be about preparing young people for work” (p. 11), yet effusive praise for those who take up the call to engage with the/ir career and employability learning discourse. Thus a binary is constructed in which the ‘bad’ teacher is positioned as taking a reductive view of the purpose of education, whilst the ‘good’ teacher is seen to embrace an uncritical, unproblematic, and positive view of the labour market, reflecting a commitment to the long-term well-being of their students, and society.

The approach to career ‘education’ in New Zealand is not too far removed from that advocated by Hooley, Watts and Andrews (2015), where it is positioned as having a major part to play in ensuring that tomorrow’s adults and workers will be appropriately skilled, well qualified, flexible, and able to ‘self-manage’ their future careers (MoE, 2009a). Hence, career ‘education’ is expected to enable students “[to] learn how to become resilient career managers . . . [by] gaining the competencies that will enable them to lead full and satisfying lives, and contribute to a sustainable future for Aotearoa New Zealand” (MoE, 2009a, p. 7). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the competencies students are expected to acquire are focused on ‘self-knowledge’, opportunity awareness, and decision

making and acting. Schools are thus advised “to use the competencies and their knowledge of individual students’ acquisition of them to design learning programmes that are appropriate to the developmental stages of their students and inclusive of their cultural identities, values and contexts” (MoE, 2009a, p. 7).

Although there is some affirmation in the competency descriptors that career construction is multilayered, this is located within an apolitical context, which disregards the effects of social structures (Roberts, 2005; Young, 1990). Hence, inequality is primarily positioned as a problem for individuals, families and those from non-European ethnic cultures. Opportunity for critical reflection *about* the nature of work, injustices that occur *within* the labour market (and society at large), and the marginalising of those who fail to conform to a dominant career and employability discourse, is muted. Moreover, by focusing on the competencies required by individuals if they are to be/come resilient, productive, and enterprising ‘worker-citizens’, students are positioned as human commodities, there to be exploited in the interests of capital. To clarify, Brookfield (2009) explains that *critical* reflection is focused on “uncovering, and challenging, the power dynamics that frame practice and uncovering an challenging hegemonic assumptions (those assumptions we embrace as being in our best interests when in fact they are working against us)” (p.298). Thus, it is concerned with both the personal *and* professional values held by career advisors as these can inform how ‘sense’ is made of curriculum, and practice is constructed.

This can be exacerbated by attempts to construct career competency measures that are situated within a sanitised economic frame (see for example: Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Huibers, & Blonk, 2013; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2010), and may be designed to meet government objectives. As Sultana (2011b) has noted, career development will continue to be marginalised and potentially lack the investment it requires from governments until policymakers are able to see measurable and tangible benefits. The suggestion is that the introduction of ‘formal’ qualifications in career development, and the tracking of students’ post-16 to demonstrate ‘positive’ continued education, training or employment outcomes will also contribute to its standing within education, and lead it to be more valued by students. Yet, as Usher & Edwards (1994) observe, “The assessment of performance through competencies, articulated within the dominant liberal humanist [and neoliberal] discourse is powerful in sustaining a regime of truth and itemising and normalising the behaviour of people in the workplace” (p. 108), a concern that could equally be applied to the current aims of career ‘education’ in New Zealand.

So, where does this leave career *education*, which should be focused on broader goals concerning the socially constructed nature of ‘career’ itself, and how structural influences can shape the ‘careers’ that are made available to different groups? Although there may be some value in assisting students to gain those career management competencies that will assist them to access opportunities and manage their lives in a volatile world (Sultana, 2014), adopting

a holistic career learning approach takes students beyond competency models which are predominantly concerned with the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of career development (Sultana, 2009). This contributes to a deeper understanding of the ‘why’ and ‘whose interests are served’ associated with a critical educational pedagogy (Freire, 1996; Kincheloe, 2008; McLaren, 2007). Furthermore promoting a competencies discourse, in isolation of broader knowledge and understanding (Usher & Edwards, 1994), deflects attention away from a deeper, and more critical, approach to career education that uncovers and interrogates multiple meanings and disrupts dominant discursive formations (Irving, 2010b). As Bakan (2011) contends,

education should be rich and multidimensional; that it should prepare children for lives as literate, informed, and thinking citizens, not only as skilled workers; and that it should cultivate their full potential as human beings, not only as human resources. (p. 150)

Thus, it would appear that when career learning is isolated from a critical educational context, it is as much about the development of *survival* strategies, as it is about ‘management’ and social well-being. This raises questions about whether a competency base for career ‘education’ will result in a narrowly circumscribed career development discourse that is founded on conformity and compliance.



Like education itself, career education is subject to a range of competing social, political, and economic, discourses which impact on how social justice is conceptualised and located within this curriculum area. Acknowledging that occupational identity should no longer be privileged but recognised as one potential aspect of a wider career identity (which incorporates other possibilities) can contribute to a redrawing of the boundaries that separate economic engagement from social values. Constructing ‘our’ career(s) in relation to how we see and understand ourselves, what we value at moments in time, and how we give meaning to the complexity of our lives, contributes to a dynamic sense of being that is no longer bounded by, in many cases, imposed economic ‘realities’. This has implications for the construction of career education as it moves this curriculum area away from that of vocational preparation, towards the preparation of critical citizens for an active engagement with the social dimensions of life.

### **Locating social justice in career education: Im/possible practice**

As I noted in chapter one, the pursuit of social justice is a key political goal within contemporary society, yet the term is often loosely applied (Sandretto, 2004) and poorly articulated within everyday popular discourses. It is also important to recognise that the location of social in/justice, career/education and schooling in New Zealand cannot be understood in isolation of the everyday social, political and economic events of the ‘wider world’, and the discursive formations that are at play. Thus, it is also important to identify the interrelationship between society, schooling and curriculum if social justice is to be meaningfully connected to career education.

*Career/education in neoliberal times: Economic imperatives*

For young people transitioning from compulsory schooling, career ‘choice’ appears to be mediated by a range of interrelated factors including socio-political ideologies (Watts, 1996b), social class (Roberts, 2005), ‘race’ and culture (Basit, 2012; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Mara, 2015), gender (Humphries & Dyer, 2005). Hence, career education, like education itself, operates within a politically charged arena that is characterised by substantive inequalities between individuals and social groups. As I noted in chapter one, New Zealand has been in thrall to neoliberal policies since the 1980s, where market principles have come to inform educational thinking (Lauder & Brown, 2007). Neoliberalism has been positioned by its proponents as an apolitical standpoint that is primarily concerned with the economic wealth and health of nations (Kumashiro, 2008; Patrick, 2013; Ruff, 2001) in response to the global economy (Apple, 2007).

Thus, what counts is the individual’s *economic* potential (Read, 2009), i.e. their capacity to create wealth, with societal benefits seen to accrue *through* this (Gurria, 2007). Here, the ideal/ised neoliberal subject position is that of the socially detached (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006) ‘homo economicus-entrepreneur’ (Read, 2009), the responsabilised, self-regulating, self-interested, economic subject (Kelly, 2001), who embraces an entrepreneurial spirit (Peters, 2001) by making their life, and their career, their business (Hinchcliffe & Jolly, 2011; Kelly, 2006). State welfare provision, meanwhile, is positioned as a disincentive to ‘work’ (Goodin, 2001), whereas the contribution to wealth

‘creation’ through active participation in the labour market is positioned as the key signifier of social inclusion (Levitas, 1996), and a marker of good citizenship.

Although the effects of neoliberalism play out unevenly across nations, a common feature is the notion that individual success and economic reward should be distributed on the principles of merit and effort (Higgins & Nairn, 2006; Nairn & Higgins, 2007), which reflects its borrowing from liberal humanism. Through processes of reward and punishment, neoliberalism engages in a retributive form of justice (Gale, 2000; Irving, 2010a) by holding *individuals* personally responsible for their immediate, and future, well-being. Eschewing the effects of gender, ethnic and socio-economic class difference, it is assumed that those who possess the greatest talent and ability (Baez, 2006), and who expend the most effort, will gain advantage in a globalised employment market. The implication is that those individuals who do not achieve academic (and economic) success are told they must ‘work harder and smarter’ in a productive sense, i.e. physically, intellectually, and on themselves, if they are to improve their position in life. Consequently, investment in education is regarded as an economic imperative for the neoliberal state, due to the contribution it is assumed to make to the development of human capital (Patrick, 2013; Tomlinson, 2001). Whereas liberal humanism takes a moral stance towards issues of inequality, and draws on distributivist discourses, positioning meritocracy as the fairest way to ensure that all individuals have a ‘fair’ chance to compete for the available opportunities, for neoliberals the justice of the market prevails (Souto-Otero, 2010). Here, simple equality has been supplanted by a ‘user pays’ philosophy, where ‘equality’ has a

financial cost attached. Social justice is cast as a form of reductive individual obligation, where “those who had suffered under thirteen years of neoliberal reforms were said to owe something to those who had benefited from them” (Small, 2009, p. 5). Hence, those least advantaged are expected to repay their ‘debt’ to those who have gained the most.

Carr and Hartnett (1996) identify that education is immersed in an ongoing struggle which reflects the ideological tensions at play in the wider society as it is continually expected to adapt to changing cultural and economic times. Increasingly, education is being organised around market-driven neoliberal goals (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) where, asserts Down (2009), the focus is on the production of enterprising workers-citizens within the context of a globalised knowledge economy. Here, the value of learning is measured by its economic utility “resulting in certain forms of knowledge being legitimised over others” (Dyer, 2012, p. 335). With its focus on credentialism, entrepreneurialism, and the reinscription of a socially detached ‘self’ who seeks personal fulfilment through “a desire to acquire and consume” (Cushman, 1990, p. 600), neoliberal discourse has replaced liberal humanism in educational talk. Those who advocate in favour of a meritocratic system do so in the belief that the measures used are neutral and value free (Baez, 2006; Young, 1990). This can be seen in the career development model discussed earlier in this chapter, where the acquisition of competencies may be construed as an attempt to ‘level the playing field’. However, as Baez (2006) points out, whilst there is no actual definition as to what constitutes ‘merit’, the measures that are used to shape such learning is institutionally

determined and politically informed. Furthermore, Baez (2006) contends, “Merit standards, regardless of how well they can be defended, are ultimately culturally biased; they reflect that which in our society currently deems worthy” (p. 1002), with knowledge itself reflecting the normative discourses of the day (Adams et al, 2000; Apple, 2000).

This is also visible within a labour market context where there is an assumption that, regardless of ethnicity, socio-economic class and gender, those who prove to be the ‘most able’ will be given an entitlement to claim the greatest rewards within a hierarchically organised labour market. Yet, far from being merit based, value-neutral, or socially detached, labour market practices remain steeped in the ascription of cultural values and prejudices, which are influenced by personal biases, negative attitudes, institutional racism (Phillips, 2011), and the marginalisation of the non-white other (Yong, 1990). Lying beneath neoliberal intentions in New Zealand other, more pernicious discourses are at play that cling on to vestiges of a ‘settler past’ (Kurian & Munshi, 2012), and reinforce white privilege (Borrell, Gregory, McCreanor & Jensen, 2009). For instance, recruitment and selection practices often transgress assumed neoliberal rationality and its claim to ‘racelessness’ (Thornton & Luker, 2010), with Wilson and Parker (2006) reporting that employment practices in New Zealand are influenced by an applicant’s ethnicity. This is supported in reports produced by Statistics New Zealand (2012). Using data from the New Zealand General Social Survey, Statistics New Zealand identified that discrimination most commonly occurred in employment situations, including “applying for (or keeping) a job or position” (p.

5), with those of Māori, Pacific, and Asian origin most affected, indicating that ‘white privilege’ may continue to have a hold in New Zealand. It is important to add that, within a ‘career context’, Reid (2011) has identified three different subject positions occupied by Māori which reflect their degree of acculturation and acceptance of dominant Pākehā (white European New Zealand) norms.

Although neoliberalism promotes a form of meritocratic principles, and ostensibly advocates that employers should maximise their investment by selecting and recruiting the ‘best person’ for the job, these ideological goals are rooted in an economic rationality which fails to account for the socio-cultural and political values held by those in authoritative positions. This acts to decontextualise the history of human struggle and resistance, thus masking the impact of structural inequalities and multiple oppressions on the basis of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic class and dis/ability.

In many respects career education may be more vulnerable to the intertwining of neoliberal discourse(s) with those of the knowledge economy because of its closer links with the post-school world, and what is happening in New Zealand society at large. As identified earlier in this chapter, the pressures to prepare students for an indeterminate life/career beyond school are infused within the career education and guidance (CEG) guidelines (MoE, 2009a), where career construction is positioned as an individual project which emphasises personal responsibility, values enterprise and competition, reifies the development of employability skills, and is located within the context of an unassailable

consumer-driven market economy. Consequently, career/education appears to be expected to become “the producer of obedient and ‘moral’ *human capital*” (McGregor, 2009, p. 355). Schools, teachers and career advisors, meanwhile, are judged against the extent to which their students acquire qualifications, demonstrate ‘competencies, and learn to accept a responsibilised individualised state. Hence, this curriculum area appears to be based on individualised notions of career development and employability. Therefore, my study seeks to identify whether career *education* in New Zealand actively questions dominant neoliberal discourse, and engages with issues of discrimination, ‘difference’, and social in/justice through its practices.

*Revealing social in/justice: How will ‘we’ know it when we see it?*

Although neoliberalism has had a hold on developments within education, with a few noticeable exceptions (for example: Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher, 2008; Hyslop-Margison & Pinto, 2007; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; Irving & Malik, 2005), this has rarely been discussed within a career *education* context. There has, however, been increased interest in ‘social justice’ within a career guidance, counselling, employability and/or development context in the international literature (see Arthur, 2005, 2014; Bassot, 2012; McMahon, Arthur & Collins, 2008a; Sultana, 2014), yet this has often avoided engagement with issues of politics and power. The political nature of social justice has, for example, led to impassioned debate about whether this philosophical position should provide the underpinning principle of career practice (Metz & Guichard, 2009).

A critical-recognitive reading of social justice (informed by the work of Young, 1990) can be seen to go beyond concerns with simple (in)equalities as it is concerned with how *society* meets the needs of *all* citizens. Thus, it provides a foundation for decisions about the distribution of goods and resources, *and* the forms of recognition that should be accorded to diverse social groups. Yet, the concept of ‘social justice’ appears to be poorly articulated and relatively unknown by career advisors. This is exemplified in Australian research reported by McMahon, Arthur and Collins (2008b). These researchers examined how social justice is understood and put into practice by career development practitioners. To help define and clarify their position they adopt O’Brien’s (2001) somewhat generalised understanding of socially just practice as “actions that contribute to the advancement of society and advocate for equal access to resources for the marginalized or less fortunate individuals in society”, (p. 66). Although there remained a lack of specificity around how social justice was being theorised in, and through, this research, McMahon, Arthur and Collins (2008b) reported that Australian career development practitioners expressed a commitment to ‘social justice’. However, the focus of their activities was on meeting the needs of individual clients, with little evidence of engagement with broader systemic issues. Furthermore, their exposure to different models of social justice, and access to training that might facilitate this, appeared to be lacking.

This generalised articulation of social justice in action, however, not only displays a modernist turn in relation to (an undefined) advancement of society, but also reflects the liberal view of Rawls (1971), who argues that a ‘fair’ distribution



of resources will result in equality of access and opportunity<sup>8</sup>. Of equal concern is the low participation rate in the research, which is underlined by McMahon, Arthur and Collins' (2008b) disconcerting suggestion that "it might also be possible that the topic of social justice is not one that captures the interest of career development practitioners or one that they believe is relevant for professional practice" (p. 22). This is reflected in Guichard's (2001) more general comment that:

Career education practices only rarely aim at enhancing equality of opportunity, of lessening *social inequity* or enhancing collective development actions . . . career education is focused on the individual [and] tends to ignore society and community. (p. 166)

This observation is particularly pertinent to recent reviews of career education in New Zealand, where little attention has been paid to issues of in/equality, and reference to 'social in/justice' is noticeably absent (see Education Review Office, 2006; Education Review Office, 2015; Vaughan and Gardiner, 2007). Where such issues are identified, these are positioned as challenges for individuals, families and/or communities. It is suggested that if *individuals* are to overcome *their* inherent disadvantage(s), they must engage more effectively with education in order to acquire qualifications (Ministry of Education, 2009a), reflecting a meritocratic neo/liberal discourse, discussed earlier in this chapter. Individual families and communities are "identified as the *cause* of their situation" (Gillborn

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<sup>8</sup> This is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

& Youdell, 2000, p. 30), and are thus held individually responsible and personally accountable (along with career advisors indirectly) for ‘achievement’ and ‘success’.

Within these reviews, there is little discussion about the ways in which socio-economic class, race, gender and dis/ability intersect as sites of discrimination and injustice, thus rendering invisible the deleterious effects of social structure on the misrecognition of difference, and the distribution of opportunity. Moreover, consideration of *why* discrimination occurs, and *how* it might be exposed, questioned and challenged through career education is noticeably absent. It is important to add that the term ‘social justice’ is not used within the CEG guidelines in New Zealand (MoE, 2009a), thus contributing further to its invisibility.

The silence within these reviews concerning the place of social justice in New Zealand career education is mirrored in a critique of career education and guidance in Ontario, Canada. Here, Hyslop-Margison and McKerracher (2008), identified that although students were encouraged to pursue non-traditional careers “There is no opportunity to discuss the very real barriers to marginalized groups confronting limited wages, racism, and other forms of religious, ethnic or economic discrimination” (p. 141). Issues of social in/justice (such as inclusion/exclusion, ‘disadvantage’, or ‘underachievement’) are presented in ‘black and white’ terms, positioned as problems for individuals, rather than the product of a complex nexus of inequitable power relations. Moreover, the ways in

which institutional mechanisms in education can contribute to discriminatory and exclusionary practices (Lankshear, Peters & Knobel, 1996), is also overlooked. As Young (1990) observes, social injustice is a product of social structures and dominant normative practices, which can perpetuate oppression and domination.

Yet, within the wider education curriculum more explicit connections are made with social justice in subject areas such as health and/or social studies. However, it appears that the critical learning that takes place within one curriculum area does not necessarily transfer across to another. For example, Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2006) observe that in Canada there is a disjuncture between citizenship programmes that explore social conditions as a product of human decision-making, and career education programmes that prepare students for a fixed, predetermined, social 'reality'. This observation is also pertinent in New Zealand where, from a small-scale study in a secondary school, I reported that career education failed to make meaningful connections with the wider social studies curriculum, even though the career advisor taught both subjects. I found that whilst issues of poverty were explored in relation to 'fair trade', and collective action effected a change in school practices, the learning that took place was not taken up, and translated, within a career education context (see Irving, 2009). Instead, *all* students were presented with the notion that if they 'worked hard', followed their passions, developed the 'right' competencies and behaviours, and for some from the Pasifika community, 'freed' themselves from their cultural constraints, then all would be well in the future, reflecting an individualised career development approach.

Foucault (1988) observed that through the use of discourse, versions of reality, rationality, and common-sense ‘truths’ are constructed, in which particular perspectives are privileged and given prominence above others, with alternative forms derided, or excluded. Hence, continual exposure to apolitical discourses of the ‘self’, preoccupations with employability, and the pragmatic ‘realities’ that encompass it (Freire, 1999), can “frame representations of ‘how the world is’; present socially constructed truths as incontrovertible; and establish ‘common sense’ explanations and solutions” (Irving, 2013a, p. 187). Thus, the interests and beliefs of those groups most powerful and influential within society become privileged (Apple 2001, 2007; Bartels, 2008; Colley, 2000; Hill & Boxley, 2007; Hyslop-Margison & Ayaz Naseem, 2007), contributing to the normative effects of domination and oppression. Consequently, where career advisors internalise neoliberal values and expectations it can lead to a narrowing of this curriculum area as counter narratives are silenced (Ormond, 2001).

This raises questions about how career advisors come to know about, and conceptualise, social in/justice, and contextualise it in relation to their professional practices. In New Zealand, Thomson (2008) has noted, there is an absence of initial and ongoing training generally available to career advisors, and where it is offered attendance is voluntary, whilst payment (if there is a cost involved) and the freedom to attend is generally at the behest of individual schools. Furthermore, professional ‘career-related’ qualifications are not required for the career advisor role in New Zealand schools (Furbish, 2012; Irving, 2011b). Yet even if career advisors were ‘free’ to attend in-service development courses, or required to

obtain a professional qualification, the observations of British researchers Mahony and Hextall (1997) are salient when they ask “Whether we are adequately educating teachers [and career advisors] to enable young people to act responsibly and critically as citizens in an increasingly complex world” (p. 276). Thus, there is a need for a deeper understanding of what conceptual resources career advisors have able to call upon if they wish to challenge social injustice and/or develop transformative career education programmes. The underlying issue here concerns the extent to which career advisors are able to access collaborative learning opportunities and materials that engage them in a critique of career education; allows them to be critically reflective about the professional *and* personal values they hold; and provides a framework through which they can interrogate the broader institutional and social contexts in which career education is located (Day, 1999).

## **Conclusion**

In the introduction to this chapter I noted that career education occupies a strategic location within compulsory secondary education, inhabiting the boundary between school and ‘adult life’. Therefore, how career advisors conceptualise career, and locate this within an education context, is of fundamental importance when viewed through a social justice lens. This is no easy task, however, as the concept of career is multilayered and differentially understood, whilst career *education* appears to be conflated with an apolitical career development model which privileges the acquisition of competencies, and emphasises the importance of ‘employability’. This adds to the confusion within

this curriculum area where, it would appear, the full potential of career *education* has rarely been realised. Career *education* thus appears to have been left stranded at a conceptual crossroads, which is noticeable in the annual reviews of career development, theory, research and practice that are published in *The Career Development Quarterly* (see Sampson Jr. et al, 2014, for example).

Accepting the premise expressed in the CEG guidelines (MoE, 2009a), that *everyone* in New Zealand has a career, regardless of whether or not they are economically active, reflects the multiple forms that lives might take, and the complex ways in which meaning is attached to what ‘we’ do, think and believe. Looking more broadly, by acknowledging that career construction is not simply an individual project, but also subject to inscription through the dominant socio-cultural, political and economic values of the time, the challenges experienced in the development of a coherent career education curriculum founded on social justice principles were revealed.

The pursuit of social justice within career education will require a principled stand that is translated into action (Walker, 2003). Therefore, if career education in New Zealand is to lay claim to social justice credentials, it appears that a shift in philosophy and change in focus will be required, thus distinguishing it from career *development*. This will require a clear articulation by career advisors of what ‘social justice’ means to them, how they relate this to the futures of their students, and where they see social justice fitting into, and informing, their career education practices. Given the multiple conceptions of career, and

contested notion of career education, my study seeks to ascertain whether the CEG policy guidelines make the development of a transformative career education curriculum possible, and identify where, or whether, career advisors engage with a socially just pedagogy through their practices. Hence, whilst there may never be a common ground in relation to how ‘career’ is conceptualised, nor how social justice is understood and positioned within this curriculum area given the divergent theoretical and philosophical standpoints, my research seeks to make clear how competing versions privilege particular perspectives within career education in New Zealand.

## **Chapter Three**

### **A critical theoretical framework: Locating the political philosophy of Iris Marion Young**

#### **Introduction**

There has been resurgent interest within the international literature regarding the socio-political nature of careers work, first articulated by Watts in 1996 (Watts, 1996b). This has given rise to debate about whose interests are progressed through career policy and practice, leading to disagreement about whether a social justice framework is feasible, or desirable, for career practice. The concern, voiced by some, is that the inclusion of a social justice framework will ‘politicise’ career practice (see Metz & Guichard, 2009), thus jeopardising the efficacy and assumed impartiality of practitioners, and ultimately affecting its status as a ‘helping’ profession. Yet, whilst there may be lively debate occurring, the concept of social justice remains inadequately theorised and poorly articulated. As a result there has been restricted discussion about the relationship between career education and social in/justice, and how this plays out differentially in policy and practice (see Arthur, 2005; Irving, 2005; McMahon, Arthur & Collins, 2008a, 2008b; Watson, 2010). As an advocate for the inclusion of social justice perspectives within career education my study speaks to this knowledge gap by exploring how social justice is conceptualised and positioned within a New Zealand context. Located within the critical social theory tradition



in which phenomena are viewed in relation to their historical, political and social contexts (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Davidson & Tolich, 1999a), I utilised Young's (1990) understanding of social in/justice to explore and examine the multiple discourses within this contested curriculum area (Harris, 1999).

I begin this chapter by outlining the key elements of critical social theory, and then locate Young's (1990) theory of justice within this broad paradigm. The key dimensions of Young's theory are then discussed in more detail, and I relate these to my study to demonstrate how her approach can contribute to a deeper understanding of the way social in/justice concerns 'fit' within a career education context. I conclude by reflexively showing how Young's (1990) theory of justice contributed a sophisticated lens through which to explore my research question/s.

### **Setting the theoretical scene: A critical framework for exploring social in/justice**

The application of sound and robust theory is an essential component of any research endeavour as it acts as a frame of reference through which it is possible to make sense of experiences and perceptions (Sikes, 2006). However, as Anyon (2009) asserts, without the adequate theorising of social problems data is at risk of simply reporting the obvious and is also likely to lack explanatory power. Theory, therefore, should be comprehensive in its reach, provide a "systematic account and explanation of social relations as a whole" (Young, 1994, p. 717), and relate to the specific practical and political problems it is investigating as appropriate. Expanding on this, Ball (2006) suggests that, in a

practical sense, it is better to conceptualise theory as a toolbox of ideas which facilitates a way of reflexively seeing and understanding social phenomena. Thus, I have located my study within a critical social theory perspective as this has the power to guide and shape practice, not only in terms of how things are, but also with regards to how things might be (Goldstein & Beutel, 2007).

Critical social theory encompasses a range of theoretical approaches “that critique domination and subordination, promote emancipatory interests, and combine social and cultural analysis with interpretation, critique, and social explanation” (Anyon, 2009, p. 2). Theoretical perspectives that sit comfortably within this field focus on critiquing ‘common-sense’ explanations of the social world, uncovering privileged interests, challenging structural inequalities, and engaging in analysis that promotes transformative goals. Furthermore, as Leonardo (2004) asserts, “A language of critique . . . is always bound up with a political project” (p. 13). Thus, rather than accept the theoretical standpoints that sustain the ‘pragmatic realities’ embedded within dominant discourse, attempts are made to deconstruct and demystify theory, and connect it with politicised transformative practice (Delanty, 2011; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Exploring alternative futures that reflect changed realities and possibilities is integral to this, along with an acknowledgement that there is no utopian end game (Freire, 1999). Hence, in my study I have sought to problematise career education in terms of its ‘taken for granted’ assumptions; question monological ‘truths’; trouble dominant norms; disrupt hierarchical power relations; expose structural inequalities and injustice; interrogate knowledge claims; and provide a foundation for

transformative action (Apple, 2000; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Sikes, 2006; Wright, 2008). For example, critical social theory provided a conceptual tool that enabled me to make connections between the discursive influences that occur outside of institutional settings (Anyon, 2009), such as the CEG guidelines (MoE, 2009a), and how these may inform the practices of career advisors in school settings.

Critical social theory is not beyond critique. Questions have been raised about the ways in which critical theorists accord a materiality to oppression, progress a transformative agenda, and/or seek to give voice to subordinate groups (see Ellsworth, 1989; Usher & Edwards, 1994). However, I am in agreement with Carr and Kemmis (2005) who argue that,

although various postmodernisms have demonstrated how injustices are embedded in discourses and accepted ways of thinking shaped and formed in particular times and places, there is still a point to the struggle against injustice, both *with* others (through participation in their struggles against injustice) and *on behalf of* others. (p. 354, original italics)

Hence, postmodern and poststructural theorising can be regarded as complementary to critical social theory, contributing to the explanatory scope of this perspective. This viewpoint is encompassed in the writings of the political philosopher Iris Marion Young (1947 – 2006) whose ideas have been influential in contemporary times (Ferguson & Nagel, 2009; Sardoc, 2006), and whose

theory of justice framed my study. Drawing from critical theory, phenomenology, psychoanalysis and post-structural perspectives, Young (1990, 2000) locates her theorising of justice within a philosophical framework which is historically informed and contextually situated. In addition, her work engages with the political and connects with the post-structuralist aim “to expose structures of domination by diagnosing ‘power/knowledge’ relations and their manifestations in our classifications, examinations, practices, and institutions” (Peters & Burbules, 2004). Moreover, reflecting the conventions of the critical tradition, Young openly acknowledges her partiality in her commitment to the promotion of a fairer, more equitable and socially just society.

One of the strengths of Young’s theory of justice is its comprehensiveness and breadth of coverage (Weldon, 2008). Whilst her theory was developed within the context of the United States, Young’s perspective is also applicable to other post-industrial capitalist societies, as they can be seen to share many common cultural, social and economic characteristics (Castells, 1999). In brief, Young is concerned with the multiple ways in which social processes and practices can contribute to the re/production of injustice(s).

As a committed feminist, Young initially had a particular interest in gender relations (Weldon, 2008). Yet as she developed her theory of justice she identified that issues of oppression and domination can cut across group differences, such as gender, race and socio-economic class, in a multitude of ways. She demonstrated how the impact of oppression and domination leads to

the structuring of group, and concomitantly individual, inequalities thus impacting on life chances, choices and opportunities to develop one's capacities in meaningful ways (Young, 2001a). Young emphasised that inequalities can only be regarded as unjust when structural relations privilege some groups more than others. With regards to domination, Young's work is focused on the ways in which institutional decisions impinge on the lives of *all* social actors, not only those who may be oppressed. However, by actively excluding members of oppressed groups from the democratic process their voices are silenced and their desires go unheeded. Thus the analytical framework she devised to identify the 'five faces of oppression' and her understanding of domination, which are outlined later in this chapter, avoids the privileging of one group's experiences over another (Hawsworth, 2008). I will now move on to discuss Young's theory of justice, and the relevance of her theorising for my study, in greater depth.

### **The political philosophy of Iris Marion Young: a theory of justice**

Young's (1990) theory of justice is located within a democratic socialist tradition. She is concerned with the multiple ways in which institutional processes and practices contribute to the oppression and domination of social groups. Young (1990) takes a broad view of the institutional context, and includes "any structures or practices, the rules and norms that guide them, and the language and symbols that mediate social interactions within them, in institutions of state, family, and civil society, as well as the workplace" (p. 22). Young goes beyond 'simple equality' associated with Rawls (1971), with regards to the distribution of goods,

or the complex equality of Walzer (1983) which is focused on equality of outcomes. Young argued,

for a paradigm of justice that involved government and public political and economic processes that allowed for the development of people's capabilities for free and autonomous decision making, and involved democratic processes that acknowledged social differences and respected social movements. (Ferguson & Nagel, 2009, p. 12)

Thus, Young (1990) sought to promote a democratic polity that gives meaningful recognition to group difference, enhances self-identity, self-esteem, self-development and self-respect, and facilitates the equitable distribution of economic goods. It is important to note that unlike a political community, a polity is not identified by a common or shared bond, but comprises a diverse population who hold a wide range of differing views regarding social norms, values, religions and such like. A polity is defined as "a collective whose members recognize themselves as governed by common rule-making and negotiating procedures" (Young, 2000, p. 27), yet whose lives are not dominated by imposed normative behavioural expectations.

Regarding Young's reference to the 'self', whilst this may appear to be contradictory given her focus on social groups, she does not deny individual differences and capabilities, nor reject the scope for individual agency. She argues however that, in part, individual identity is constituted by group structures and

social relations that are multiple, fluid and/or given. For example individual lives may be enabled *or* constrained on the basis of their structural positioning in relation to socio-economic class, race and/or gender, which may be sustained through institutional structures or practices. Young's concern with the multi-layered nature of institutional influence, and how this can contribute to oppression and domination, has informed the construction of my research questions. Through my engagement with these complex dimensions I have sought to uncover the discursive formations in play (see Foucault, 1972) that act to shape policies and inform the professional behaviours of career advisors. For example, how the discourses that underwrite career education normatively construct and position notions of the 'self', and codify the type of person students are expected to be/come, indicating what is privileged within this curriculum area.

### *Conceptualising oppression and domination*

Central to Young's (1990) theory of justice are the concepts of oppression and domination. Young argued that for social justice to be realised all forms of institutionalised oppression and domination need to be eliminated. As oppression and domination overlap, in this section I have outlined the key features of each, whilst also showing how they can intersect at particular moments.

Oppression, which has a historical base and is a product of ideological beliefs (Artiles, Harris-Murri & Rostenberg, 2006), operates through a series of interconnected structures that reflect normative social assumptions and behaviours, thus acting to restrict life choices and chances (Young, 2000).

Allowing for the pluralities and complexities of social life, Young (1990, pp. 39-65) identifies five overlapping and interconnected ‘faces of oppression’. These can be summarised as follows:

- *exploitation*: i.e. the inequitable transfer of labour benefits from one group to another. For example when the surplus, or unpaid, labour, that is produced by one group is appropriated by another.
- *marginalisation*: i.e. the exclusion of particular groups of people from useful participation in social life. In my study this refers to those students categorised as being ‘at risk’ and disengaged from mainstream schooling for example, who may exist at the educational margins leading to subsequent disadvantage and prolonged social exclusion in their post-school lives.
- *powerlessness*: i.e. a lack of authority status, autonomy, sense of worth and voice whereby particular social groups, such as those who do not possess the cultural capital of the more privileged, have little input into, and influence over, the shaping of their lives.
- *cultural imperialism*: i.e. the imposition of dominant values and norms through stereotyping of behaviours which not only devalues the cultural expressions and experiences of oppressed groups, but also imposes a dominant view of how the world and cultural life, should be.



- *violence*: the fear of real and/or implied violence which is prompted by a desire to inflict harm on group members. For example, women, or those from minority cultural groups, who may be subject to actual physical violence, humiliation and/or derogatory actions on the basis of their attributed ‘difference’ and/or ‘deficiencies’.

Oppressive processes and practices serve to restrict the development of the capacities of people, inhibit their scope to exercise these, and provide little opportunity for people to express their needs, thoughts and feelings (Young, 1990). This can be illustrated with reference to gender. Young (2000) contends that “gender difference [can be seen] to be structured by a set of interrelationships and interactions that act together to produce specific possibilities and preclude others, and which operate in reinforcing circles” (p. 93). This is evident in the popular stereotype of teenage pregnancy where, it is posited, young mothers *will* lead unfulfilled lives, and follow meaningless ‘careers’ (Vincent & Thomson, 2010). Moreover, whilst New Zealand research reported by Gibb, Fergusson, Horwood, and Boden (2014) identifies that those who become mothers before the age of 20 years old are likely to experience financial hardship, this ‘reality’ has to be understood within a socio-political context which reflects the limited economic support that this group receive from the state. Paradoxically, perhaps, Kalb, Le, and Leung (2014) suggest

that young teenage mothers are disadvantaged because they have children, which is compounded by the fact that they have children at such a young

age. Child bearing and caring responsibilities associated with having children are impediments to a woman's labour market activity while having children at a young age is also an obstacle to human capital accumulation. (p. 20)

Within a neoliberal regime in which human capital and economic participation overshadows unpaid forms of meaningful activity, the state accepts limited *social* responsibility to care for those citizens who do not conform. As O'Brien (2013) notes, the reshaping of welfare reform in New Zealand "[positions] beneficiaries as 'outsiders' . . . [whose] lives need to be overseen and managed by the state" (p. 743). Thus, the stereotype of the 'feckless' and 'irresponsible' young woman, and the 'reality' of socially determined inequality, is reinforced. 'Welfare dependency' is thus endowed with negative connotations, and reinforced through career discourse. This acts in an oppressive way to marginalise and render powerless teenage mothers whose choices do not conform to a dominant and individualised economic and moral discourse. Couched within a language of 'common sense', this form of oppression intersects with domination (which I elucidate below) as it seeks to regulate the sexual behaviour of *all* young women, by discursively attributing a meaningful life, and worthwhile career, to the public arena of market work (Richardson, 2012b).

Concerning domination, Young (1990, 2000) identifies this as an effect of the ways in which institutional structures, such as those of the state, employers and schools for example, determine, promote and enforce rules, norms and

behaviours. Structures of domination can impact both oppressed *and* non-oppressed groups. For example, if a monological worldview which progresses privileged interests prevails within career education, then *what* students learn about how career/s might be constructed and enacted, and *which* norms, skills and behaviours they are subject to (and expected to take up) as part of the ‘self-managed’ career discourse, can perpetuate a culture of domination that affects all. What is at issue here relates to the extent to which *all* people are provided with opportunities to collectively contribute to, and participate in, institutional decision making processes at a range of levels, that determine their own actions or the conditions of those actions. This, writes Young (1990), “fosters the development of capacities for thinking about one’s own needs in relation to the needs of others, taking an interest in the relation of others to social institutions, reasoning and being articulate and persuasive, and so on” (p. 92).

When considering the intersections of oppression and domination, Young moves away from the traditional notion that constructs the effects of this as a top down imposition of wills, or the exercise of a powerful group over a less powerful group. Reflecting the work of Foucault (1980), Young (1990) sees power circulating within a complex web of relations. Through social processes and practices, which include the use of language and the ascription of meaning, oppressive acts are brought into being, and thus certain beliefs and behaviours come to dominate thinking. Complex social issues, such as teenage pregnancy and career enactment, are presented in ‘black and white’ terms leading to the

construction of one 'true' reality (Ormond, 2001), which is predicated on singular assumptions of 'common-sense' which silence counter narratives.

Hence, as power produces reality, establishes discursive fields, and constructs rituals of truth, particular perspectives are privileged above others, whilst alternative versions are silenced, denigrated, excluded and/or discarded. Complex social processes are at play as subject positions are not simply imposed from above but embraced *and* resisted by individuals as they engage with, and make sense of, the truth regimes that underlie them (Besley, 2005) in their own specific micro contexts (Griffiths, 1998) such as communities, schools and classrooms. The way in which silencing can restrict the subaltern voice (Apple & Buras, 2006) within the public domain, and render invisible competing views, is illustrated by Ormond (2001). From her research on Māori youth, Ormond (2001) identified that whilst the young people in her study freely discussed issues pertinent to their lived realities, at times they silenced their own counter narratives when, for example, her questions provoked feelings of discomfort. Thus, argued Ormond (2001), her participants actively patrolled the borders of "what can and cannot be [publicly] spoken" (p. 58) by locking themselves (and each other) into hegemonic "prisons of silence" (p. 57). By restricting critique from the collective voice they acquiesced to the silence imposed through dominant discourse. At the same time, they resisted master narratives by protecting the 'collective secret knowledge' about their own way(s) of life that was held by, and within, the group. This highlights the contradictory subject positions that might be made available, whilst also reflecting the influence of dominant power and oppressive silence on

the scope for open resistance. Consequently, dominant discourses may be internalised, normalised and claimed as our own, or simply accepted by default. Hence, 'we' can become the source of our own oppression, and actively collude with the structures of domination, by regulating the scope of our beliefs and incorporating these perspectives within our practices.

The complex interplay between 'race', gender, social class and broader cultural differences and expectations are encapsulated in the plurality of Young's (1990, 2000) conceptualisation of oppression and domination. For example, this can be illustrated by reference to processes of normalisation. Normalisation relates to the ways in which people are judged against physical, mental and/or social standards that reflect the values and behaviours of the dominant culture. Thrupp (2007, 2008), for example, refers to the ways in which education policy tends to advantage more affluent sectors of New Zealand society whose values and expectations are embedded within the institutional practices of schools. Whilst some groups are advantaged, those who fail to conform may be subject to a normalising gaze that can act to, consciously or unconsciously, set apart those who are perceived to be 'different' (Young, 2006), and thus expose them to oppression *and* domination. Enslin (2006) identifies how the cultural traditions and practices of different groups can also impact on the quality of education children from non-dominant groups receive which can lead to a pathologising of underachievement by educators. Allard (2005) highlights how the pathologising discourse of the 'at risk' student (who may leave school without qualifications and/or a future education, training or employment plan) positions *some* students,

*and* their families and communities, as socially deficient. These pathologising discourses, for example, have been applied to Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, whose worldview sits in tension with that of the dominant majority at times (see Bishop, 2005; Manning et al., 2011 ). I return to this issue later in the chapter.

With regards to career practice, Mignot (2001) has argued, career advisors have a responsibility to remain constantly aware of the invidious nature of oppression, to which I would add domination, and to actively challenge and undermine it in whatever form it takes. With reference to career education, therefore, the question that arises for my research relates to how policy discourses seek to normalise particular values and behaviours which inform practice within this curriculum area. Moreover, I am looking to uncover the social in/justice implications with regards to the impact structural factors might have on construction(s) of career, and how career advisors respond. However, to fully engage with Young's theorising of oppression and domination, it is first necessary to gain an understanding of how she conceptualises the notion of the social group.

*Conceptualising group difference: a critical-recognitive positioning*

Young's theory of justice is concerned both with material inequalities between social groups, *and* a lack of recognition of, and respect for, group difference which creates the conditions for oppression and domination. Thus it could be characterised as a critical-recognitive model (see Irving, 2010a) as it engages with the nature of social injustice from a transformative standpoint.

Young (1990) explains that “[in] the good society . . . there is equality between socially and culturally differentiated groups, who mutually respect one another and affirm one another in their differences” (p. 163). In this way, she argues, a culturally pluralist democratic state can function more justly by acknowledging, including, and accommodating, diverse group interests and needs.

Young (2000) differentiates the concept of the ‘group’ in a number of ways, i.e. as aggregates, associations, and social groups. As an aggregate, the group comprises people who merely share particular attributes, such as eye or hair colour, or the model of car they drive. Unlike aggregates, other group constitutions represent forms of social relations which are distinguished by an affinity with and/or active relationship between the members (Card, 2009). Associations generally consist of social actors who voluntarily choose to identify with each other collectively in formal relationships that reflect particular shared interests or projects, such as a football club, craft circle, community organisation or political party. Associations may pursue a range of goals, including social, political and economic objectives which challenge structural and cultural group injustice(s). However associations cannot be regarded as representative of a structural or cultural social group.

Young (1990) contends that the social group occurs through a different dynamic where “group meanings partially constitute people’s identities in terms of the cultural forms, social situations, and history that group members know as theirs, because these meanings have been either forced upon them or forged by

them or both” (p. 44). Young (1990) posits that individuals more commonly *find* themselves positioned within a ‘given’ social group which carries an externally apportioned sense of identity, which is different to the aggregate and associational forms. Thus, social structures precede individual subjects, with collective terms such as race, class, ethnicity and gender acting as “axes of structural inequality rather than of subjective identities” (Young, 2005a, p. 21). Here, notes Mann (2009), the externally situated subject is the product of socio-political and historical forces, finding themselves collectively positioned and categorised.

For example, Young (1994) draws on Sartre’s concept of seriality to show how externalities unify women into an ‘unconscious’ social collective. Card (2009) elucidates, commenting that “it was because of our choices regarding the importance of certain shared experiences of the *external structures* – including sexual divisions of labor and enforced heterosexuality – that made us into what Young calls a serial collectivity” (p. 150). Hence the category ‘woman’ became an important identity marker. This seriality provides the backdrop to the formation of the structural group identity of women. Social groups therefore can be seen to be socially constituted, the product of a sense of individual (conscious or unconscious) affinity with other group members, yet “differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life” (Young, 1990, p. 43).

However groups should not be seen as discrete, existing in isolation to one another. Instead Young (1990, 2000) asserts that there is a dynamic overlap and interplay within and between groups. Nor should individually constructed



identities be regarded as singular and fixed, nor conflated with that of group location. As Young (2000) explains:

The relation of individuals to groups, however, is not one of identity. Social groups do indeed position individuals, but a person's identity is their own, formed in active relation to social positions, among other things, rather than constituted by them. (2000, p. 99)

Hence social group identification, and individual identity in relation to this, does not emerge from within the individual, nor is it the product of a 'known self'. Rather it is fluid, contextual, and relational, cutting across a range of group positions, informed by multiple experiences, and can take different forms. In my own case, for example, I can be identified by/identify with a number of different groups as a white, middle aged, heterosexual, socialist male, however certain aspects will also be subject to change over time (I will grow older for example). Group identity therefore may be ascribed by others (for example the collective categorisation of women), reflect specific cultural norms and values (such as ethnic practices); emerge as a result of exclusion and/or labelling; or occur on the basis of 'voluntary' membership with regards to shared interests and goals. As Weldon (2008) observes, Young's understanding of social group identity should not be construed in an essentialist sense, i.e. the notion that each individual member shares common characteristics, but regarded as a structural signifier. Within a career education context for instance, those labelled as being 'at risk' do not necessarily share common characteristics but are categorised against

externally derived ‘norms’ that reify particular qualities, behaviours, and expectations. This has implications for my study where I have sought to identify, and analyse, the discourses that provide the normative frameworks against which individuals are judged.

At a general level then, social group recognition contributes to the identification of structural and cultural inequalities, uncovers the privileging of some groups (Young, 2001a), and helps to expose how that privilege is maintained. In relation to group difference however, some commentators suggest that there is a tendency at times for recognition demands to be seen as divisive, acting against ‘the common good’ (Splitter, 2007). Beiner (2006), commenting from a multicultural perspective, suggests that a politics of differentiated citizenship is at risk of disrupting notions of a common citizenship based on universal moral principles and shared goals. He argues the need for all groups to be regarded as ‘equals’, to be fully assimilated into mainstream society, creating social solidarity. Yet reducing difference to ‘sameness’ through a reductive form of assimilation may dissipate diversity, leading to the sanitising of dissent, and a silencing of those voices that do not wish to accede to a, potentially imposed, ‘common identity’. Reflecting Young’s (2000) stance, Parker-Jenkins, Hartas and Irving (2005) write that within the context of cultural difference a diverse polity should allow “*all ethnic groups to be equal and different, to participate in the majority world but not at the expense of their own collective sense of being*” (p. 169). Therefore, providing opportunities for all segments of society to engage in open discussion and debate, without groups having to compromise their own

perspectives, can be regarded as a signifier of an inclusive communicative democracy, according to Young (2000, 2005b). I will return to this notion later in the chapter.

In a different vein, whilst generally agreeing with Young that cultural recognition is an important aspect of justice, Fraser (1999) makes a forceful argument that two distinct, yet connected, forms of social injustice are at play, i.e. economic injustice and cultural injustice. She registers concern about Young's attempt to locate distributive issues within the same category as recognition (Fraser, 2000). Fraser (2000) argues that the politics of recognition, which she categorises as an 'identity model', has two particularly deleterious effects. Firstly, that a focus on recognition tends to displace claims for redistribution. Secondly, that group identities become simplified and reified, encouraging "separatism, intolerance and chauvinism, patriachalism and authoritarianism" (Fraser, 2000, p. 108). For example Fraser is critical of claims that the restoration of unjustly devalued identities, such as the cultural subordination of women due to the effects of patriarchy, will, by association, result in greater economic equality.

With regards to Fraser's critique of the 'identity model', Young (1997a) agrees that *some* recent forms of multiculturalism and nationalism have a tendency to focus on cultural recognition whilst ignoring redistributive concerns. Like Young (1990, 1997a), Alcoff (2007) also contends that issues of redistribution do not have to be absent from claims for recognition as the relationship between the two often intersect. Thus, Alcoff (2007) questions

whether Fraser's alternative, which disaggregates political economy from cultural recognition, helps to address this tension. She argues that by giving greater weighting to economic injustice, Fraser's analytical approach is at risk of privileging issues of redistribution and downplaying other cultural struggles for recognition on the basis of race, gender, sexuality for example. Alcoff (2007) further suggests that by positioning 'class' solely as a category of economic redistribution, Fraser fails to recognise the importance of the interrelationship between 'class identity', other identity markers and labour market segmentation. She notes that:

Segmentation has occurred since the inception of capitalism through identity markers, suggesting that colonialism and capitalism (and patriarchy as well) exist as an integrated system, not as independent formations. Thus, there are no economic mechanisms operating with complete independence from identity hierarchies; identity hierarchies determine costs, profitability and degree of organization among the workers. (Alcoff, 2007, p. 261)

This is elaborated on further by Young (1997a) who asserts that when recognition claims are considered, such as the cultural representation of women, it is important to remain aware of the economic inequality *and* disadvantage that has contributed to this. Effecting change in the gendered division of labour therefore cannot be seen simply in terms of a redistribution of tasks or economic goods as the cultural meaning and value of different kinds of work will also need

redefining (Richardson, 2009, 2012b). As discussed in chapter two, this resonates with the way in which career education appears to pay little attention to the inequities that exist between groups within society in general, and the labour market in particular, and how the concept of ‘work’ might be differentially understood as a social, and not merely an economic, practice.

### *Beyond the distributivist paradigm*

Young (1990) argues that “a critical theory of social justice must consider not only distributive patterns but [more specifically] the processes and relationships that produce those patterns” (p. 241). She contends that an “inclusive democracy should *not* favor philosophers accustomed to rational, disembodied, and emotionally sober argument and construction” (Ferguson & Nagel, 2009, p. 12). As such, Young is particularly critical of humanist theorists (even those who are well intentioned) as they tend to privilege the individual and/or promote universal rights and values at the expense of group difference and autonomy (Young, 2006). Young argues that such views are reductive in that they fail to acknowledge the right to be different, whilst marginalising the multiple ways in which social group background influences, and impacts on, equality claims and opportunity (Ferguson & Nagel, 2009). She also expresses concerns about social models that elevate the role of the state in determining the needs of disadvantaged and/or oppressed groups, and/or focus their attention solely on outcomes (Young, 2006), themes which I return to later in relation to education. Therefore, to fully understand the fractures between Young’s theorising of social justice which emphasises a politics of difference, and dominant (re)distributive models that

favour individual rationality and/or state sponsored benevolence (Tomlinson, 2001), I will begin by outlining the work of John Rawls (1971) which coalesces comfortably with the individualised nature of much career theory.

The work of John Rawls (1971) has been particularly influential in the development of distributive models of justice. Steeped in liberal-democratic and humanist philosophy which individualises social life, for Rawls (1971), social justice is about the distribution of rights and duties by major social institutions. Rawls (1971) bases his theory on a hypothetical reasoning methodology, where all parties are imagined to be free, equal and motivated by rational self-interest. He suggests that if a set amount of goods were hidden behind a 'veil of ignorance', equality of distribution would be assured as individuals would seek to ensure that they would not be disadvantaged by receiving a lesser share. Acting in their own rational self-interest, individuals would thus choose to share the unknown goods equally with others to ensure they received a just share. For Rawls, this became the standard against which real world practices should be measured, and equality judged, with justice focused on end-state patterns rather than social processes. Importance is attached to individual liberty and freedom (as long as this does not impinge on the freedoms of others), and equality in the distribution of material and social goods (whilst acknowledging that not all individuals have the same starting position in life and therefore inequality in distribution is justified if it contributes to the well-being of those who are most disadvantaged). Thus, in terms of justice, the distributivist goal is to create a baseline standard (Rawls, 1971), against which society can be judged, which may entail a redistribution of

social goods to those individuals who are least advantaged. It is important to note, however, that within the distributive paradigm equality refers to fairness rather than sameness (Olssen, 1997). Rawls' goal, therefore, is to secure liberty, enhance equality of opportunity, and address disadvantage.

Located within the broad distributive paradigm is the social democratic, or 'difference' model of justice associated with Walzer (1983). Here, there is an emphasis on identifying and meeting the needs of diverse social groups who may experience material disadvantage due to gender, ethnicity or other factors. There is also a recognition that the imposition of a universal moral code is unjust as values are seen to derive from communities (Olssen, 1997). This pluralist view seeks to ensure that those individuals and/or groups who are most disadvantaged within society are allocated appropriate resources to ensure fair and equitable access to educational opportunities, and employment outcomes, particularly through the use of support programmes and legislative measures (Riley, 1994).

Whilst not eschewing certain aspects of distributive theories of justice, particularly those reflecting a fair and equitable re/distribution of goods, Young (1990, 2000) argues that the distributivist paradigm provides a limited explanation for the causes of social injustice. It has a tendency to be reductive, equating justice with end patterns of distribution in terms of what individuals have, how much they have, and how this compares with others. Moreover, distributive models tend to work on a top down basis, from the general to the particular. Whereas Rawls (1971) bases his model on a fictional well-ordered society, an ideal type, the

social democratic model continues to privilege the top down re/distribution of economic and social goods where the state decides *whose* claims are legitimate, determines *which* needs are ‘just’, and resolves *how* these should be met. Young’s theory meanwhile tends to work from the bottom upwards, from the particular to the general (Jaggar, 2009), starting from the standpoint of those social groups who are least advantaged (Gale & Densmore, 2000). Therefore, I take up these issues in my study by exploring how the discourses which inform career education construct notions of injustice, and determine how the needs of those who are least advantaged within society might be identified and met. Allied to this is an examination of whose interests are privileged.

A further issue for consideration is the way in which both Rawls (1971) and Waltzer (1983) identify rights and duties as ‘goods’ to be distributed. As Young (1990) highlights, rights and duties cannot be regarded as tangible goods but “institutionally defined rules specifying what people can do in relation to one another. Rights refer more to doing than having, to social relationships that enable or constrain action” (p. 25). Young’s theory is thus focused on a critical conceptualisation of justice in a world where there is a general messiness in social relations, where coercive practices, real and implied threats, and structural inequalities are widespread rather than the exception (Young, 2000). Therefore, in my thesis I consider whether the distributivist paradigm is evident in the way value is attributed to career education, and whether it has influenced how social justice is conceptualised in policy and by career advisors. Moving beyond distributivist concerns, Young contends that communicative action resides at the



heart of a democratic society as it enables the voices, and desires, of all to be heard which I now move on to explore.

*Communicating with the 'other': Towards democratic inclusion*

Young (1990, 2000) identifies communication as integral to an inclusive democratic process, acting as a marker of a just society. In the development of her communicative approach she examined two existing dominant models of democracy within contemporary political theory, i.e. the aggregate and deliberative. To summarise, the aggregate model is “based on the fairness of healthy competition . . . the deliberative model is based on the fairness of healthy discussion around some issue” (Melton, 2009, p. 173). Whilst preferring the deliberative model over the aggregate form, Young (2000) questions whether either can fully meet the needs of a diverse polity in a just way, and fully accommodate an understanding of difference. Young (1999) comments that a politics of positive recognition (sometimes referred to as ‘identity’ politics) which underpins the deliberative model can be reductive as it is primarily focused on culture at the expense of structure. She argues that the concept of symmetrical reciprocity, which underpins deliberative models, presents only a partial solution. Symmetrical reciprocity, developed by Benhabib from the work of Habermas (as cited in Young, 1997b), is based on the idea that communication is founded on an egalitarian moral respect for each other, with tolerance accorded to difference. Here it is posited that those engaged in dialogue are able to adopt the standpoints and perspectives of others, to see the world through the eyes of an ‘other’. Whilst agreeing with much of what Benhabib has to say, Young (2001b) argues that the

symmetrical approach is still at risk of masking difference, is politically suspect as it seeks to secure a consensus which represents a majority view, and most importantly, disguises the fact that it is not actually possible to experience another person's life.

A politics of difference needs to be broader, argues Young (1999), to acknowledge "that hegemonic discourses, relations of power, role assignments, and the distribution of benefits assumes a particular and restricted set of *ruling norms*, even though they usually represent themselves as neutral and universal" (p. 416). Young therefore asserts that democracy will be better served if communication is premised on the notion of an asymmetrical reciprocity. Young (2000) developed the concept of asymmetrical reciprocity by taking up Derrida's notion of gift giving. Here gift giving is not understood as a circular exchange, but regarded as an act of selflessness where a gift is given freely and without any obligation on the receiver, yet both the gift giver and receiver recognise the generous intention of the action. Young (2000, 2005b) applied this notion to her communicative model, arguing that although individuals are unable to place themselves in another's position, through shared dialogue it is possible to gain some understanding of another's perspectives and experiences. This form of communicative democracy therefore recognises, acknowledges, and seeks to understand the unique needs, different standpoints, and differentiated experiences of the members of a diverse polity.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Young links culture with issues of structural inequality and distribution. Demands that *all* will conform to hierarchically imposed standards can contribute to the exclusion of non-dominant groups who may adopt different protocols, and/or act to silence their voices. Dominant norms, for example, are embedded in constructions of white, Western, middle class ‘respectability’ (such as rationality, dress codes, mode of speech, and ‘acceptable’ behaviours’), or paternalist values which are expressed as a desire to ‘do good’. These can overshadow and/or delegitimise other cultural practices, such as Māori ways of knowing in New Zealand (Pouwhare & Mortlock, 2004). Thus, Young (1990) argues for a communicative participatory democracy that is critical of cultural *and* institutionalised norms, expectations and conventions that can privilege one group over another. The challenge, within an educational context, is summarised by Auerbach’s (2007) observation that “parents [and students] come to school with unequal resources for pursuing educational goals and with complex raced/classed/gendered identities, cultural scripts, and family histories or dynamics that shape their relations with institutions” (p. 276).

Hence, the enactment of an inclusive participatory democracy requires members of those groups who occupy the most powerful positions to reflexively display a sense of commitment, understanding, cultural sensitivity, and humility. As Young (1990, 2000) argues, this can be facilitated by ensuring that the differing and competing voices of all segments of the polity, particularly those who are least advantaged, are provided with opportunities to be heard respectfully and responded to positively. This does not mean that diverse viewpoints should

not be questioned and/or challenged (Young, 2000, 2001b). Agreeing with Young, La Caze (2008) adds that such exchanges between groups should be done sensitively, respectfully and openly with due regard given to difference.

For Young, a communicative democracy should recognise, acknowledge and understand the unique needs and different standpoints of diverse groups, rather than be driven solely by the desire for consensus or mediated agreement which reflects everyone's preferences (La Caze, 2008). This has salience for my own study where I am interested in knowing whether spaces are provided within career education for multiple voices to be heard, and how/whether views that do not reflect those of the status quo are recognised, included and respected. Moreover, it raises questions about whether particular discursive values and behaviours dominate within career education, and whose interests are promoted. In the following section I expand on Young's contention that a participative democracy can extend to social priorities, as well as labour market and workplace relations (see Fung, 2004), by exploring how neoliberal economic concerns are effecting change in educational systems.

#### *A political engagement for/with social justice: Critical moments*

In her seminal work, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young (1990) identifies that since the 1950s, public life in North America has been increasingly depoliticised, thus restricting collective participation in economic and social matters. She contends that the implementation of welfare capitalism, which was introduced with the 'New Deal' in the USA, led to a closer relationship between

the state and business, elevating the importance of distributive concerns. This saw a shift of focus from issues related to workplace organisation, management, control and/or the overall direction of the economy, towards a general consensus that economic growth should take centre stage. Government and business were thus given greater authority to determine what was required in order to ensure that the size of the 'social pie' would be as big as possible. Young (1990) contends that this occurred at the expense of wider democratic participation, and has created an impersonalised dependency culture in which workers have become subject to institutionalised rules that they were likely to have had little input into. Here, the citizen is (re)cast as a client-consumer, rather than an active democratic participant, with the state (and business) becoming the arbiter of what should be considered fair in terms of economic (re)distribution and social well-being.

In the shadow of the consumerist state, identity-group politics is (re)framed as a competition between self-interested parties who are focused on getting the 'best deal' for their particular constituents in a quest for limited economic resources, and/or public approbation. Economic participation is also positioned as a social obligation and a way out of poverty, regardless of circumstances or need. As a consequence, suggests Apple (2005), the move towards an economic democracy has acted against a sense of collective belonging by positioning the individual as a rational, free and self-actualising consumer. Thus, connections with the effects of disadvantage which can accrue on the basis of, for example, class, 'race', ethnicity, and gender are weakened. This shifting political landscape is evident in New Zealand where economic objectives and

discourses of meritocracy have overshadowed engagement with broader social issues (Kelsey, 1997; Lauder & Brown, 2007).

With the ascendancy of neoliberal thinking, Yates and Young (2010) have identified that the educational systems and curriculum in English speaking countries are increasingly tied to economic goals and national competitiveness in response to the 'global challenge'. The influence of neoliberalism is also finding its way into Scandinavian education (see Blossing, Imsen & Moos, 2014) where countries such as Denmark and Norway have traditionally resisted the encroachment of the market (Wiborg, 2013). Premised on a Western liberal understanding, mainstream education now appears to be reinforcing "the values, perspectives and life worlds of dominant groups [that] permeate cultural and institutional norms" (Lynch & Baker, 2005, p. 143). Increasingly, the success of educational systems is being measured against international rankings determined by vested interest groups, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank. Here, the value of education is judged in human capital terms, and the benefits calculated by the contribution made to individual productivity and economic growth (Robertson & Dale, 2009) which are positioned as being in the interests of all. Ballard (2004), however, identifies that a business culture, and the disembodied language of the market place, is diluting and commodifying broader educational aims and impacting on the process of teaching within New Zealand. Davis (2007) agrees, commenting that economic objectives are heavily influencing teacher pedagogy and curriculum.

Young (1990) also links the hierarchical division of labour where there are limited opportunities at the top, with what she terms as ‘the myth of merit’ (see pp. 200-206). Within the liberal education tradition, which is being reshaped by neoliberal thinking, schools are now expected to nurture ‘talent’ in response to changing labour market conditions (Arthur, 2014), which is measured through the apparent dispassionate and ‘unbiased’ processes of testing and measurement. This is legitimated through the acquisition of qualifications which are used to signify academic merit and ability. Hence, a ‘good education’ is equated with the acquisition of measurable and marketable competencies which are aligned with the economic priorities of the state (MoE, 2012), with *all* students positioned as having the same opportunities to succeed. Difference is thus rendered invisible as these ‘impartial’ standards and values purportedly reflect “a ‘natural’ hierarchy of intellect and skill” (Young, 1990, p. 200). Such a view implies that there is a generally agreed understanding of how ‘success’ should be judged, and what, and whose, ‘knowledge’ is desirable (Apple, 2000, 2006, 2008). As a result, those who ‘fail’ are labelled as the inadequate and less intelligent ‘other’ (Young, 1990) who are deficient in some way. Thus deficit discourses “blame the victims and see the locus of the problem as either lack of inherent ability, lack of cultural appropriateness or limited resources; in short, some deficiency at best, a ‘pathology’ at worst” (Bishop, 2003, p. 223). Such discourses not only identify those from marginalised communities as the cause of their own failure(s) (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000), but also exclude and/or silence alternative viewpoints (North, 2008). For example, Bishop (2003), and Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh and Teddy (2009), contend that for Māori a deficit model operates in mainstream

education which tends to silence Māori voice, and hence their communities' desires go unheard. In my study, therefore, I examine whose voice is dominant, how particular student groups are positioned, and consider the degree of importance attached to merit and the acquisition of qualifications as a signifier of opportunity and success within a career education context.

The issue of cultural recognition has wider political ramifications because Māori also challenge many of the taken for granted practices within Pākehā dominated New Zealand society (Mahuika, Berryman & Bishop, 2011), including the normative frameworks that are employed within education to protect group privilege (Young, 1990). This connects with Young's (1990, 2000) argument that in a democratic pluralist society there is a need to repoliticise social life (of which education is a key site); to facilitate the inclusion of multiple voices; and to engage in political analysis that "concerns all aspects of institutional organization, public action, social practices and habits, and cultural meanings insofar as they are potentially subject to collective evaluation and decision making" (p. 9). When viewed through a critical social justice lens, my study considers how economic concerns are positioned in relation to cultural difference within career education, and examines what, and whose, values and priorities are privileged within this curriculum area.

## **Conclusion**

Critical social theory, and the work of Young (1990, 2000) in particular, was used to guide my thinking as I sought to construct a study that would enable



me to explore, interrogate, and uncover the complex, messy and ambiguous discursive ‘realities’ of career education and locate these within a social justice context. Critical social theory challenges the ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of the everyday world, and Young’s standpoint within this provides a sophisticated lens with which to conceptualise social justice and relate this to the ‘realities’ of career education. Thus, Young’s theory provides a sound framework for my study because it raises critical questions about how social justice might be conceptualised and positioned in career education policy in New Zealand. It helped me to focus my attention on: how dominant discourse informed the CEG policy guidelines, and how career advisors were positioned/positioned themselves; whose voices and way of life were privileged within career education; whether ‘social justice’ policies in schools impacted on how career education was constructed; and which discourses were dominant in relation to how the role of career/education might be understood through a social justice lens.

Jaggar (2009) observes that compared with the distributivist model, the breadth of Young’s theory “offers better political guidance in the real world characterized by deep structural injustices, including racism, imperialism, and male dominance” (p. 100). It contributed to my understanding that oppression and domination within career education cannot be addressed by identity politics alone (Dalglish, 2013) through simply enhancing a ‘sense of self’, nor solely through concerns with the re/distribution of educational ‘opportunity’ (Muller, 2013) because this diverts attention away from the complex interconnected nature of recognition. Thus, I was able to explore the effects of structural injustice

(Ackelsberg & Shanley, 2008), and to critically engage with the intersections between the ‘material’ and the ‘recognitive’ dimensions of social life in a politically robust way, as I will show. Hence, Young’s critical-recognitive framework facilitated a process of inquiry, discovery, critique *and* possibility. It also contributed to my choice of method and methodology, which I discuss in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four

# Methodology and method: A critical qualitative engagement

### Introduction

I begin this chapter by outlining how a qualitative research approach ‘fits’ with the critical theoretical framework that underpins my thesis. Given the political and transformative nature of critical qualitative inquiry, I then provide an overview of an ethically reflexive framework, developed by Gewirtz and Cribb (2006), as this permeated all aspects of my PhD study. Moving on to the research process itself, the question of ethics is explored, my research design outlined, and an overview of the data collection process is presented. Following this, I discuss the political and philosophical foundations of critical discourse analysis (CdA<sup>9</sup>) as this methodology framed my analysis. I also engage in a critical re/view of CdA and address key methodological critiques. Finally, I explain how I utilised CdA to analyse the data, and conclude by drawing together the different strands.

Throughout this chapter I actively engage with the critiques of qualitative research, and pay particular attention to those concerned with critical approaches, as these present challenges to those, such as me, who engage in this form of inquiry. Counter-arguments are presented that call into question the claim that

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<sup>9</sup>As noted in chapter one, I have used the acronym CdA to distinguish my methodological approach from that of Fairclough (1992, 1995) where the term CDA is generally associated with his work.

qualitative inquiry must be objective, neutral, and ‘value free’ if it is to be considered ‘legitimate’. Engaging with this debate makes my own worldview transparent (Darlaston-Jones, 2007), and illuminates how I established the relationship between theory, method and methodology, which are intertwined in this study (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Gillborn, 1998; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000; Verma & Malik, 1999).

### **Critical qualitative inquiry: In search of meaning(s)**

Qualitative research is not located within any single paradigm (Lather, 2006; Rolfe, 2006), but cuts across a range of theoretical perspectives, academic disciplines, and fields of study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2012). As an interactive form of inquiry, the qualitative approach seeks to engage directly with the search for meaning by locating the researcher within the world(s) of the researched. Thus, it provides “richer and more finely nuanced accounts of human action” (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 578), as the emerging data is drawn from localised contexts, lived experiences and potentially contradictory worlds (Wetherell, 1999). Operating at the contested borders between ‘reality’ and representation, and engaging with contradictory values, knowledge(s), truth claims and experiences (Davidson & Tolich, 1999b), a qualitative approach provides insight into the multi-layered lives of participants. In relation to policy texts, a qualitative approach allows for active engagement with, and critical evaluation and explanation of, the ‘realities’ that are presented in the text through the discourse(s) called upon (Fairclough, 2013). Thus, qualitative inquiry facilitates insight into the multiple discourses at play within text and talk, helping

to uncover obscure, and contested, meanings through critical engagement with the 'realities' presented. Moreover, a qualitative approach engages with the reciprocal and interactive nature of meaning-making as individuals make sense of the/ir world(s) which is caught up in a dialectical relationship between social structure and individual agency. Coalescing with this, my research is located within an interpretivist frame which contextualises meaning-making (Tonkiss, 1998), positioning it as part of an active social process, and acknowledges the place of language and discourse in socially constructed notions of 'reality' (Bassey, 1995; Darlaston-Jones, 2007; Davidson & Tolich, 1999a; Giddens, 1974; Richardson, 2012a; Schwandt, 2000).

By seeking to uncover the multiple ways in which 'common sense' and taken-for-granted assumptions permeate all aspects of life, qualitative interpretivist research can be adapted as a form of critical social practice (see Anyon, 2009) where it turns its attention to identifying possibilities for transformative change (Cannella & Lincoln, 2012; Fine, Weis, Weseen & Wong, 2000). I chose to employ a critical qualitative approach for my study because it allowed for a deeper exploration of the nature and purpose of career education, and how meaning was given to social justice within this curriculum area. It also gave me the scope to examine how social justice concerns were positioned by both the state and career advisors in practice. Becoming aware of the importance attached to ethics and reflexivity in critical qualitative research (McCabe & Holmes, 2009) due to its political and transformative nature brought me to the work of Gewirtz and Cribb (2006).

*Acting ethically: A critical research framework*

Rather than shy away from, or simply ignore, the challenge to politically committed and/or critical social research, Gewirtz and Cribb (2006) have developed a framework for ethically reflexive practice in relation to the sociology of education that addresses this issue. Whilst acknowledging that their framework will not sit comfortably with some, it provided a way forward for my own study, and I embedded it into my research practice. The five key dimensions of ethically reflexive practice identified by Gewirtz and Cribb (2006) are:

Firstly, being explicit, as far as is possible, about the value assumptions and evaluative judgements that inform or are embedded in every stage of our research. Secondly, being prepared to offer a defence of our assumptions and judgements to the extent that either they might not be shared by others or, conversely, that they are not sufficiently problematised by others. Thirdly, acknowledging, and where possible responding to, tensions, between the various values that are embedded in our research. Fourthly, taking seriously the practical judgements and dilemmas of the people we are researching. Finally, taking responsibility for the political and ethical implications of our research. (pp. 147-148)

In a reflexive vein, Gewirtz & Cribb (2006) outline three key challenges that need to be addressed if their ethical framework is to be effective. The first of these relates to “the apparent boundless nature of ethical reflexivity” (p. 149). They contend that if researchers become too caught up in defending *their own*

value judgements this could deflect their attention away from engagement with the data itself, impact on the reporting of findings, and restrict the development of recommendations from the research. Hence, they emphasise the need for openness and clarity regarding the values and judgements made in relation to the research. They also emphasise the importance of reflexive critique by those engaged in the research in relation to the values applied. Alongside this, they suggest that all researchers should critically engage with the ethical judgements that arise in, and through, their practice. Accordingly, throughout all of the stages of my research I have engaged in a reflexive process as a means of ensuring that my own values and beliefs are transparent and clearly articulated. For example, in relation to the data analysis I recognise that my own reading is neither neutral nor value-free, but informed by the critical method I have employed (which I return to later in this chapter), and my own political stance as a democratic socialist from a working class background.

Secondly, they posit that it is important to recognise, and manage, the tensions between the abstract values and ideals of the researcher, and how these might be practically realised. Rather than position ourselves outside of, and above, the lived realities of participants “an ethically reflexive perspective involves social researchers being prepared to develop their value judgements in a way that is responsive to, and learns from, the practical dilemmas faced by those operating in the social contexts being studied” (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2006, p. 150). I thought deeply about this challenge as I constructed my research design. I did not want to conceal my political ideals and critical stance as I believed that to be ethically

dishonest, but nor did I want this to influence how my participants might respond during the interview. As identified in chapter one, having worked within the career arena for a number of years, as a practitioner and an academic, I had some understanding of the challenges and contradictions that can be encountered in practice. Thus, within the interview process I sought to ensure that my participants felt free to share their personal views and professional experiences without feeling that their behaviours and actions were being judged. I remained aware that the articulation of social justice may have been difficult for some career advisors; that enacting social justice philosophies within career education practice can be problematic; and that the participants may not share my views; though I did not explicitly state these for my participants.

Finally, Gewirtz and Cribb (2006) contend that there is a need for a self-conscious engagement with “the way our interests in, or concerns about, potential applications or readings of our research influence the process or products of research” (p. 151). They also suggest that if critical researchers accept responsibility for the practical implications of their work, are reflexive and open about their own values, and differentiate between recommendations arising from the research, and those that have been informed by prior beliefs, it can demonstrate academic rigour *and* contribute to political and social change. My intention, therefore, has been to learn *from* the research findings, to identify how social in/justice concerns coalesce with/in career education; to present policymakers and practitioners with multiple ways of looking at the world; and to



provide opportunities for career advisors to extend their repertoire of practice within the contexts of localised situations.

### *Ethical considerations in practice*

Before commencing my study I was required to meet the institutional requirements of the University of Otago which govern the undertaking of research with human participants. The Ethics Committee seeks to safeguard the rights of both the researcher and researched by ensuring that participants are not likely to come to any form of harm. Thus, ethical approval at the institutional level played a key role in the development, and delivery, of my research for a number of reasons. Firstly, it prompted me to engage in a process of ‘researcher reflexivity’ whereby I sought to identify potential ethical issues that could arise during my study, and consider how these might be addressed. Secondly, it opened my research design to external scrutiny, thus giving it a degree of credibility. Finally, the gaining of institutional ethical approval provided a foundation for my research practice (Griffiths, 1998; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Mitchell & Irvine, 2008), and raised my awareness of the need to be alert to potential ethical considerations as my study progressed (Glesne, 2006).

The ethical dimension of reflexivity goes beyond epistemological concerns, and is “a means of continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation, not just in relation to the research methods and the data but also to the researcher, participants, and the research context” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 275). Allied to this is the need to give careful consideration to how research

findings are presented and contextualised to avoid negative theorising and blame laying (Alderson, 1999; Glesne, 2006). This was of particular importance for my own study where the adoption of a ‘critical’ stance can lead to negative representations of participants’ views. Therefore, rather than position my participants as objects of study, I saw them as active contributors in the co-construction of knowledge (Fine, 1994; Snook, 1999). Thus, I was aware of the need for greater reflexive introspection at a range of levels as my research unfolded, including the importance of being open and honest in my dealings with participants (Cameron, 2001), the wider research community (Snook, 1999), and my supervisors. In the following discussion of the research design and process I have made reference to specific ethical concerns where appropriate.

### **The research design**

When I constructed the research design I was mindful of Ozga’s (2000) view that researchers operating within a critical frame should seek to explore, examine and expose social injustices, and challenge ‘common sense’ assumptions that underlie official rationalities and logics. For me, these intentions illuminated how the socially constructed nature of qualitative inquiry has the potential to dig beneath the surface by not simply identifying the ‘what’ of a research problem, but also uncovering the ‘how’, and interrogating the ‘why’. Ozga (2000) also suggested that one of the questions a critical researcher for social justice might explore in their inquiry is “Does [the planned research] support the development of human capacity, respect for human dignity and worth, a more equitable distribution of economic and social goods and expansion of economic activity to

meet need?” (p. 46). This was particularly apposite for my own study, connecting to Young’s (1990) theorising of social in/justice, and reflecting the potential of career education when located within a holistic, and transformative, frame.

M. Patton (2002) also poses a number of helpful questions for those applying a critical epistemology. He asks, “How have the people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, ‘truths’, explanations, beliefs and worldview? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviours and those with whom they interact?” (p. 132). To this list of questions I would add: Whose interests do they progress? These insightful questions informed the overall research design, including the framing of my interview schedule, and provided a useful guide when I analysed the empirical data. Moreover, they acted as a conceptual mind map as I explored how social in/justice in the ‘real world’ of career education in New Zealand was constructed in the Career Education and Guidance (CEG) guidelines (MoE, 2009a); how dominant discourses can become embedded in seemingly benign ways; and how career advisors themselves might take up and/or reject such discursive influences.

To make sense of the data I employed critical discourse analysis (CdA) as this allowed me to actively engage with the social, economic and political influences that serve to inform, and shape, the multiple discourses that can be found within career education *and* social justice. As indicated in chapter one, I have used the term CdA to distinguish my own approach from that of Fairclough (1992, 1995). Whereas linguistic nuances are an important feature in Fairclough’s

CDA approach, my primary concern was with the socio-cultural and political dimensions in discourse. This enabled me to draw on a wider range of theorists, such as Foucault (1980, 1988), in my interrogation of the workings of power on constructions of ‘reality’ (see Rogers et al, 2005), and the complex ways in which this was implicated within the discourses that inhabited policy, and were drawn on by career advisors in practice.

When I constructed my methodology I considered a range of data gathering methods including focus groups, and second interviews based on an initial analysis of the transcripts. In consultation with my supervisors it was decided that analysis of twelve ‘single interviews’ with those responsible for the development and delivery of career education, supported by my policy analysis, would provide enough appropriate ‘evidence’, and connect effectively with my critical social theory framework. Hence, one of the limitations of my study is its lack of statistical validity and generalisability given the limited evidence that is presented. However, although there is no hard and fast rule regarding sample size (see Baker & Edwards, n.d.), I believe my sample size to be appropriate for this type of study, and the broad generalisability of my findings is enhanced by the combination of the interview data and the detailed critical analysis of the data gleaned from institutional and national policy documentation and arrangements.

My research design focused on gaining an understanding of how the teleological nature of career education, and the conceptualisation and positioning of social in/justice within it, is understood at the (con)textual levels of policy, and

more specifically from career advisors' perspectives in practice. My qualitative approach encompassed policy analysis, and the collection of interview data from practising career advisors. Researching at the macro (state policy), meso (institutional policy), and micro (career advisor) levels allowed for an exploration of the complex interplay between these different layers, and resulted in a richer and more nuanced analysis. This enabled me to relate the 'bigger discursive picture' of the state's aspirations for career education, and how social justice is conceptualised and positioned, by facilitating examination of how such issues are perceived within localised settings (Kincheloe, 2003; Rogers, 2004a).

As discussed in earlier chapters of this thesis, career discourse cannot be positioned as 'neutral', objective, or devoid of political influence. It is informed by government policy, influenced by the wider society, and shaped by career advisors in secondary schools in, and through, their practices. The constitutive and political effects of discursive policy pronouncements (see Graham, 2007), can shape the climate in which career education might be interpreted and understood, and provide legitimacy to the state's view of how career(s) should be constructed. At the institutional level, career advisors construct the learning environment, decide on 'appropriate' curriculum content, and determine what aspects of social life should be included and excluded. By providing the educational context through which 'career(s)' might be conceptualised they play a key role in determining how, or whether, career education should engage with social in/justice concerns. Thus, through the development and delivery of career

education within their schools career advisors occupy powerful roles. Hence, there is also the potential for resistance and transformation.

### **The research: Process and practice**

I intended to begin my analysis by gaining an insight into how social justice concerns in relation to career education were conceptualised and positioned by the professional organisations representing career advisors in New Zealand. However, these bodies do not currently produce policies or guidelines of this nature. From a policy perspective, therefore, emphasis was placed on the CEG policy guidelines (MoE, 2009a). Where appropriate, I also drew on a range of associated ‘official’ documents in my analysis. This provided insight into current thinking concerning the concept of career, the role of career education, and how social justice is conceptualised, and positioned, thus providing a macro context for my school-based fieldwork. At the institutional level, semi-structured interviews were employed to consider how the participants positioned themselves/were positioned in relation to the CEG policy guidelines; examine whether school-based policies concerning social justice issues informed their understanding of career education; and explore whether dominant discourses relating to career education and social in/justice were taken up, and/or resisted. Thus, the data was not limited to that gleaned from interviews alone as I drew from a range of sources. This extended the discursive resources I was able to draw from as I constructed my findings, and helped address concerns identified by Hobson and Townsend (2010) about the presumed unreliability of interviews as a sole source of data generation.

Access to the CEG policy guidelines, and other ‘official’ documents, was relatively unproblematic as these were publicly available in print form and/or via the web. However, securing participants for the school-based element of the research was more complex and challenging.

*Into school: Issues of access and recruitment*

Although I was not seeking a representative participant sample, I was interested in gaining the views of career advisors working in a range of different state-funded secondary school settings. To facilitate this I developed a matrix to assist with the identification of schools on the basis of decile (which indicates the socio-economic make-up of the community the school draws from), cohort (in terms of gender and ethnic mix), and size (student numbers). I focused on securing participants from a major cosmopolitan city, a provincial city, and a rural area. I utilised the Ministry of Education’s website to identify potential participant schools as this provided basic demographic details and contact information. Schools in New Zealand are quasi-independent of the state. Principals are responsible for the activities of their staff, and answerable to their Board of Trustees for what goes on in the institution. Career advisors, meanwhile, are appointed by the Principal and, in general, have primary responsibility for the organisation of careers work in their schools<sup>10</sup>. As identified in chapter two, whilst career education is subject to state guidance (see Ministry of Education, 2009a), career advisors continue to exercise a degree of autonomy in this curriculum area and thus their understanding is central to this research.

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<sup>10</sup> This is discussed in further detail in chapter five: State utterances concerning the nation’s priorities

After the granting of ethical approval by the University of Otago College of Education, I sent letters about my study (see Appendix A) to 14 school Principals in the target areas. In the letter I enquired whether they would be willing to grant permission for their school's career advisor to participate in my study, and if so to pass my contact details on to them. I included an information sheet (see Appendix B) which outlined the aim of my study and the commitment it entailed, which was primarily focused on a single interview. I felt that this protocol, which was agreed with my supervisors, would help facilitate access. However, this resulted in no responses. Consequently, I changed my approach. I followed-up the initial tranche of letters to Principal's by emailing each school's career advisor directly, and contacted a further 34 career advisors in the same way. An information sheet was attached to the emails, and I offered to contact their school Principal for permission if they indicated a willingness to participate. Reflecting the everyday power dynamics at play within secondary schools, this offer was made to ensure that their participation would not conflict with their obligations to the school, or place their jobs in jeopardy.

Whilst this direct approach proved to be more successful, there were still a number of non-respondents. This was particularly noticeable from career advisors in rural areas, despite numerous follow-up contacts. In relation to those who did reply, the responses ranged from the highly enthusiastic, through to those who simply stated that they were not interested. The principal of a low decile school mentioned that he was being inundated with requests, and felt his school, and students, were being 'over-researched'. A number of career advisors in the initial



contact cohort reported that their Principal had not made them aware of my study, thus highlighting the role that formal gatekeepers can play in determining what are deemed to be ‘worthwhile’ activities (Reeves, 2010; Seidman, 2013).

Subsequently, my research included 12 participants from a range of schools in a provincial and cosmopolitan city. This included one career assistant who actively participated in one of the interviews with a career advisor as she was present in the room used. I provided participants with a copy of the consent form (Appendix C) which included space for their Principal’s signature, and informed them that it may be in their interests to get the formal approval of their school Principal as a professional safeguard. The final decision, however, rested with each individual participant. Making participants fully aware of the purposes of my research, reiterating the voluntary nature of participation, gaining informed consent from gatekeepers (school Principals) and the participants (career advisors), and clarifying how I would seek to protect their anonymity (Piper & Simons, 2005), facilitated a more open research process, locating it within a supportive framework.

In relation to the difficulties I experienced with recruitment, I reflected on whether there may be a deeper sense of resistance to engage in what might be regarded as ‘contentious’ or ‘politically sensitive’ research in an educational era characterised by academic achievement, ‘positive’ progression, and increasing institutional accountability (Crooks, 2011; MoE, 2012). For example, Creswell (1994) noted that “inquiry into racism and equal opportunities remains a sensitive,

hostile and defensive terrain” (p. 526). This observation may be apposite to my own critical study where my concern with issues of social in/justice and career education may be considered, by some, to fall into this category. Issues of ‘trust’ could also have come into play as there was no existing relationship between myself, many of the career advisors I approached, and/or their schools. However, Australian research by McMahon, Arthur and Collins, (2008b) concerning the relationship between social justice and career practice reported a low response rate to their online questionnaire even though they elicited participation through a number of professional bodies, suggesting the challenges I experienced may be wider.

#### *Interviewing as a reflexive process: Into the field*

The process of interviewing can be seen as a dialogical activity (England, 1994) where the relationship that is formed actively engages the interviewer and participant in a complex and creative interaction (Beer, 1997; St. Pierre, 1997) in response to the questions posed. Yet how participants ascribe meaning(s) as they respond to, and interpret, questions (Cameron, 2001), cannot simply be understood in a ‘rational’ and ‘logical’ sense as there are other factors in play. As Cameron (2001) notes, interviews are not naturally occurring, but a place where respondents actively engage in the construction of accounts. From an interpretivist standpoint, I realised that it was important to acknowledge that the accounts career advisors share might be better understood when “seen as the social constructions they are, fully impregnated by their location within the power structures and social milieu” (Goodson, 1995, p. 98). For example, these could

reflect their location with the school hierarchy, the personal and/or political values they hold, and their positioning in relation to socio-economic class, gender, and culture for example. Therefore, rather than a search for ‘truth’ or the reflection of a unified reality of the participant’s world, the responses to the interview questions could more accurately be regarded as a partial representation which was contextually specific (McMahon & Watson, 2007), and informed by multiple discourses (Powers, 1996) which, at times, were also competing. This was an important consideration as my study was concerned with the complex ways in which dominant discourses concerning social in/justice within career education were conceptualised and played out in policy texts and career advisors’ talk.

Thus, using my primary research questions outlined in chapter one as a guide, I constructed an interview schedule (see Appendix D) that accommodated the breadth of issues, but was flexible enough to respond to unanticipated turns or events (McAteer, 2013). In the construction of my interview schedule I had a desire to accompany my participants on a metaphorical journey through the contested labyrinth of career education (see chapter two), and to gain insight into how they conceptualised and positioned social in/justice within this curriculum area. The questions were grouped to facilitate discussion around a series of broad discursive issues that related to my primary research questions (McAteer, 2013), as shown in the table below. Each of the specific interview questions was supported by a range of secondary prompts to help stimulate the discussion when required.

**Table 1**

*Research questions and corresponding interview schedule*

<b>Primary research questions</b>	<b>Specific interview questions</b>
<p><b>RQ1:</b> What are the dominant discursive messages communicated in the 2009 Ministry of Education (MoE) Policy Guidelines for Career Education and Guidance (CEG) in New Zealand schools?</p>	<p><b>Note:</b> This research question provided the focus for the analysis of the CEG policy guidelines.</p>
<p><b>RQ2:</b> How are the discursive messages within the MoE policy guidelines received by career advisors in practice?</p>	<p><b>Q3:</b> What do you understand the main purpose of career education to be?</p> <p><b>Q4:</b> Do you see any differences between the following terms: career education; career development; and career counselling?</p> <p><b>Q5:</b> Are you aware of the 2009 Ministry of Education document ‘Career Education and Guidance in New Zealand schools’ (or the 2003 document)?</p> <p><b>Q6:</b> In the MoE document, career is presented in a holistic way. What do you understand holistic to mean in relation to career education?</p> <p><b>Q8:</b> Looking more closely at the development of your own career education programme, what do you feel have been the key influences?</p> <p><b>Q16:</b> Is there anything further you would like to add?</p>
<p><b>RQ3:</b> Do school-based policies related to social justice concerns (such as equity, equality, inclusion, diversity, bullying) inform how career advisors conceptualise and construct career education?</p>	<p><b>Q2:</b> How did you get involved in career education?</p> <p><b>Q3:</b> What do you understand the main purpose of career education to be?</p>

	<p><b>Q12:</b> Does your school have equal opportunities or social justice policies? If so, where do you see them fitting in to career education?</p> <p><b>Q13:</b> Where do you see social justice concerns fitting within career education in general, and in your own programmes specifically?</p> <p><b>Q14:</b> Have you received any education or training related to social justice issues?</p> <p><b>Q16:</b> Is there anything further you would like to add?</p>
<p><b>RQ4:</b> Have humanist and essentialist conceptions the ‘self’ informed how social in/justice is conceptualised and located within career education by career advisors?</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p><b>RQ5:</b> Has neoliberal discourse influenced how social in/justice concerns are conceptualised and located within career education?</p>	<p><b>Q3:</b> What do you understand the main purpose of career education to be?</p> <p><b>Q5:</b> Do you see any differences between the following terms: career education; career development; career counselling?</p> <p><b>Q6:</b> In the MoE document, career is presented in a holistic way. What do you understand holistic to mean in relation to career education?</p> <p><b>Q7:</b> How would you view the inclusion of alternative activities or pathways to paid employment or continuing in education fitting into career education programmes?</p> <p><b>Q8:</b> Looking more closely at the development of your own career education programme, what do you feel have been the key influences?</p> <p><b>Q9:</b> What theory or theories would you say have influenced your approach to career education?</p> <p><b>Q10:</b> What do you feel are the main career education needs of students in</p>

	<p>their final years of compulsory schooling?</p> <p><b>Q11:</b> What do you understand the term social justice to mean?</p> <p><b>Q13:</b> Where do you see social justice concerns fitting within career education in general, and in your own programme more specifically?</p> <p><b>Q15:</b> What do you feel are the major challenges facing career education in the future?</p> <p><b>Q16:</b> Is there anything further you would like to add?</p>
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I adopted a semi-structured interview approach which, Barribal and While (1994) note “is well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex, and sometimes sensitive, issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers” (p. 330). Whilst the research interview itself can be understood as a socially constructed engagement between mutually interested parties (Poland, 2002; Scott, 1999), its effectiveness is influenced by how the scene is set. Prior to the interview, therefore, participants were made aware that our discussion could last for approximately an hour, and they were provided with a copy of the interview schedule. This gave them an opportunity to arrange a mutually acceptable interview time, to reflect on what might be covered, and to raise any questions or identify any issues with me in advance. This ameliorated any sense of ‘entrapment’, contributed to openness in the research process, through which I sought to facilitate a collaborative and reciprocal atmosphere (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2007), as a

means of establishing a shared sense of empathy and rapport (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Fontana & Frey, 2000).

After they outlined their school setting and reflected on how they arrived in their current role, I encouraged the participants to share their own understanding of the discursive messages within the CEG guidelines (see MoE, 2009a). Questions were then presented which encouraged them to think deeply about their own understanding of career education, and how they conceptualised social justice. These questions were designed to enable them to reflexively consider this understanding within the specificities of their own professional practice, and in relation to their values and lived experience. An open question was included at the end of the interview to give them an opportunity to introduce issues they felt had been overlooked or omitted, or to ask further questions about, for example, why I chose to embark on this study.

The interviews were principally undertaken within the participant's office as this was often the most convenient location, and might also be regarded as 'safe ground'. Prior to the commencement of the 'formal' interview, which was recorded with their permission, we often began by sharing personal histories and experiences. This contributed to a process of informality which generally put the participant at ease. In addition, I explained the process of informed consent, outlined how I would seek to safeguard their rights and preserve their anonymity (Bell, 2010), and negotiated the use of the data (Cameron, 2001). Whilst a safe environment contributes to an atmosphere conducive for reflexive engagement I

was aware that informal exchanges can unconsciously set boundaries concerning my expectations, and what participants feel free to disclose (Rose, 1997) regardless of the degree of sensitivity applied. All of the participants were sent a copy of the full written transcript to assist them to reflect on the interview, and confirm that it was a fair representation of what was said. They were also invited to add further comments if they wished, and/or make amendments. Even though none took up this offer, I felt it went some way in addressing the limitations imposed by the interview process.

The semi-structured questions facilitated a lively interplay between my participants and me during the interviews, contributing to the flow of the interaction and adding to the depth of the discussion. This helped illuminate my own understanding of their experiences. Fitting comfortably within an interpretivist paradigm, a dialogical space was provided which enabled participants' to reflexively engage with the questions in thoughtful, and at times challenging, ways. Sharing their accounts in their *own* words (Reinharz, 1992), allowed them to draw on their personal and professional values which are informed by their (potentially) contradictory worldviews (Wetherell, 1999). Moreover, it assisted them to reflexively consider their career education practices and explore their perceptions of social in/justice within the national policy context, and the particularities of their own localised settings. Hence, opportunities were provided for personal and professional reflexive moments (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).



At a practical level, it is important to add that schools are busy places and on occasions some interviews were disrupted by telephone calls, interrupted by student enquiries and/or cut short due to the limited time a participant had available. However, the use of a semi-structured interview schedule enabled me to concentrate on key questions when the time available for the interview was curtailed (for example, one participant had to collect her son from childcare). I documented these events when completing my field notes which helped me capture moments that could not easily be recorded. All of the interviews were transcribed in full as this provided me with an opportunity re-immense myself within each interaction in a situated sense (Cameron, 2001), enabling their responses to my questions to be put into context. At this initial stage, where transcription overlaps with an early form of analysis, I drew loosely from Fairclough's (2013) CDA approach by noting the tenor of the interviews, and identified how participants deployed language by laying claim to particular discursive positions through, for example, the use of personal pronouns.

Before moving on to discuss my analysis in greater depth, it is important to add that other issues were also at play during the data collection stage. Barriball and While (1994) highlight that it is beneficial for researchers engaging with a semi-structured approach to have received prior skills training to ensure that the interview(er) is flexible, sensitive and comprehensive. Fortunately, in my earlier 'life' as a career advisor I received interview-skills training which encompassed an empathetic approach and included the use of open questions to facilitate discussion. I have embedded this within my research practice over the years. A

further consideration relates to the unevenness of power relations between the researcher and participant (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Stacey, 1988), and the expectations that each may hold. Mediating factors such as the conscious and unconscious agendas of both researcher and participant (Scheurich, 1995), along with gender and status differentials (Reay, 1996), may also shape the process. For example, I was aware that I retained control of the overall direction of the interview, thus restricting the discursive scope of the discussion. Moreover, whilst each participant was made aware that the interview transcript remained their property (McAteer, 2013), and they had the right to restrict its use, the overall responsibility for determining the findings; decisions as to what was included/excluded; and how the findings would ultimately be used; predominantly resided with me as the researcher (Malone 2003; Stacey, 1988). This heightened my understanding of the considerable responsibility that rested on my own shoulders, highlighting the need for ethical concerns to be articulated, negotiated and agreed at an early stage (Malone, 2003), and ensure this continued throughout the study.

### **Critical discourse analysis: Philosophical foundations and political aspirations**

CdA emerged as a methodology that is concerned with the workings of power in, and through, discourse and the multiple ways in which particular realities are privileged *and* contested (Fairclough, 2013). Drawing its philosophical and ideological base from a wide range of critical theories, it provides an analytical approach “to describe, interpret, and explain the ways in

which discourse constructs, becomes constructed by, represents, and becomes represented by the social world” (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui & Ogarra, 2005, p. 366). Recognition is given to the sociohistorical specificity of language and meaning (Weedon, 1997), and how, through the appropriation and manipulation of language, meaning(s) within discourse can become obscured, rendered invisible, and/or used to present taken-for-granted ‘common sense’ truths (Foucault, 1972; Luke, 1995). For example, through attempts to shape and control language dominant discourse can progress the interests of powerful groups (Fairclough, 2001) by attempting to delimit permissible thought (Segall, 2013).

The intention of CdA, therefore, is to disrupt and problematise embedded power relations within talk and text (Luke, 1998) by providing insight into the multiple, complex and contradictory ways in which discourse, power, dominance, and social inequality interconnect (van Dijk, 1993). It seeks to trouble that which appears “familiar, comprehensible, and easily readable” (Segall, 2013, p. 479), by exposing narratives, uncovering silences, and questioning dominant discourses. This necessitates the rejection of the notion of language in its discursive form as abstract and neutral (Segall, 2013), requiring interrogation of the ways in which words carry meaning that are politically, socially, and historically located (McGregor, 2003). Thus, CdA facilitates critical examination, exploration, and explanation of the multiple ways in which subjectivities are constructed, constituted, communicated and negotiated through discourse, and helps to uncover the workings of power and ideology in relation to these (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2013; Wodak, 1996).

It is important to note that whilst CdA and discourse analysis overlap there are noticeable differences. Gee (2004) observes that whilst discourse analysis is often tempered by critical insight, critical discourse analysis is concerned with the constitutive nature of language, and the intertwining of social practices with political decisions about fairness, distribution, and justice. Thus, CdA may take a more avowedly partisan and/or ideological stance in its promotion of social justice by, for example, reflecting the political stance of the researcher (Gillborn, 1998).

Looking closely at the philosophical and political propositions that underlie CdA, it is possible to identify how Young's conceptualisation of social in/justice (see chapter three) 'fits' alongside this methodology. Both encompass ideological concerns with power, knowledge, politics, diversity and recognition, and a desire to reveal and transform inequitable institutional processes and social conditions (McDonald, 2005). The workings of oppression and domination, the potential for resistance, and the importance of action are also of shared interest. Thus, in my analysis I utilised CdA to focus my examination of the way(s) in which discourse is employed to present 'common sense' truths about 'career', construct the boundaries of career education, provide (partial) representations of 'how things are' in relation to social justice, and to consider possible transformative scenarios (Luke, 1995; Rogers et al, 2005). The findings were theorised in relation to Young's theory of justice, informed by her concepts of oppression and domination, and related back to my research questions. For example, in my analysis I considered how dominant discourses that underpin career education seek to normalise a particular understanding of what constitutes

an ‘acceptable’ life, and to position those not engaged in paid labour as being ‘at risk’ of social exclusion.

*A critical re/view of CdA: challenging language and discourse*

As discussed above, CdA is not simply concerned with describing social phenomena, it also engages in normative critique which seeks to interrogate, evaluate and assess a discursively constituted wor(l)d. However, like all methodologies CdA is not beyond critique. Cameron (2001), for example, observes that “CDA has tended to prompt particularly sharp criticism because of its openly ‘committed’ agenda, which challenges the orthodox academic belief in objective and neutral description” (p. 140). This has been forcefully echoed by Hammersley (1998, 2004), with regards to partisan or ‘critical’ research. Hence, there is a view that the findings from research that has employed critical discourse analysis will be saturated by political and social ideologies that are read into the data, with the risk that it will present a biased, or unbalanced, view (Rogers, 2004b). Related to this, Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) identify that those who apply a strong critical theory standpoint in their application of CdA have a propensity at times to complement their empirical data with reference to their own understanding of the wider social context. Critics also claim that the analysis often draws on an insufficient number of examples, and that counter-examples are not given enough importance (Cameron, 2001), thus privileging the analyst’s own interpretation of text and talk. In a general sense this intersects with concerns raised by Bishop (1998) and Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) who argue that research

located within a Western epistemology, and framed by the ontological ‘realities’ of the dominant culture, serves to obscure indigenous ways of knowing and being.

As I reflected on the implications of these critiques for my own study, I found myself questioning a number of their underlying premises. A key issue highlighted above implies that if the researcher takes a partisan stance (see Gillborn, 1998; Troyna, 1995) it will result in distorted analysis and biased findings which privilege the views of the analyst. Griffiths (1998) provides a salient response, arguing that “bias comes not from having ethical and political positions . . . but from not acknowledging them” (p. 133). Hence, the extent to which ‘we’ can position ourselves in an apolitical sense without compromising our values and beliefs is open to question (Applebaum, 2009). Therefore, as a partisan researcher *for* social justice, I acknowledge that the interests of those least advantaged has been privileged in the construction of my research. Moreover, throughout this study I have been open about my own worldview, the values I hold, and my political position as a democratic socialist.

Relating to this, I believe that any desire to adhere to an objective Western ontology disregards the complex ways in which the research/er ‘self’ is caught up in a web of social relations that are historically, discursively and culturally informed (Stead, 2004). Disaggregating individual re/presentations from, or interpreting them outside of, the wider socio-political (Wetherell & Potter, 1988) and cultural (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) context, which acts to shape our (participant and researcher alike) understanding, are at risk of privileging *individual*

perception and experience in isolation of broader discursive influences. As Blair (1998) comments, “our histories and memories are shot through with gendered, classed, racialized and other ‘excluding’ understandings which give us our particular perspectives on the world” (p. 13). Therefore, rather than position any research/er as neutral, there is a need to acknowledge that *all* research findings are partial and open to contestation as these represent the researchers particular reading of the data. Hence, ‘evidence’, can be ephemeral and situated, whilst ‘truth’ is better understood as epistemologically relative, rather than ‘fixed’ and sacrosanct. This observation is particularly pertinent for my own study where, through my use of CdA, I am seeking to expose the potential for oppression, domination, *and* resistance within career education, and disrupt claims to truth.

*CdA in practice: A discursive engagement with talk and text*

Luke (2000) defines discourse as “systematic clusters of themes, statements, ideas and ideologies [that] come into play in the text” (p. 456), a definition I adopted for my analysis. Collectively, discourse is a representation of a socially constructed reality that has been discursively formed through the interactions of those who give meaning to the world and events around them, such as policy makers and career advisors. In relation to language, the use of metaphor can contribute to ways in which ‘problems’ are (re)presented that seek to create images and connections in readers’ minds between the tenet of the text and non-literal descriptors (Bloor & Bloor, 2007), such as “the responsibility of individuals to *chart their own path* [emphasis added] of career development” (Patton, 2001, p. 19). Moreover, when there is an absence of critical reflection on the part of the

analyst, metaphor can obscure the underlying dynamics of power within discourse(s) (Arthur, 2014) through the use of mediated language (Scott, 1992). An example of this can be found in the way in which ‘career’ is constituted in a holistic ‘life’ sense in the CEG guidelines, yet little said about how this ‘life’ might be conceptualised and enacted outside of formal education and/or the labour market.

Hence, through its discursive deployment language cannot simply be taken at face value as it is a complex and active medium, constituting how social lives might be constructed and enacted (Wetherell, 1999), reflecting contradictory standpoints, and/or leading to the privileging of some aspects of life over others. However, whilst attempts may be made to position individuals through the presentation of discursive ‘realities’, the subject positions available to the participants in my study were also influenced by multiple contexts that can extend beyond their role as career professionals. As Scott (1992) observes, language contains a range of subject positions that are constructed from the meanings that are brought into being such as ‘woman’, being ‘unemployed’, or being engaged in meaningful ‘work’. Consequently, my analysis was not simply concerned with identifying ‘obvious’ discourses, but also uncovering those that were less apparent and lay deeper beneath the surface.

#### *Making sense of the data: Meaningful moments*

I elected to use CdA as this melds critical social theory with discourse analysis, yet does not forego the oscillation between social structure and



individual agency, social contexts and localised particularities. Although there is no prescribed method for actually ‘doing’ critical discourse analysis (see Fairclough, 2003; Rogers, 2004a; van Dijke, 1993), there are common strands that reflect its sociohistorical and politically embedded nature. Rather than seeing text as reflecting a ‘given truth’, I perceived it as being a dynamic interactive use of language, employed simultaneously to construct and obscure meaning(s). In my analysis I considered how the inherent political nature of language use was implicated in the discursive construction of meaning(s), and (re)presented multiple, and at times competing, discourses. Accordingly, whilst I paid some attention to linguistic plays, such as the use of personal pronouns and modalities (Fairclough, 2013), my method leaned heavily towards a combination of socio-political and critical analysis, rather than that of linguistic theory (Gee, 2004). Hence, I have drawn from the work of Cameron, Luke, Foucault, and Gee, as well as that of Fairclough, to inform my approach. Thus, the term ‘critical’ signalled my intent to take a politically oriented stance in relation to my data analysis.

Therefore, I began my data analysis by reading through the textual material at a surface level to attune myself to what had been written. Following this, I identified and explored the broad themes that emerged, and examined these with respect to their relationship to wider social, political and economic discourses. This helped me to move the analysis from the abstract to a more concrete representation, and allowed for the interpretative process to occupy the critical ground. Through multiple readings of the empirical data (i.e. the CEG guidelines and interview transcripts) it was possible to narrow down a range of

key themes and sub-themes that related to my primary research question. It also enabled me to expose silences and omissions (Kincheloe, 2004; Mazzei, 2007). This added richness to the deconstruction of the textual data, both written and spoken, giving greater depth to the findings. For example, a key theme within the CEG policy document and throughout the transcripts was the importance attached to the discovery of a 'self'. Participants articulated a particular version of 'the self' (and positioned career education in relation to this) which led to my identification of a series of sub-themes such as those concerning individual responsibility, 'self-knowledge', individual choice, psychological awakening, educational/occupational aspiration, and self-actualisation/individual fulfilment. What was less apparent from a social justice perspective, however, concerned the relationship between constructions of 'the self', and the impact of socio-economic, political and cultural conditions (Stead & Bakker, 2012).

A discursive analysis helped illuminate how practitioners attributed meaning to career education, how social justice might be conceptualised, and the presuppositions informing this (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011). This deeper engagement also revealed the multiple and contradictory positioning(s) that are made available through discourse (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and culture (Stead & Bakker, 2012), and how these might be taken up, and/or rejected. Moreover, as the findings show, there was a degree of fluidity evident as discourse constructs, and is constructed by, social practices and thus remains open to multiple, and partial, interpretation and application (Rogers, 2004b). Thus, I was able to consider the implications of the findings at the macro, meso, and micro levels, and

locate these discourses within the wider context. In a discursive sense, therefore, this approach enabled me to uncover and interrogate the dominant discourses that were at play, identify counter discourses, and to tease out multiple readings. I sought to identify how competing conceptions of social justice were articulated and/or brought into play in both the CEG guidelines and through the participants' talk. Thus, I was able to locate and theorise the emergent discourses of social in/justice with reference to Young's (1990) conceptualisation presented in chapter three.

It is important to reiterate that my analysis focused attention on what was said rather than being overly concerned with the finely tuned nuances of grammatical usage and such like, which is an important feature in Fairclough's CDA approach. My intention, therefore, was to look for the textual patterns in the data that were called on to explain and legitimate how meaning was given to social justice within a career education context in theory and practice(s). Thus, I was primarily concerned with the multiple ways in which particular discourses permeate policy and practice, connect the discursive with the material aspects of social life, act to construct forms of reality, which connects with the power dimension within CDA (see Fairclough, 2013), and make particular subject positions available. As such, I was not concerned with quantifiable frequencies of particular utterances, aggregates of responses from the participants, nor the presentation of a representative sample of my participants' views. Hence, I have made few references to actual numbers of participants who commented on particular issues as I believe that the desire to quantify in pursuit of assumed

generalisability and validity (see Forsey, 2012) can have a distorting effect on how qualitative data is interpreted, and findings constructed. Therefore, I openly acknowledge selective inclusion of my participants' 'voices' that, at times, has been utilised to illustrate how conceptualisations of social justice are implicated with competing discursive forms such as liberal humanism and neoliberalism, and affect practices within career education.

CdA facilitated insight into, and an understanding of, the many ways in which dominant discourses within this curriculum area can be transmitted through language, how they carry embedded meaning(s), and how they make particular subject positions available (Wetherell, 1999) for career advisors which may delimit the scope of career practice to engage with issues of social in/justice. This helped me uncover how dominant discourse permeated career thinking in a partial sense (as counter discourse is also at play), and shaped the relationship between career education and social in/justice. My investigation of language use was also utilised to assist in the identification of the power of some discourses to appropriate and/or over-write other forms by changing meaning, and to distinguish how such discourses might be resisted or rejected.

Thus, in my analysis (and throughout my research) I have sought to account for the ways in which the language of power, and the normalising influence of dominant discourse(s), shapes the way(s) in which 'truth' and 'reality' might be discursively constructed (Liasidou, 2008) within the career arena (Arthur, 2014), and radiates through the capillaries of social practices.

Greater weighting was given to the effects of dominant discourses on the conceptualising and positioning of social justice within career education, and how this can consciously or unwittingly contribute to oppression and domination. Hence, my use of CdA showed how a critical research approach can present a counter-discursive view which questions those taken-for-granted truths, and partial representations, that are privileged within the career literature.

### **Concluding reflections**

Employing a critical qualitative approach enabled me to design a study that facilitated deeper insight into how state policy guidance, and the discursive resources made available to career advisors, shape how social justice might be conceptualised and positioned within career education. In the following chapters I interrogate the discursive formations in CEG policy; examine how career advisors conceptualised social in/justice; explore how meaning was given to the nature and purpose of career education; and consider how social justice concerns were positioned and played out within this curriculum area. Reflecting my theoretical framework (see chapter three), CdA was utilised to examine the multiple ways in which career, and career education was constructed through discourse.

As a critical researcher for social justice in (career) education (see Griffiths, 1998, 2003), I endeavoured to ensure that the principles of justice were applied to all aspects of the design, delivery, analysis, and reporting of the findings. Through a critically reflexive process I sought to enable my participants to answer the interview questions freely, and to re/present their views fairly in the

findings, yet I also acknowledge that the interpretations are my own. I felt that remaining aware of the unequal power relationships in play between myself and my participants, being sensitive to their complex and shifting sense(s) of identity, and being respectful of the information provided, enabled me to undertake my analysis, and establish my findings, in a socially just way. In the following chapters I present my findings, and then finally draw the diverse strands of the discussion together in the concluding chapter.

## Chapter Five

### State utterances concerning the nation's priorities: Defining the context and delimiting the boundaries of career education<sup>11</sup>

#### Introduction

Education policy can be understood as the means by which the state makes public its expectations for schooling. Yet policies that emanate from the state, and the guidelines that support them, are not merely political rhetoric, or 'static' pronouncements that are isolated from intended outcomes. As Lawn (2010) notes, whilst policy may not dictate practice, the guidance it provides "aspire[s] to the status of a 'total phenomenology' by legitimating and motivating certain kinds of behaviour and thought" (p. 35). Thus education policy, and the companion documents and guidelines that are produced, are more than technical instruments that reflect a privileged 'expert' voice (Yeatman, 1998). These textual artefacts are given a tangible materiality, presenting career advisors and teachers with a particular reality, whilst attempting to dismiss, omit, or silence, alternative perspectives. It is through policy that "governments secure their authority by allocating values through attempts to forge people's subjectivities in terms of a

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<sup>11</sup> This chapter provided the basis for the following article: Irving, B. A. (2013). Discourses of delusion in demanding times: a critical analysis of the policy guidelines for career education and guidance in New Zealand secondary schools. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 13(2), 187-195. DOI: 10.1108/QRJ-03-2013-0019

dominant social imaginary” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 36). Hence, policies, and the guidelines that support them which are often positioned as ‘advisory’ rather than ‘statutory’, are employed as “processes of allocation – the tactics and strategies designed to secure popular legitimacy. . . become just as important as the values articulated in the text” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, pp. 36-37). In other words, it is not only the values and underlying discourses within policy and related documents that are important, but also their ideological nature (Kenway, 1990), how these values and discourses become institutionalised (Prunty, 1985), and how they come to be accepted and/or resisted in/through practice.

In New Zealand, policy guidelines within education are produced at a central level, whilst responsibility for the development of detailed policies, and their implementation, has generally been devolved to individual schools. In this chapter I critically analyse the multiple discourses that flow through the Career Education and Guidance (CEG) guidelines (MoE, 2009a). The relationship between career education and the secondary school curriculum are examined, and links with companion documents, such as the Career Education Benchmarks (Careers New Zealand, 2011), the revised Career Education Benchmarks (Careers New Zealand, 2014), and Career Education in Practice (Career Services rapuara, 2009) are identified. I also examine how the discursive messages conveyed in the CEG guidelines position particular groups within New Zealand society, and consider how these impact on concerns with social in/justice. More specifically, I consider the social justice implications of textual representations (Ball, 1994a), as a means of identifying whose interests are being privileged (Troyna, 1994).



Following Rizvi and Lingard (2010), my analysis critiques the assumptions that are located within the CEG guidelines by uncovering the ways in which “they might either support or undermine the values of democracy and social justice” (p. 70), which, in agreement with Young (2000), I contend, are inseparable.

## **De/centralising authority: Education policy-making in New Zealand**

In chapter two I discussed how, within New Zealand’s decentralised system of education, broad policy objectives and curriculum practices are determined by the government. At a local level actual policy-making falls within the remit of the Board of Trustees (BoT) at each individual state and state-integrated school. The BoT is responsible for the development of a policy framework which ensures that their school “fulfils its obligations in the national education system . . . [and has] a Charter which outlines how the school will give effect to the NEGs [National Education Guidelines]” (MoE, 2010, p. 4). Each BoT is comprised of elected (and in some cases co-opted) representatives from the school and local community, and is constituted as a legal and Crown entity. Whilst each school has a degree of autonomy in relation to how the school operates, this is mediated by their legal obligations to the national educational system. Moreover, schools are evaluated by the Educational Review Office (ERO), a government department independent of the MoE. Through a process of collaborative review which includes integrating the school’s self-review with ERO’s own external assessment (Mutch, 2013a), school’s performance, effectiveness and compliance in relation to the National Education Guidelines

(Thrupp, 1997) is determined. It is important to note that in 2012, ERO began to focus greater attention on an evaluation of career education and guidance provision in high schools (ERO, 2012).

With regards to career education, the only legal requirement is that each BoT complies with National Administration Guideline 1(f), a sub-section within the NEGs, which stipulates that their school *must*:

provide appropriate career education and guidance for all students in year 7 and above, with a particular emphasis on specific career *guidance* [emphasis added] for those students who have been identified by the school as being at risk of leaving school unprepared for the transition to the workplace or further education/training (MoE, 2015).

Thus, the provision of career education and guidance is enshrined in law.

Alongside this is a particular focus on the requirement to deliver career *guidance*, which is generally more individually focused, to those labelled as being ‘at risk’, with an assumption that this group’s wider learning needs will be accommodated within career *education*. Whereas career guidance tends to focus on the processes and the identification of steps that individuals need to take in order to achieve particular goals, career education is usually delivered in group settings and is concerned with knowledge acquisition, a broadening of the mind, and gaining an understanding of the world beyond school.

Although there are no detailed government policies relating to the actual content of, and delivery mechanisms for, career education (which paradoxically, sits outside of the national curriculum), this does not mean that the state has no interest in this curriculum area. Careers Services rapuara (now rebranded as Careers New Zealand), a quasi-autonomous government agency, was commissioned by the MoE to produce a set of guidelines for use in secondary schools which led to the publication of *Career Education and Guidance in New Zealand Schools* (hereafter referred to as the CEG guidelines) (MoE, 2009a). First published in 2003, and subsequently updated in 2009, many similarities remain between the two versions. However, as the 2009 document states, “Since 2003, many countries have decided to refer to competencies instead of aims” (MoE, 2009a, p. 47). Whilst generally underplayed in the CEG guidelines, the shift from a language of aims (which might be understood as broad intentions) to that of competencies (that encompass measurable skills, abilities and personality traits) signalled a move towards a regime of accountability and control that has been influenced by the global environment, as I will demonstrate.

The CEG guidelines, do not provide a set of policy prescriptions as such (Furbish & Reid, 2013), but offer “advice and support to schools on providing effective career education and guidance in years 7 to 13 [i.e. aged 13 to 17 years old]” (MoE, 2009a, p. 5). The document goes on to outline “a set of career management competencies [i.e. understandings, skills and attitudes] young people *need* [emphasis added] to develop, and suggests an *effective model* [emphasis added] of career education and guidance that can be used to develop these” (p. 6).

These competencies were adapted from the Australian Blueprint for Career Education (MoE, 2009a, p. 7), with the rationale underpinning the CEG guidelines reflecting the policy borrowing in the career field that is occurring between many English speaking nations (Hooley, Watts, Sultana & Neary, 2012; Sultana, 2011c; Watts & Sultana, 2004). It is assumed that transnational policies and practices, located within a seemingly ‘apolitical’ global frame, can simply be adapted to meet local conditions. Implicit within the advice and support the CEG guidelines provide is an underlying assumption that whilst there may be alternative models that could be employed, what is presented within this document is validated by “international research and practice” (MoE, 2009a, p. 7). Consequently, it is intimated that career advisors would be wise to take up the sagacious guidance proffered, if their students are “to learn how to become resilient career managers” (p. 7). It is important to add that there is no mention of social justice in the CEG guidelines. As I discuss later in this chapter, where social justice related issues do arise, with regards to ‘disadvantage’ for example, the liberal language of individual responsibility and equality of access to opportunity pervades.

Through the CEG guidelines, the foundational thinking of the state has been established regarding the need for particular competencies and what schools should deliver in general (even though this is positioned as ‘advice’). Thus, it attempts to take on a regulating form, reflecting Ball’s (1994b) observation that “policies do not normally tell you what to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed, or

particular goals or outcomes are set” (p. 19). Therefore, I examine policy not simply as texts or formal statements of intent, but as discursive products which bring particular sets of processes into play. From a social justice perspective, for example, the way(s) in which the CEG guidelines conceive ‘career’, frame career education, and define ‘successful outcomes’, has the potential to delimit the scope for career advisors to engage in a critical exploration and/or examination of how ‘career’ might be conceptualised and enacted in practice; what career education could/should be concerned with; and who, or what aspects of life, are included/excluded as a result.

### **The ‘new reality’ for career education: producing the global economic subject**

Ell and Grudnoff (2013) assert that “New Zealand is very much in the thrall of international discourses” (p. 74), and thus susceptible to the pronouncements of global organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Reflecting the impact of globalisation, concomitant advances in technology, and the spreading tentacles of neoliberalism, it is increasingly apparent that the shaping of education policy, including career education, is being negotiated in transnational spaces. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010) note, intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) “have become major sites for the organization of knowledge about education, and have created a cajoling discourse of ‘imperatives of the global economy’ for education” (p. 79). Here problems are being defined, and solutions framed, that nation states are expected to implement as they come to “learn what their problems really are” (Robertson &

Dale, 2009, p. 33). For example, Raffo & Gunter (2008) identify how policy-oriented reports from the OECD make strong links between the labour market and education, and the role of schools in the promotion of economic success to ameliorate social exclusion. Thus, advice to nation states about what they, and their citizens, *must* do if they are to survive and thrive within the ‘new’ global economy are being disseminated through a range of IGOs, who are being positioned, and are actively positioning themselves, as the arbiters of the ‘global good’ (Grimaldi, 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Inclusion, however, is primarily framed in economic terms, and fails to name, for example, “problems of racism, cultural intolerance, economic exploitation, or a refusal to help needy people” (Young, 2000, p. 13), issues that actively contribute to *political* exclusion.

In recent years, international attention has been focused on how career guidance (which commonly encompasses career education) might contribute more effectively to social and economic well-being. This is apparent in the CEG guidelines in New Zealand where there are numerous references to the global economic context and the importance of international influences. As a result, Watts (2005) observes, career-related concerns now occupy a higher position on the global public policy agenda. He reported that “the last 3 years have seen overlapping policy reviews in [the career guidance] area by three influential international organizations” (p. 66), i.e. the OECD, the World Bank, and the European Commission (EC). These reviews encompassed 37 countries (including New Zealand). Drawing on his own review, Watts (2005) identified three primary public policy goals that provide a rationale for career guidance. Whilst these were

categorised into three broad areas, i.e. learning, the labour market, and social equity, the common strand running throughout was the inter-relationship between career engagement and economic participation.

Writing from a Foucauldian perspective, Bengtsson (2011) notes that European policy concerns with career guidance are not simply focused on human capital concerns restricted to the shaping of a competitive workforce, but also the development of an entrepreneurial, self-regulated, and responsabilised individual who actively takes up a neoliberal subject position. The importance attached to the development of a globalised neoliberal subject position is articulated in the Foreword to the CEG guidelines by Karen Sewell, the Secretary for Education:

Predictions about participation in the 21st century workforce are being proven accurate every day. It *does* demand lifelong learning and an enduring capacity to manage change. Globalisation has created even more challenges as well as opportunities for everyone. Young people are entering a more complex and dynamic environment where the interface between work and other facets of life is constantly being reappraised.

International interest in career education and guidance is increasing as governments acknowledge the personal, social and economic benefits of equipping school students with the attitudes, knowledge and transferable skills they will need to become self-reliant career managers and lead positive and fulfilled lives.

Internationally, career specialists have refined an agreed set of career management competencies and these have been adopted in various forms by many governments (MoE, 2009a, p. 4).

Here, Sewell calls upon the voices of (invisible) experts who foretold the changes to the labour market, and makes reference to (unspecified) ‘international career specialists’ who have identified a universal set of competencies that are essential for effective career management. Utilising these as ‘irrefutable evidence’ enables her to locate career education within a particular global context in which economic demands dominate, thus legitimating her truth-claims about how the nation, and its citizens, *must* respond, if they are to live “positive and fulfilled lives” (MoE, 2009a, p. 4).

Reflecting European policy developments concerning the promotion of a particular form of ‘active citizenship’, that is caught up with/in notions of career self-management and the autonomous, responsabilised, enterprising self (Bengtsson, 2012), the regulating nature of the guidelines become apparent. All who read the document are exhorted to believe that students must take up the subject position of the productive economic citizen who commits to a life of ‘l/earning’, and learns to live with/in a world of constant economic and social flux by becoming an adaptable, and pliable, source of labour. Little is said about how career education might create the conditions which enable students to explore and



examine how they might collectively impact, and influence, the/ir world(s) in a transformative sense<sup>12</sup>.

As identified earlier in this chapter, market-driven discourses permeate the CEG guidelines, both explicitly and implicitly. Here, the state(d) priorities of individual opportunity and economic advantage, with reference to desired transitions from compulsory schooling, are reiterated by Sewell in the extract below:

In New Zealand, successful transition from secondary schooling into tertiary education and the workforce is a government priority . . .

Young people who have learned to manage their own journeys through life are equipped to seize and create opportunities and participate fully in society and the economy (MoE, 2009a, p. 4).

At a macro level, social well-being and concerns with justice have become bound up with, and subordinate to, labour market participation and economic growth, where what is good in an economic sense is positioned as being socially beneficial. This distinction which underlies career-related policy in New Zealand (and elsewhere), and the paradoxical relationship between the economy and the positioning of social justice, was articulated by the Commission of Social Justice (CSJ) in Britain. The CSJ (1988) noted that “social justice has a part to play in deciding how a market is constructed” (p. 47). There is a caveat attached to this

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<sup>12</sup> This is concept is explained in chapter one

assertion, however, as the CSJ also commented that “there is only one criterion of a just outcome of society, namely that it should be the product of the free market” (p. 37). Thus, whilst not disavowing the notion that there is a social dimension to the economy, for the CSJ a ‘just’ society occupies a subservient position to that of an apparent ‘free market’ economy. In the interests of justice, and economic growth, the CSJ draw on a particular variant of social justice, i.e. related to the distributivist standpoint discussed in chapter three, in their contention that there should be open and fair competition for the economic rewards available, with ‘merit’ and ‘effort’ employed as key determinants. Thus an illusion of ‘freedom and choice’ is created in which individuals are positioned as the authors of their own destinies.

What the CSJ fail to engage with, however, is the questionable notion that *any* market is completely ‘free’ and ‘open’, and that nation-states are merely powerless bystanders. Far from being an ‘innocent casualty’ of the neoliberal tide, Harvey (2010) has identified how many governments are working tirelessly to create the conditions in which capital can thrive by de/regulating in its interests. As Wacquant (2012) observes, governments are an active, and acquiescing, participant in the neoliberal project in a political sense. Moreover, governments are engaged in punitive measures to enforce compliance as it “redraws the boundaries and tenor of citizenship through its market-conforming policies” (p. 71). In New Zealand, for example, which has been at the forefront of the neoliberal experiment (Boston & Eichbaum, 2014; Kelsey, 1997), the government has sought to enforce compliance to its economic goals through the introduction

of welfare and employment reforms that have undermined a sense of collective social rights, replacing these with the notion of individual ‘responsibilities’ (Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012).

At a micro level, the CEG guidelines make reference to the value of personalised learning, where the type of person *all* students *must* become is codified. This is made clear in the following extract which states that “Students *need to* [emphasis added] become positive, resourceful and motivated learners who *will* [emphasis added] carry on learning when they leave school” (MoE, 2009a, p. 17). Implicated within statements such as these is a singular reality. There is an implicit assumption that such learning will be formalised, and identifiable. Hence, the construction of a ‘learner identity’ is positioned as an individual imperative, an essential(ised) behavioural activity that must be visibly enacted. Those who do not take up this inscribed identity are ‘othered’ (Aberton, 2011), positioned as ‘non learners’, who, it would appear, are destined for ‘failure’. However, as Aberton (2011) contends, learning does not only take place within education but occurs in a range of settings and situations, where it may not be ‘obvious’ or quantifiable. The process of privileging and ‘othering’ particular forms of learning can contribute to a process of domination by closing down alternative ways of knowing and understanding.

This has implications from a career education perspective. Here, the value of personalised learning is bound up with the belief that by coming to know themselves, students will be “able to move on to take control of their career

pathways” (MoE, 2009a, p. 17). This is further illustrated in the following excerpt from the CEG guidelines:

Developing career management skills, particularly self-awareness, will help students to understand their learning needs and to express them. *This helps teachers to decide what learning is a priority for them* [emphasis added]. It provides a foundation for the co-construction of teaching and learning . . . [and] develop[s] students’ ability to take responsibility for their own learning (p. 17).

Thus, whilst there appears to be a desire to provide the conditions that facilitate student self-determination in relation to their learning needs, the contradictions in the above excerpt show how personalised career learning can potentially be employed as a technology of control. For example, there is an assumption that students will have opportunities to reflexively explore and contextualise their learning needs, to be able to articulate these to their teachers, and that teachers have been trained (and are willing) to listen. Moreover, as the excerpt shows, whilst students are primarily held responsible for understanding and articulating their career learning needs, and reference is made to the notion of co-construction, decisions about what a student needs to learn as a priority continues to rest in the authoritative hands of the teacher/career advisor.

The complex relationship between institutional power, teacher authority, and student *empowerment* was highlighted by Mayes (2010) from

her qualitative research with teachers in an English composition programme in an American University. Mayes found that whilst the teachers in her study expressed a desire to give greater agency to their students by working in a more student-centred way, they also had to shape their practices around externally imposed student assessment requirements necessitating a more directive stance at times. Hence, it is possible to see how the notion of individual ‘empowerment’ and responsibility can be shaped by externally imposed expectations, outlined in the curriculum.

The potential for personalised learning to be utilised as a form of surveillance is further exacerbated in relation to those students categorised as being “at risk of leaving school undecided about future pathways or unprepared for transition to the workplace or further education” (MoE, 2009a, p. 18). Drawing from unspecified ‘research’, the CEG guidelines identify the following groups to be particularly vulnerable, thus requiring extra attention: “Māori students, Pasifika students, migrant students, and refugee students. Other students in need of special consideration might include: gifted students, students with special needs and students who may be disadvantaged by their family background” (p. 18). To assist schools, a range of indicators are provided to help them identify ‘at risk’ students. These include:

students likely to have difficulty in competing equally for education or training places and jobs; students [who] have not developed their career management skills well enough to achieve their potential, including those

who have made decisions about their futures without appropriate exploration and consideration, or have unrealistic plans; [and] students (and families) [who] have limited understanding and experience of the world of work and tertiary education and training (p. 18).

Students in this category are deemed to lack ‘competitive edge’, have competency deficits, lack ‘rational career plans’ that stand up to professional scrutiny, and/or have insufficient insight into the demands that post-school opportunities will make of them. Thus, the term ‘at risk’ is used in the CEG guidelines to signify personal, family, and/or cultural deficits (Smyth & McInerney, 2013). The ‘solutions’ that are proffered are premised on individualised short-term responses, focused on changing the learning behaviours of students. Colley (2000), for example, has identified how the discourse of reality within English career practice has been used to coax students to regulate their behaviours and adapt their aspirations to service the needs of a global economy.

Hence, it is the individual who is expected to “move on to take control of their career pathways” (MoE, 2009a, p. 17), within a depoliticised labour market. Inequality, disadvantage and injustice is ascribed accordingly to ‘dysfunctional’ ‘risk’ identities. Consequently, students are told that *they* are responsible for their own lives, and must be prepared to change themselves ‘appropriately’ (through choice or coercion) if *they* are to realise their *own* potential, and be of value to society.

This perspective is reflected in Italian research into young people ‘at risk’, “where individuals are asked to be successful performers, flexible, entrepreneurial, open to face continuous changes and challenges” (Grimaldi, 2012, p. 1144). If students learn how to ‘play the game’ effectively, the neoliberal argument maintains, *individuals* will build their capacities, learn how to demonstrate their (economic) value through their own self-promotion, and accordingly transgress ‘imaginary’ structural boundaries. Attention is thus shifted away from concerns with the impact of longstanding inequalities (Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012), ongoing discrimination, and the imposition of standards and practices that reflect those of the dominant group, and may not be their own (Colley, 2000). Hence, the complex structural problems that exist beyond the school gate, where future possibilities are shaped by the effects of globalisation, the influence of neoliberal practices, and the impact of a collapsing youth labour market in New Zealand (Department of Labour, 2012; Higgins, 2002) remain unchallenged. The move away from concerns with the effects of structural inequality on the basis of social groups is captured by Australian researchers Bottrell and Goodwin, (2011), who identified that “in neoliberalism . . . the focus on inequalities between social categories has been replaced by a focus on outcomes for individuals” (p. 24).

An example of the shift in focus from the social group to that of the individual can be found within the CEG guidelines with regards to women. Whilst reference is made in the document to gender roles and the changing nature of gendered work, there is no explicit reference to the persistence of gender

in/equality, which is not unique to New Zealand society. Despite the existence of a Human Rights Act in New Zealand since 1993 (see <http://www.hrc.co.nz/human-rights-environment/human-rights-legislation/human-rights-act>), and numerous pieces of similar legislation in Europe (see <http://europa.eu/legislation>), recent data shows continued gender disparities in wage rates in New Zealand and Europe, which appear to reflect the differential socio-economic value accorded to ‘masculinised’ and ‘feminised’ occupations (Department of Labour, 2009; Europa, 2009). The injustices here do not simply highlight participation in the economic domain however, but also bring into question the ways in which those behaviours associated with a ‘masculine’ subject position are regarded as superior to those of the ‘feminine’ subject position (Young, 1990, 1995, 2002) within society as a whole.

Further to this, the positioning of the individual as an apolitical self-actualising agent, within the CEG guidelines, turns attention away from a collective understanding of career engagement and enactment. No mention is made of democratic governance and/or its relationship to the labour market; there is a resounding silence about the role of trade unions or other political/interest groups; an absence of discussion about alternative forms of production, such as co-operative business and/or self-sufficient living; and little consideration of the ways in which a society’s resources might be distributed more equitably on the basis of need. This coalesces with Hackell’s (2013) contention that the embedding of individualistic neoliberal values within the very fabric of New Zealand political life has led to the emergence of a form of ‘taxpayer citizenship’, where “the rights



of the taxpayer not to be exploited by an undeserving poor” (p. 138) has replaced concerns with social equity. This resonates with the inordinate focus on employment and employability throughout the CEG guidelines. By reifying the economic domain, the voices of those from marginalised and subaltern social groups are unheard (Young, 2000), as responsibility is shifted onto the individual and their families for their own situations.

Individual responsibility, economic realism, and national interests are thus located at the core of career education:

Constantly changing patterns of work and education worldwide make it essential that every school student has access to career education and guidance that is future-focused and personalised. This has immediate and long-term benefits for individuals and for New Zealand (p. 5).

These feelings are reinforced through the Career Education Benchmarks (Careers New Zealand, 2014) which were produced to “bridge the gap between the NAG1 (f) [i.e. the compulsory provision of career education and guidance] and Career Education and Guidance in New Zealand Schools [the CEG guidelines]” (p. 5). Although voluntary, the Career Education Benchmarks is the only un/official ‘guide’ that career advisors have available with which to self-review and evaluate their career education programmes and practices, which adds gravitas to its standing.

In the Foreword to the 2011 edition of the Career Education Benchmarks, individuals are called on to do their patriotic duty, “which is structured by a neoliberal ontology and the demands of global capitalism” (Roberts, 2009 p. 410). As Graeme Benny, the Chief Executive of Careers New Zealand at that time, stated:

Our country faces some important economic, fiscal and social challenges, none more significant than the challenge of maximising the opportunities for our youth . . . Careers New Zealand believes that high-quality career education in our schools is an essential support component in order for all our young people to be fully capable of making and taking decisions that will ensure they achieve successful employment outcomes. Ultimately it is about creating a socially and economically prosperous New Zealand by allowing young New Zealanders to fulfil their potential (Careers New Zealand, 2011, p. 1).

Accordingly, Benny suggested that the barriers that prevent young New Zealanders from being able to “fulfil their potential”, and thus contribute to ‘social and economic prosperity’, was their lack of (cap)ability to make the *right* decisions which would enhance their employability, and consequently enable them to secure (and retain) employment. It is noticeable that in the Foreword of the revised 2014 edition of the Career Education Benchmarks – Secondary (Careers New Zealand, 2014), there is less overt emphasis on employment and the economy. Keith Marshall, the new Chief Executive of Careers New Zealand,

writes: “We all want our young people to succeed and have productive and fulfilling lives”, a popular sentiment that few would contest. This is qualified by his belief that:

To do this they need high quality, integrated careers information and the career management competencies to make good choices and enact their decisions . . . Careers New Zealand is well placed . . . to assist schools to provide young people with high quality career education programmes and services that focus on building their competencies to self-manage their careers (Careers New Zealand, 2014, p. 4).

Here, Marshall clarifies that whilst *we* might all want to see young people lead meaningful lives, the responsibility for ensuring that actually rests with *their* willingness to take up the responsibilised subject position that is made available to them. Yet everyone is complicit in this as, continues Marshall, “*we* [emphasis added) want our young people to develop *their* [emphasis added] career capabilities so that *they* [emphasis added] are resilient, confident, connected and actively involved in life-long learning. That is *our* [emphasis added] aim”. (p. 4). The outcomes career education is expected to achieve, and how these are to be measured, are codified and aligned to the development of career management competencies that, ostensibly “*will* [emphasis added] enable them to follow the pathway they choose, through which they *might* [emphasis added] realise their potential . . .” (p. 14). Hence there are no guarantees, merely guarded promises that if students acquire the career management competencies required to self-

manage *their* career, their desires and aspirations *may* be fulfilled. Yet, nowhere in this document is there an acknowledgement of the impact of structural disadvantage, or the effects of discrimination experienced by members of non-dominant social groups. It is assumed that if students become highly competent at “making life, learning and work decisions”, then they will *know* how to, “implement strategies to overcome identified barriers” (p. 16). If they should fail to acquire this competency, it would appear that they become subjects of their own oppression(s), and the authors of their own disadvantage. Furthermore, if career advisors question, disrupt and/or disregard the ‘given truths’ presented in the ‘Benchmarks’ about the ‘realities’ the global economic challenge presents, which, ostensibly, is shared by *all* New Zealanders, they could find themselves positioned as not having their students’ best interests at heart.

In the discursive messages conveyed through/encompassed within the CEG guidelines, and reinscribed through the Career Benchmarks, career education is positioned as the instrument through which career advisors (and students alike) are made aware that what is good for the economy is good for society. Through this broad curriculum area, it is anticipated that students will be exposed to the ‘new realities’ of the global economy and the ‘promises’ it offers for self-fulfilment. As a consequence, it is assumed that students will come to embrace market-focused values, and willingly acquire predetermined competencies that are entwined with their employability. Career advisors, meanwhile, are implicitly encouraged to embrace the neoliberal mantra, where emphasis is placed on the need for their students to learn to adapt, manage, *and* respond positively to

whatever challenges life (*read* the economy) may present. Underlying this is an expectation that individuals will forever engage in a process of economic self-capitalisation (Rose, 1999) by striving to *be* an entrepreneurial autonomous, self-governing, career manager (Bengtsson, 2011), in which their life *is* their business (Kelly, 2006). These are positioned as essential truths that *all* must accept if students are to *learn* to thrive, and survive, within a globally competitive knowledge economy. Students who fail to take up the educational/economic subject position made available are positioned as being at risk of ‘failure’.

If the CEG guidelines are accepted tacitly and uncritically, the discursive space made available to reconfigure career education towards the promotion of socially just goals that embrace meaningful recognition *and* redistribution, may be restricted. The primary issue as I see it, therefore, is not the inevitability of globalisation, but the form it takes, whose interests it serves (Colley, 2000), and how local, national and global social politics can mount challenges to the economic determinism that is embedded within dominant neoliberal discourse (Yeates, 2001). Furthermore, to fully appreciate the influence of the CEG guidelines it is also important to understand how this connects career education with the secondary school curriculum as a whole. Thus, it is important to identify whether there are spaces within the CEG guidelines that allow for re/interpretation that can contribute to the promotion of social justice in practice, and expose the fantasy of the ‘free’ and empowered citizen within the neoliberal state (Wright, 2012). This will help to uncover those policy objectives that are masked by a focus on competencies, the language of ‘self-regulation’, and the emotive call to

secure the economic well-being of themselves, and the nation (Davies & Bansel, 2007).

### **Building bridges and transgressing boundaries: Career education across the curriculum**

Although career education sits outside of the national curriculum, the CEG guidelines emphasise that there should be a symbiotic relationship between the two. The rationale for this is outlined below:

Curriculum learning areas provide rich teaching and learning opportunities for career education. When career topics and concepts are highlighted within regular classroom teaching and learning students develop their career management competencies in meaningful contexts. In turn, study within learning areas is linked to life beyond school and takes on greater relevance for students. (MoE, 2009a, p. 36).

On its own, it would appear that career education, i.e. learning *about* the multiple ways in which career(s) might be constructed, constrained, contested and lived (Irving, 2010a, 2011a), has little currency in its own right. Curriculum learning areas, meanwhile, are positioned as being conceptually divorced from the ‘real world’ beyond school, and thus need to be given ‘relevance’ in order for them to be made meaningful for students. A deeper interrogation of this notion illuminates the particular way in which career competencies are seen to provide

this relevance, and thus complement the key competencies contained within the national curriculum.

The key competencies and career management competencies can be addressed in parallel. For example, school career education programmes often consider the qualities employers are looking for in employees. These qualities are closely aligned to the key competencies (MoE, 2009a, p. 12).

In the above quote, the value attributed to the acquisition of work-related competencies and the transmission of qualities that, according to employers, constitute the ‘good employee’ are emphasised. More broadly, as the CEG guidelines advise, “career education and guidance in schools is most effective when it is seen as an essential component of the education a school provides for its students” (MoE, 2009a, p. 33). Thus, the career management competencies, i.e. “the understandings, skills and attitudes that people use to develop and manage their careers . . . [and] equip people to better understand themselves, make informed decisions about learning and work options, and participate effectively in work and society” (p. 6), are positioned as complementary to those of the national curriculum which are concerned with “managing self; relating to others; participating and contributing; thinking; using language, symbols and text” (MoE, 2009a, p. 11).

Locating career education within the curriculum is thus seen to provide opportunities to construct subject learning in more imaginative and creative ways,

that are “future focused” (MoE, 2009a, p. 36), and enhance ‘abstract academic subjects’ by providing it with a relevant, concrete base that relates learning to the ‘real world’ beyond school. Whilst the acquisition of competencies that can enhance employability, and be applied in the workplace and elsewhere, has some value (Bakan, 2011), when this becomes the primary purpose of career education learning is reduced to a pragmatic instrumentalist process, that is acquiescent to economic demands (Wheelahan, 2009). Yet, integrating career education into the wider curriculum need not be bounded by concerns with the ‘free market’, employability, employment, and the responsabilisation of young people and their families (Kelly, 2006). Engaging subject teachers in the career education process may help to uncover spaces where it is possible to move career learning beyond a hegemonic instrumentalist discourse which privileges the acquisition of work-related skills and gives primacy to economic imperatives. This is where the cracks and fissures in the CEG guidelines are most visible. Connecting career learning to other curriculum areas allows the concept of career to be explored and understood within a wider social context.

Drawing on an exemplar in the CEG guidelines (cited below) that describes “how a learning module can be adjusted or enlarged to include some relevant career education outcomes and how career concepts can be fore-grounded without detracting from the subject-specific aims” (MoE, 2009a, p. 36), it is possible to illustrate the conceptual and practical opportunities made available to those who wish to engage in transformative and socially just career education practice.



An example of how this might be done is a module that studies the environmental impact of sources of energy, especially electricity and gas. Teachers can address the career management competency of self-awareness by encouraging students to think about their own behaviour and values with regard to the environment and energy. In considering the impact of energy production on the environment they can think about how people's lives are affected. Students could then consider consequent career challenges and opportunities. They could explore disappearing and emerging occupations that relate to changing sources of energy (MoE, 2009a, p. 36).

A transformative reading of the example above enables career learning to be positioned within a critical socio-political-environmental domain (see Irving, 2013c) through which students can explore how the influence of human actions on how the world is shaped. For instance, through an examination of capital's reliance on (over)production and (over)consumption which is driving up energy needs, consideration could be given to the ways in which discourses of growth and development have been used to promote oil and gas exploration off the New Zealand coast. As Laugesen (2013) reported in the *Listener*, a New Zealand periodical, this raises questions about whether such exploration is a 'social good', and whether the risks outweigh the potential environmental costs. Looking more deeply at individual and *collective* values and behaviours, self-awareness can be enhanced by providing students with a learning environment which illuminates how the concept of career is discursively generated. By examining the relationship

between individual ‘career decisions’ and how these contribute (or otherwise) to a sustainable environment, space is made available which allows career advisors and/or teachers to provide students with opportunities to consider how they might “participate effectively in work and society” (MoE, 2009a, p. 6), as critical citizens who are democratically engaged, socially aware and politically informed (Apple, 2000; Giroux, 2011). Moving beyond a simple equation between career planning and the occupations of tomorrow allows for a deeper interrogation of issues related to energy needs, opening up discussion about the social dimensions of how ‘career/s’ might be constructed, and enacted (Irving, 2013a).

### **Conclusion: the CEG guidelines are not the end of the story**

This chapter has engaged with a number of important questions concerning how career is conceptualised at a deeper level within the CEG guidelines, what the Ministry of Education expects career education to achieve, and whose interests are progressed. The integral relationship between career education and the New Zealand economy has been examined, and opportunities for transformative career learning identified. Although the CEG guidelines may provide contradictory advice at times regarding the values that students should adopt, underlying this are particular assumptions that binds career education to education/employability, and ultimately the economic success of the nation.

The issues above need to be understood within a wider context as the rhetoric of the ‘free’ market and the knowledge economy has found its way into

education in general (Casey, 2006) and schooling in particular (Davis, 2007). As a result, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) contend:

Educational policy objectives have thus become closely tied to economic goals, as the production of individuals with the knowledge, skills and dispositions that can help them enhance their own and national competitiveness within the global economy . . . [Consequently] educational values . . . have become *derivatives* of neoliberal economic thinking (p. 196).

Within New Zealand, education policy-making has been increasingly responsive to the perceived demands of a global economy (Dale & Robertson, 1997), which is infused with neoliberal ideology (Kelsey, 2002). Increasingly, the state's expectations of teachers and career advisors, and the pedagogies they employ, are being shaped by particular discursive formations that sustain this. This is noticeable within the CEG guidelines where the construction of career, and career education, has been subject to the political aspirations of the state, the demands of employers, and the effects of wider global influences (Harris, 1999; Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher, 2008; Irving, 2005). The state's expectations, expressed within the CEG guidelines, are that career education will contribute to the production of an idealised neoliberal subject who takes personal responsibility for themselves and the well-being of their families, continuously strives for (their own) economic success, and makes an active contribution to national wealth creation. Hence New Zealand career advisors are 'reliably' advised (through the

CEG guidelines) that the career needs of their students must be entwined with the economic imperatives of the nation state, which is positioned as being in the best interests of all. As identified earlier in this chapter, the discourse of the ‘at risk’ student is employed to name and manage those students who are failing to conform to the state’s expectation of the economically productive worker-citizen. Such students are positioned within a deficit discourse framed in terms of ‘educational underachievement’, and measured by the acquisition of formal credentials and social networks that, it is assumed, will have currency in the competition for jobs (Strathdee, 2001). I discuss these issues further in later chapters.

Whilst the intention of the CEG guidelines may be to establish the parameters of career education, regulate the practices of career advisors, and establish pre/determined outcomes by promoting a particular worldview (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992), the intended translation of policy texts into practice is characterised by uncertainty (Ball, 1994a). Thus, how career advisors position themselves in relation to the CEG guidelines, and whether they take up or reject (in part or in full) the discursive ideological messages conveyed with regards to what career education should seek to achieve, is mediated by the authority they vest in the CEG policy guidelines, their own understanding of this curriculum area, and the values they hold. Therefore, in the following chapter I discuss how my participants positioned themselves with regards to the CEG policy guidelines, and explore the influence of ERO, through its authority as a state agent.

## Chapter Six

# The power of state discourse: a discursive framework for/in practice

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined the multiple messages that are discursively embedded within the CEG guidelines. I explored how attempts are made to construct career education, and position the work of career advisors, in ‘common-sense’ ways which privilege economic concerns and progress the state’s interests. Although career advisors and teachers may be subject *to* the discursive messages within the CEG guidelines, they are not simply the subjects *of* power (Foucault, 1980) and the authority vested in the Ministry of Education. Thus, noted Young (1990), power relations must be understood within a context in which structural oppression can be perpetuated through “the normal processes of everyday life” (p. 41), which can include the workings of institutional practices, and may include the un/conscious actions of well-intentioned people (such as career advisors).

Hence, career advisors cannot be regarded as mere functionaries and/or powerless actors in their interpellation of policy and its enactment (Irving, 2005). Interpellation is part of an ideological process through which individuals are ‘hailed’, i.e. called into being as active subjects who un/consciously take up the (albeit transient) subject position conferred upon them (Althusser, 1971). Yet,

exposure to the dominant discursive ‘reality/ies’ embedded within policy is only one form of subjectification. As Foucault (1980) contends, power is caught up in a web of social relations and, although unevenly exercised, “only [exists] in action” (p. 89). Looking through a critical lens, this implies that there is also scope for career advisors to resist and disrupt such normative frameworks through engagement with counter-discourses that provide alternative ways of seeing, knowing, and becoming. Transgression, however, is not without risk (Bunch, 2013) as it could lead to the marginalisation and/or exclusion of career advisors from the career/education and/or school community, and potentially even lead to the loss of employment.

In this chapter I explore the extent participants identified with the stated intentions of the CEG policy guidelines and the reasoning that lies beneath it<sup>13</sup>, and whether ERO audits reinforce the discursive authority of the state. Consideration is given to how their conceptualisation of career and their understanding of career education, and their professional role as career advisors, contributed to their positioning. The ‘surveillance’ function of the Education Review Office (ERO) (N. Lewis, 2003), and the extent of its disciplinary authority, is also examined through my analysis of how two participants perceived this in relation to career education and/or their freedom to practise.

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that at the time of the interviews the 2009 CEG guidelines had only recently been released, therefore a number of participants were still using the earlier 2003 version.

## **The CEG guidelines: Committed, conforming, realist, and resisting career advisors**

Those participants who responded to my question concerning their understanding of the key messages conveyed through the CEG guidelines gave accounts that relayed the primary features, and were able to articulate what the MoE was seeking to achieve. As Patricia<sup>14</sup> commented:

I think the opening pages [of the CEG guidelines] talk about the need for highly qualified, highly skilled people . . . for the development of the country and New Zealand . . . and the key competencies, the link with the new national curriculum . . . the rest of it is the kind of way in which career education is integrated into the whole school system . . . also students' contacts with the wider world, the family, community, things like that . . . and a lot of it is also, you know, previous things like developing self-awareness, awareness of opportunities, thinking and acting, things like that.

However, beyond the general and descriptive, not all of the participants took up the discursive messages in the CEG guidelines in the same way. In my analysis I was able to identify four broad subject positions taken up by participants in relation to the CEG guidelines. The *committed* participant had taken part in the writing of the earlier CEG guidelines, internalised the dominant

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<sup>14</sup> Codenames have been used to preserve the anonymity of participants

messages, and hence took up the position of advocate. The *conformists* (which encompassed the majority) generally welcomed the CEG guidelines as they were seen to offer a sound rationale for career education, and provide a valuable framework for their practice. The third subject position is that of *the realist*. The lone member in this group displayed a degree of reticence concerning the feasibility of an integrated curriculum approach towards career education (which is a central aspect of the CEG guidelines) in the current educational climate. Therefore, whilst generally acquiescing he fitted the guidelines around his practice. Finally, there are *the resisters*, who questioned the authority of the MoE and challenged the philosophical basis and underlying rationale of the CEG guidelines.

#### *The committed*

The committed subject position was occupied by Joanne who took up and internalised the discursive messages conveyed through the CEG guidelines. This was particularly apparent when I asked her to comment on the key messages in the CEG guidelines. Joanne told me that the 2009 document contained:

nothing that I didn't know before. I mean I was part of the writing workshop for the first one that came out [in 2003] so . . . I think it's a valuable tool, especially for people coming in new.

Being one of the contributors to the earlier version of the CEG guidelines, published by the MoE in 2003, she appeared to have already internalised many of



the priorities within the 2009 document, and demonstrated an enthusiasm for what was expected of her. When asked more specifically what the focus of the document was in relation to career education, Joanne commented, “I guess in a nutshell it’s reinforcing what we do at school here . . . so I guess what it’s really doing is confirming we’re on the right track”. Thus, Joanne took up the subject position of the knowing ‘expert’. She called on her voice of experience<sup>15</sup> to justify how the CEG guidelines related closely to her practices, with the official discourses of the state becoming entwined with her own personal and professional values. However, the ‘voice of experience’ is saturated by the discursive formations of the time (Fuss, 1989), leaving its authenticity and authority open to contestation (Scott, 1992). Here, assumptions are made about how the world ‘is’, what career advisors need to know, and the type of person career education should produce.

Although Joanne had not yet read the 2009 CEG guidelines comprehensively due to time constraints, she still drew attention to the “solid research” that she felt underpinned the document, using this to legitimate its value, and her belief in its veracity. The research that supports the document, however, is primarily sourced from government departments and related organisations located in New Zealand and elsewhere (see MoE, 2009a, p. 45) that take a narrow view of the scope of career education and guidance. Little attention is paid to how career education (and guidance) might contribute to the development of critical and creative social subjects, as advocated by, for example,

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<sup>15</sup> I discuss the ‘voice of experience’ further in chapter eight.

Hyslop-Margison and McKerracher (2008), Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2006), and Irving and Malik (2005).

In the excerpt below, Joanne identified how her reading of the CEG guidelines accorded with her own personal expectations about the desired subject positions that career education should make available:

I think that, to me, it's the good old Kiwi thing that if we produce people that are able to contribute to society and are really worthwhile to society . . . I think it's that base Kiwi line of you're a good bloke and you get on with your life, and if you're happy in what you are doing, then things will work out.

Through her interpretation of the CEG guidelines, Joanne saw her goal as the production of a 'good bloke' who contributes to, and fits in with, a Kiwi way of life premised on the notion of a fair and participatory society, in which being of 'good character' will, by default, result in positive outcomes. This 'feel-good' factor is evident in the work of the New Zealand historian Michael King (2003), who comments that,

most New Zealanders, whatever their cultural backgrounds, are good hearted, practical, commonsensical and tolerant. Those qualities are part of the national cultural capital that has in the past saved the country from the worst excesses of chauvinism and racism seen in other parts of the world.

They are as sound a basis as any for optimism about the country's future (p. 520).

Those who adopt such qualities are positioned as 'good citizens'. Such a view accords with the 'fair-go' notion that is commonly called upon in contemporary New Zealand to legitimate its stance as a fair, just, and tolerant nation that is founded upon egalitarian principles. These principles hold that all individuals are welcome, and ostensibly equal, regardless of ethnicity, gender or socio-economic class (Seve-Williams, 2013). Discourses such as these which avoid engagement with structural inequalities, have become embedded within the New Zealand education system since the reforms of the 1980s (Nairn & Higgins, 2011; Thrupp, 2007), and continue to be influential (Nairn & Higgins, 2007). In her recourse to a taken-for-granted individualising discourse about the nature of the 'good Kiwi bloke', which possibly emanated from 'our' colonial past (Borell, Gregory & McReanor, 2009), Joanne (who worked at a co-educational school) illustrated how her understanding of the CEG guidelines, informed by her own values, can lead to a well-intentioned reinscription of social injustice in practice through her uncritical endorsement of the rhetoric. As the Human Rights Commission in New Zealand reported in a discussion paper published in 2012, those from non-European backgrounds continue to experience structural discrimination in New Zealand society, and are not getting a 'fair go'. Moreover, Singham (2006) observes that whilst there have been relatively peaceful race relations in New Zealand for many years, it is naive to assume that our 'fair go' ethos is the experience of ethnic minority communities (p. 34). Thus, he argues,

multiculturalism needs to be strengthened by more positively recognising the value of ethnic diversity, and the contribution made by ethnic peoples to the country's well-being.

This universalising of expectations within the CEG guidelines reflects a neo/liberal discourse in which individuals are seen to be (primarily) free agents who make their own luck, determine their own actions, and have control over their own future happiness. Moreover, through the utilisation of gendered language, Joanne's reference to the metaphorical 'good bloke' and how 'he' epitomises New Zealand society marginalises and/or renders invisible those who may not identify with this particular subject position, such as women, and/or members of other cultural groups. Thus, Joanne normalises a particular dominant liberal humanist discourse within New Zealand society, leading to the construction of an idealised, and somewhat uncomplicated, identity which can shift attention away from the effects of structural injustice(s) on how identities might be constituted and shaped.

### *The conformists*

Those career advisors who took up a conformist subject position explicitly welcomed the framework the CEG guidelines provided through their general acknowledgement that the intentions expressed reflected their own philosophy about career education. This group of participants conformed to the rationale offered in the CEG guidelines that there is a need to produce responsibilised and 'work-ready' citizens who will be an asset to the nation, through their belief in the

veracity of the dominant discursive messages. These were used to inform and underpin their programmes. This was exemplified by Lara who commented that the CEG guidelines were “like my bible that I’ve been using”. The bible metaphor positioned the CEG guidelines as *the* primary source of advice.

In a similar way to Joanne, who occupied the committed subject position, Rosemary positively related the CEG guidelines, and career education, to the government’s priorities which are seen to reflect the needs of the nation. This can be seen in the following excerpt where Rosemary talked about how career education might be presented in ways that sit outside of a dominant discursive framework that reifies economic participation. In a rhetorical vein, she mused:

in terms of the guidelines, what does the government, what does . . . New Zealand society need from its community members, and it needs capabilities, so I’m quite comfortable on the focus of work in [the guidelines], I think that’s very realistic . . . what we don’t want to have is a whole lot of people not feeling able to access the world of work and feeling isolated, and the reality is, in New Zealand who doesn’t work for a living at some stage during their life . . . *I think we’d be doing people a disservice if we were suggesting that not working for your life, for paid employment, was going to be realistic or beneficial* [emphasis added].  
(Rosemary).

In the above excerpt, Rosemary placed emphasis on the importance of paid employment, conflating the government's desires with the needs of New Zealand society, and emphasising that community members have a responsibility to participate in (paid) 'work'. She justified this by drawing on a social exclusion discourse (discussed in chapter five), reinforcing this with her belief that participation in paid employment was an individual good, and an inescapable 'reality' for all. Here, the 'world of work' is contextualised in relation to paid employment, which is regarded as beneficial, thus marginalising other forms of 'work'.

Whilst acknowledging that not everyone participates in the formal labour market, Rosemary talked of how those working in the voluntary sector "still gotta make a living, still gotta be able to support themselves". This was extended to include people who may be "working in a church [who have] still got to be provided with some sort of living arrangements". Rosemary said little about how those engaged in the 'voluntary' arena might be supported, or who should bear the responsibility for providing the financial support for these activities. A discourse of 'economic citizenship' was evident here, in which the individual embraces a responsibilised and enterprising self. The examples Rosemary provided reflected a partial view of career that coalesces with an economic subject position, thus exposing the normative economic rationale that sits beneath the surface of the CEG guidelines. What was less apparent related to the contested concept of 'work' (see Richardson, 1993), including how career(s) might be conceptualised

in a wider sense, constructed in ways that encompass different worldviews, and supported through a multiplicity of social mechanisms.

The expectation that career education would privilege career management competencies, encompass a whole school approach, and be integrated into the academic curriculum, featured in many of the participants' accounts:

looking at [the CEG guidelines] it's working from year 7 to 13, that it's integrated across the school, that it starts in here and starts to look out. *I did use it for my planning* [emphasis added] . . . for years 7 to 13 and *I use that in a more detailed form here* [emphasis added] . . . I base my planning upon the DOTS model from Donald Super and also from the MoE guidelines which started off with looking at the individual and personal qualities, leading on to personal skills, leading on to decision making and decision taking and all that stuff, and finally transitioning out of there, *so I did use that as a framework* [emphasis added]. [Marjorie].

I think [the key message in the CEG guidelines is that] it's looking at people as a whole person . . . and that it starts really young . . . where the kids should be thinking about themselves and getting a self-concept of who they are, and their interests, and their skills in exploring new things . . . so I think *the key thing for me was that it's a holistic thing, and it's a personal thing* [emphasis added] . . . that it can be quite easily integrated

into different subjects and different areas quite easily . . . *and that's what I've tried to do* [emphasis added]. [Lara].

Both Lara and Marjorie place emphasis on a career development approach that is 'self' focused, conforming to a liberal humanist understanding concerning the discovery of a 'true self', and the development of skills and qualities that are at the heart of career management competencies. Thus, the discursive aims of the CEG guidelines were contextualised in liberal humanist terms by Marjorie and Lara, and thus given currency and allocated value (Prunty, 1985).

However, as will be shown in chapter nine, in recent times many of the precepts of liberal humanist philosophy which inform career education, have been appropriated by neoliberalism, and this blurring of boundaries has created dilemmas for career advisors who want to do 'the best' for their students. Here, the importance of "[being] able to access the world of work" (Rosemary), developing "individual and personal qualities" (Marjorie), and "[students] getting a self-concept of who they are, and their interests, and their skills in exploring new things" (Lara), are connected with economic obligation, rather than 'self-realisation' and personal growth.

Overall, the conformist group of participants attributed authoritative 'truths' to the dominant discursive messages within the CEG guidelines, and positively took up the guidance it provided, albeit expressed in different, and at times competing, ways. For example, whereas Rosemary privileged paid



employment, Lara and Marjorie focused on ‘self’ development. Conforming to the intended outcomes encompassed by the CEG guidelines, these career advisors constructed their practices around the perceived instrumentalist need for ‘career realisation’, targeting their teaching at individual development, the acquisition of competencies and/or preparation for transition. From a social justice perspective, the use of normative standards that personalise ‘career development’ and/or are informed by economic thinking have a tendency to privilege the values of the dominant group (Young, 1990). Hence, the oppressive ways in which opportunities and lifestyles are structured, and how social groups are differentially positioned, becomes less apparent in the ways the ‘conformists’ talked about the value of the CEG guidelines for their practice.

### *The realist*

Generally Ken accepted many of the pronouncements in the CEG guidelines; however he actively questioned the extent to which career education could *realistically* be fully integrated into the curriculum in the current educational climate. As discussed earlier in this chapter, career management competencies are seen to complement the key competencies in the New Zealand curriculum, and the CEG guidelines provides examples of how these might be addressed in parallel (see MoE, 2009a, pp. 11-13). Ken told me that he was not resistant to this idea as it reflected “the kind of philosophy that [my colleague] and I have already, we were part way down the track . . . [adding] there is sympathy here for that, but there is so much else going on that it takes a little time”.

Although Ken expressed a desire “to get more holistic across the whole curriculum”, he expressed concern that this needed to be approached incrementally, commenting, “I’ve seen enough stuff forced onto teachers to know that if we’re going to do it successfully it’s better to do it slowly, which may be a cop-out I don’t know but [this sentence remained unfinished]”. However, for Ken, the ‘reality’ of the integration of career learning into the curriculum runs more deeply as it is also enmeshed with the status of career education itself, how it is conceptualised, and the value attributed to both the ‘subject’ and those who teach it (see Harris, 1999; Thomson, 2008). This was illustrated in the following excerpt where Ken provided an example of one challenge he encountered in attempting to sustain a career-related activity in a particular subject area:

I ran a programme through science where I would bring in . . . speakers on science and engineering related careers, and I used to sort of blitz the science department for one week of the year where every class would have somebody come and talk to them, and I did it in a week so that . . . kids will be talking about, “oh, who did you have” . . . unfortunately the Head of Department changed and I’ve lost that opportunity . . . I think they’re dumb not taking it up to be honest, because in terms of the fact that teachers like kids who are capable in that subject to go on doing that subject, and we have quite low retention rates in the science subject, I think I was their [science’s] best friend but they, you know they don’t necessarily all see that . . .

In the above excerpt, it was apparent that ‘career education’ was not integrated into the curriculum as such, but included as a ‘bolt-on’ activity which could be seen to have taken time away from the teaching of science. It was clear that Ken was only able to engage in this activity with the agreement of the previous Head of Department. The new Head of Department, it was implied, did not attribute the same value to the potential outcomes from the ‘careers blitz’. Moreover, ‘career’, within this context, is conceptualised in relation to occupational knowledge, progression, and subject retention.

As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, career education does not feature in the New Zealand national curriculum, nor is there a requirement for those who teach career education to be qualified (Furbish & Reid, 2013; Irving, 2011b). Hence, the status of the career advisor, and positioning of career education at the curriculum margins, is reinforced and mediated by what is seen to ‘count’ by subject teachers. Thus, at the level of the classroom, what is taught, who teaches it, and what is deemed to be of value, takes on a subjective hue that reflects the complex dynamics of secondary schooling (Harris, 1999). Ken’s ‘realist’ stance was also tempered by a concern that his practices were subject to the disciplinary gaze of ERO, who report directly to the Ministry of Education, as I show later in this chapter.

### *The resisters*

Bryony and Louise are positioned as resisters to the CEG guidelines, but for quite different reasons. Whereas Bryony was resistant to the terminology

employed by the MoE, and the practicalities of the demands made on career advisors in relation to the curriculum, Louise challenged the veracity of the underlying philosophy, and questioned whose interests were being progressed.

When I asked Bryony whether she was aware of the CEG guidelines, she commented, “I have read them, yes”. However, when I asked what she felt the key messages were, her resistance to both the guidelines, and the expertise of the MoE, was clearly articulated. She told me:

Aww, see how much I love the Ministry of Education, I can’t actually remember . . . I’ve just come back from a conference . . . you know the Ministry of Education is fabulous on new acronyms . . . they love new terms to bandy round . . . I don’t have a lot of tolerance for it, I think basically the people that are writing those things are so out of touch with kids that it just doesn’t, it’s not helpful.

Bryony drew parallels with other documents produced by the MoE, “like the curriculum documents they change every five minutes . . . you read them and go has anything actually ever, is anything changing?” Although she acknowledged continuity in the underlying philosophy of helping students to build on their existing skills, and develop positive relationships, her resistance to the CEG guidelines, at a professional level, primarily related to the terminology employed by the MoE. There was also a practical dimension to this, as Bryony questioned whether the integration of career education into the wider curriculum, which is a

key focus in the CEG guidelines, was either reasonable and/or achievable. In some respects this echoed Ken's comments noted in the previous section. Bryony told me, "it's very easy to do that [integrate career education] in the junior school, but it is impossible to do that, and it's impossible for other teachers to buy that in [in later years]". Bryony displayed a degree of helplessness as she rhetorically asked, "when you're teaching, I mean how do you do that besides [this sentence remains unfinished]". Using physics, chemistry and calculus as examples, she continued:

I think the best way that career education can be fostered with those kind of subjects is to say, 'my goodness, this can lead to this . . . if you do physics you can do architecture, you can do this, this and this' . . . I think we're quite, I think teachers are quite good at answering those kinds of questions *if* they're presented, is it actually part of the curriculum to actively talk about it, no, well, it's probably a part of the curriculum but does it happen? Not really, no.

Thus, the reasons expounded by Bryony concerning the dilemmas subject teachers might face are caught up in a general lack of clarity about *how* career education might be conceptualised (Harris, 1999; Vaughan & Gardiner, 2007). Hence, for Bryony, there appeared to be an absence of clear, practical advice in the CEG guidelines concerning *how* career education might engage the interest of subject teachers and effectively inform *what* it might add to a deeper learning experience, beyond an instrumental matching of academic subjects to occupations. This issue

is expanded on below, where Louise also drew attention to the tenuous relationship between career education and the curriculum.

Louise questioned many of the claims to ‘truth’ in the CEG guidelines, thus demonstrating how the concept of career can obscure more than it reveals. Her resistance was founded on professional and philosophical grounds. Responding to my question about the key messages in the CEG guidelines she told me:

I don’t think it’s particularly that positive a document from the point of view of the careers advisors in schools, because it doesn’t actually mention us anywhere particularly, like it says that careers education should be across the curriculum, it says all the things but it doesn’t say who’s going to do it, so for my careers education I think it’s great it, you know, it sings the songs and waves the flag, but then it doesn’t say how it’s going to be done or who it’s going to be done by.

Although the CEG guidelines state that “most schools appoint a career leader to oversee and co-ordinate the implementation of career education and guidance throughout the school” (MoE, 2009a, p. 29), Louise highlighted that the term *career advisor* was absent throughout this document. Although this may have been unintentional, Louise felt that the CEG guidelines were “written with a particular agenda in mind, I don’t think it’s an independent document”. Although she does not expand on what this political agenda may be, in the following

excerpt, Louise expressed a sense of professional marginalisation and a degree of powerlessness as a result of the lack of recognition of her role:

I don't think from a careers advisors of point of view in a school [the CEG guidelines] gives any ammunition or teeth to actually say we are the people that co-ordinate [career education] . . . there's no acknowledgement that careers advisors in schools are actually an expert in their fields as a maths teacher is, as a science teacher is, as anybody else is, that actually we are the experts in our field.

Within this context, the discursive practices employed in the CEG guidelines felt like an oppressive force for Louise by failing to enhance the standing and self-esteem of career advisors, or foster a sense of community, as their personal value and professional expertise is rendered invisible. As Louise commented, there was an assumption "that anyone can do my [career advisor] job". Exacerbating this situation is the fact that no mention is made of career education *or* career advisors in the national curriculum documents (MoE, 2007). Career education in New Zealand, as a curriculum area, is thus positioned as peripheral to the 'real' purpose of schooling (Vaughan, 2011; Vaughan & Spiller, 2012) which continues to focus on academic subjects. It is also important to add that a formal career-related qualification is not generally a prerequisite for those who take up the career advisor role (Irving, 2011b; Vaughan & Gardiner, 2007), with Furbish and Reid (2013) reporting that career-related qualifications were held by only 15 per cent of New Zealand career advisors.

A further area of contestation Louise identified related to the contradictory messages conveyed through the CEG guidelines concerning the nature of career in general, and career education more specifically. As discussed earlier, the CEG guidelines define career as being holistic, incorporating all aspects of life. When I asked Louise about this she raised doubts about whether, in fact, this was so within the document:

Well, firstly I debate whether career is holistic in that document, cos holistic to me is the fact that career isn't just about jobs and occupations. I think there's an attempt to make it [like that] . . . Whether it achieved that end I would probably need convincing 'cos I think career is about more than just work and occupation, it's about a person's life, the different roles we play in our lives . . . if you take students from this school [many of whom identify with a particular religion] it's about the fact that they are somebody's child, it's about the role they play there, about the role of religion, culture, all of those other things as well which dictates in some ways what their career, as in job, education, further education, higher education, may or may not look like. So you have to take into account those factors . . . before you deal with the traditional notion of career.

Thus, whilst the CEG guidelines ostensibly advocate for a holistic understanding of career, Louise was unconvinced. She felt that the holistic definition continued to be overshadowed, and ignored, by the privileging of “[paid] work and occupation”.



Her unease with the confused and contradictory messages conveyed in the CEG guidelines was further expressed as we discussed the integration of career learning into the wider curriculum.

I still think the document's focus was on subject areas and that sort of model of careers education . . . you deliver it through a subject area, so you are relating that subject area to a particular job, career, so where can you go with science, where can you go with, which I think, the introduction to the careers education guidelines was trying to prove that's what careers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is about, because it goes down then to the nitty gritty of how you deliver that, then I think it reverted back to a very traditional view of careers . . .

Unlike many of the committed and conformist participants in this study who saw the linking of career education with the academic curriculum as relatively unproblematic, Louise found this aspect of the CEG guidelines to be unsound. As demonstrated in the above excerpt, she felt it wavered between the promotion of a broader integration of career learning into curriculum areas, and an instrumental use of academic subjects by simply relating them to occupational areas.

As she critically re/interpreted the text, Louise uncovered the contradictory discursive formations that flow throughout the CEG guidelines, questioned the hegemonic assumptions that sustain it, and through a process of critical reflection (Brookfield, 2009) challenged the ways in which career education was positioned.

Although she accepted that the CEG guidelines had made *some* attempt to recognise the multiple ways in which individuals might construct their ‘career(s)’, and acknowledged that career choice might be influenced by a range of factors, she felt that lying just beneath the surface a traditional understanding was ever-present, in which career was conflated with “work and occupation”. She commented that a “very traditional view of careers [was privileged] . . . knowing career people could understand it”. This led Louise to conclude that “it lost the potential for a completely different way of looking at careers education”. As discussed in chapter two, the lack of conceptual clarity about what a career ‘is’ has led academics such as Richardson (2009) to argue that there is a need to shift career thinking away “from a focus on the occupational domain to a more holistic rubric of work and relationships across occupational and personal domains of life” (p. 77). Although Louise is uncomfortable with the contradictory nature of the CEG guidelines and expresses a desire to be more inclusive in her practices, her professional freedom (like that of her colleagues) is subject to the disciplinary gaze of the state through visits by the Education Review Office (ERO).

### **Measuring conformity and monitoring practice: a state of surveillance**

As discussed in chapter five, New Zealand has adopted a decentralised approach towards education. Thus, each individual school is ostensibly free to determine how their community’s needs might be best served: through their Board of Trustees; the professional autonomy of career advisors; and the curriculum they might offer. However, as I noted in chapter five, although state policy may not

overtly dictate practice, through the work of the Education Review Office (ERO), career education is subject to external scrutiny, which is also tied to ‘school performance’. The auditing of career education by the Education Review Office (ERO) as part of their cycle of school reviews can be construed as an attempt to govern from a distance. Through this process ERO are able to make judgements about whether schools, and career advisors, comply with the discursive boundaries established by the state for this curriculum area, which are encapsulated in their audit criteria. For example, in a recent review, one of the key indicators employed to guide reviewer judgements concerning the effectiveness of career information, advice, guidance and education (CIAGE) was that it should “ensure **every student** goes on to further education, training, or employment” (ERO, 2012, p. 6).

At a more general level, there is an expectation that a school’s educational practices are focused on ensuring that *all* students attain formal qualifications by the time they leave (MoE, 2012). Thus, attention is drawn to the ‘real world’ of school reform, where what is deemed to be desirable in the CEG guidelines, and what is being measured by ERO (2012), are entwined with wider pressures to redress a long tail of educational underachievement. It is assumed that improved educational outcomes will occur as a result of the quality of teaching, with teachers being held personally responsible for the learning achievements of *all* of their students (Ell & Grudnoff, 2013). Hence, improved educational provision, including career education, is espoused as the panacea for structural social disadvantage.

The role of ERO in relation to the delivery of career education and guidance was discussed with *five* of my participants, either through direct questions or as a result of the course of conversation. Their opinions about ERO ranged from those who expressed a desire to have their approval, through to a feeling that ERO have little interest in career education. Thus I draw on excerpts from my interviews with Rosemary and Ken as exemplars of these different participant positions.

In response to my question about how Rosemary viewed the relationship between her career education programmes, her school's expectations, and ERO requirements, she saw them as irrevocably intertwined:

Well we just had ERO this year . . . the whole idea is that we aspire to do things as well as we can, following best practice, providing a programme for career education . . . that meets the need of our community, so because we've got that in mind all of the time then that fits in with the school's requirements and it fits in with ERO requirements, I mean we're not going to do anything that's going against what the school requires . . . because we fit in with the school requirements we're fitting in with ERO requirements as well.

Rosemary went on to clarify this in relation to career education:

ERO are *expecting us* to fit in with [the 2009 CEG policy guidelines], and the New Zealand curriculum . . . [and how career education is] fitting in with the ideals expressed in those . . . and then *ERO are looking . . . to make sure that, you know, the National Administrative Guideline of providing career education for all students, including at risk* [emphasis added, that's being delivered, that we've got a programme that is comprehensive for all students, so that's what they were looking for and that's what they found.

For Rosemary, ERO appeared to take on the role of a “critical friend” (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2005, p. 239) who would assist her to evaluate her career education programme against the state's expectations, whilst also ensuring that it measured up to her school's aspirations. Rosemary's account demonstrated how a ‘successful’ report from ERO can potentially function as a marker of how well a career advisor is performing/conforming. In addition, it can serve to legitimise what goes on in career education to the school, community and the state, acting to reinstate a sense of belief that what is being delivered is ‘right’. For example, Rosemary used the explicit approval of ERO to reinforce the legitimacy and currency of her programme, and to justify this to me (and presumably others, such as her BoT). By taking up the dominant discursive messages conveyed through the CEG guidelines, which are reinscribed through ERO, Rosemary's vision for career education appeared to be shaped by what was expected of her by the state, and informed by the aspirations of her school.

Whereas ERO appears to have influenced Rosemary's career education practice, Ken identified how ERO's 'governance from a distance' can create conflicting subject positions for career advisors who are expected to enact policy intentions regardless of their professional or personal views. He was rather disdainful of ERO's interest in, and support for, career education, telling me:

ERO doesn't seem to care much about careers, that's really been my experience . . . I mean I remember thinking naively the first time after I had my budget greatly eroded and sort of didn't have much time . . . to do careers I thought ERO will come in and they'll see this and they'll be appalled and they will bang on the Headmasters table and tell him he's gotta resource careers properly . . . they're full of sort of sympathetic platitudes when they're talking to me but, you know the report didn't say anything and just said [this is left hanging] . . . I get a sense that ERO is not much interested in careers . . . as a field, yeah, that would be, don't quote me on that [he commented somewhat light heartedly], we've probably got ERO coming next year and I'll probably be [I tell him he will be anonymous in my study and he laughs].

For Ken, ERO was seen to be failing him, in a professional sense, due to its reluctance to ensure that he received a budget that would enable him to deliver career education effectively. What is further implied in the above excerpt is that what happens within career education does not really feature very highly on the ERO agenda, and thus its primary concern is with ensuring that the minimum

requirements are met. However, even though Ken had little regard for ERO, he still harboured concerns about the authority and influence it might bring to bear if his dissatisfaction became publicly known. Career advisors, therefore, may experience a degree of powerlessness, and have limited voice (Young, 1990), through this monitoring of their practices, and the imposition of desired outcomes.

Whilst there is a degree of latitude with regards to how the CEG guidelines might be translated at the level of the school, and by career advisors themselves, it is important to acknowledge the unevenness in power relations. Thrupp (1997) identified ERO as having a “managerialist emphasis on outcomes and contractual compliance” (p. 145). Hence, ERO has a responsibility for ensuring that schools meet the policy priorities of the MoE, and provide the mandated curriculum to the standards they set. ERO not only reports their audit findings directly to the government, but their reports are also made publicly available. Such reports can also be used to distinguish the (assumed) ‘successful school’ from those presumed to be failing on the basis of student outcomes. Thus, ERO might be positioned as a state agent “by exhorting, promoting and enforcing its regulated self-regulating model of the school, and in turn encouraging neo-liberal subjects in school spaces” (N. Lewis, 2003, p. 157). Although Lewis is talking about students here, career education as a subject area is also being judged against neoliberal values and expectations.

I experienced the effects of state influence and managerial compliance during my time as a career advisor in England during the 1990s. During this

period, careers services were taken out of Local Education Authority control and, in a similar way to schools in New Zealand, became quasi-independent. As part of the competitive tendering process, performance indicators were introduced by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). The contracts awarded to successful bidders were based around narrowly conceived output targets which, though ostensibly agreed, were predetermined (Mulvey, 2006) and monitored externally. Embedded within a neo/liberal concept of equality, i.e. the same provision for all, the funding of the 'new' careers companies was primarily contingent on 'group sessions', and the production of individual action plans (with defined outcomes) from interviews with *all* year 11 students, i.e. those in their final year of compulsory schooling, at both state *and* private schools.

Whereas Rosemary appeared to welcome ERO's intervention, and accepted that her practices *should* measure up to ERO's expectations, in my own situation there was a general impression amongst career advisors that (regardless of their views) they *must* meet their targets, otherwise their jobs would be at risk (Mulvey, 2001). Through this process I found myself self-regulating my practice due to the potential sanctions that might be employed if I openly resisted (see Rose, 1999). In some respects this 'control from a distance' resonated with Ken's experience who, whilst having little regard for ERO, did evince concern (somewhat light heartedly perhaps) during our discussion that he did not want his views to come to their attention.



However, although there was an erosion of my professional autonomy, curtailing my desire to provide extra support to those least advantaged, through judicious time-management, surreptitious behaviours, and a creative reading of the targets I was able to create spaces that enabled me to work with career students and teachers in transformative ways. For example, in group sessions about the labour market and ‘employability’, I was able to introduce the role of trade unions, and explore the ways in which collective action might shape employment practices. Issues of discrimination were interwoven throughout, and I also adapted my ‘teaching’ to respond to these issues whenever they arose.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explored the complex ways in which career advisors might be positioned/position themselves in relation to the subject positions made available through their interpretation of the CEG guidelines. I have shown how the majority of the participants’ support for this document varied. I also identified how one ‘dissenting’ voice actively challenged the material basis of the CEG guidelines, and questioned the philosophical nature of career that was embedded within it. The role of ERO, and their authority to shape practice and influence outcomes through the evaluation reports they produce, was also examined.

The complex relationship between policy intentions and their enactment is highlighted by Ball (1994a) who noted that:

Policy is both words and actions, texts and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete in so far as they relate or map on to the ‘wild profusion’ of local practice. Policies are crude and simple. Practice is sophisticated, contingent, complex and unstable (p. 10).

Thus, whilst there is an implicit expectation that the truth claims embedded within the CEG policy guidelines will be taken up appropriately, these remain partial as official discourses may be (re)translated by a plurality of readers in a range of localised settings. As Rudduck (1994) observed, secondary schools are complex places where issues that arise may be contextually specific and not fit comfortably with universal expectations. Furthermore, career advisors themselves do not share a unified professional identity (Douglas, 2010, 2013; Vaughan, 2010). Instead their subjectivity, i.e. their fluid, multiple and contradictory ‘selves’ (Cammack & Phillips, 2002), is constituted through language and meaning, constructed in/through a range of discourses and contexts (Usher & Edwards, 1994).

The extent to which the monitoring visits by ERO might impact on career education in practice, and reinforce the rhetoric in the CEG guidelines, appeared to be mediated by the values and worldviews held by individual career advisors, and how they conceptualised ‘career’. Thus the role of ERO, and the infrequency of their visits, should not necessarily be regarded as an impediment to the introduction of career education programmes that are holistic *and* transformative. This is not to suggest that there are no boundaries, however. Yet, within the

context of their individual schools, I have shown that through their interpretation of the CEG guidelines, for example, career advisors are active participants in shaping how career might be imagined, and determining whose interests should be privileged. Therefore, how career advisors, and the teachers they may collaborate with (Furbish & Reid, 2013), engage with ERO, and position themselves in relation to the CEG guidelines, can inform how social justice is conceptualised and located within their own situated practice. Moreover, although career advisors may be exposed to the rhetoric of the state through the CEG guidelines, which are reinforced through visits by ERO, they do have further policy resources they can draw on, such as those concerned with social-justice related issues produced by their schools. Therefore, in the following chapter I move from the macro level of state policy, to consider whether social justice-related policies developed by individual schools have shaped how my participants think about career/education, and whether these policies have informed their practice(s).

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Locating social justice policies in schools: In/visible influences on the construction of career education**

#### **Introduction**

In chapter five I examined how macro influences, in the form of the Ministry of Education's (MoE) (2009a) CEG policy guidelines, established the state's priorities for career education, and informed how career education might be conceptualised in schools. Following this, in chapter six I considered how career advisors positioned themselves in relation to the CEG guidelines, and examined how they perceived the role of the Education Review Office (ERO) in the monitoring of compliance. In this chapter I turn my attention to the meso level of the school, by exploring the relationship between school-based policies concerned with social justice-related issues (such as equity, equality, anti-discrimination, cultural diversity and bullying) and career education.

As identified in chapter six, career advisors are not simply the 'pawns' of policy, but are actively engaged in (re)interpreting and (re)inscribing policy intentions as they relate these to their own field of practice. Therefore, I was interested in knowing whether formal whole-school policies and (un)official statements of intent relating to social-justice informed the thinking of the career advisors in my study, and were incorporated into their practices. All of the

participants were made aware in advance that I would be asking them a question concerning this aspect.

### **Localised challenges to social injustice: School-based policies in context**

Although schools in New Zealand are positioned as quasi-autonomous from the government, each Board of Trustees (BoT) is legally obliged to ensure that it fulfils its obligations to the national educational system. The primary role of a BoT therefore is to provide governance, strategic direction and leadership for their school which is encapsulated in the form of a 'Charter'. Thus, whilst the BoT is responsible for setting the overall goals of its school through the use of policy, and determining how the curriculum is delivered, it is ultimately accountable to the Crown for the outcomes it sets. As the MoE (2010) note:

A board's policy framework should be a guide to all the decisions that need to be made in the school. For example, it will cover the outcomes the school should pursue, its educational priorities, as well as how the board will operate. (p. 8)

With reference to social in/justice concerns, there are few demands placed on the BoT to construct policies in this area. Where guidelines do exist they focus in a general way on what a BoT must include in their school charter, what the school should be seeking to achieve, and/or what must be reported on. For example, it is stated in the planning and reporting requirements of the national education

guidelines of the 1989 Education Act (see section 61, paragraph 3a), that there must be a section within a school charter that includes:

1. the aim of developing, for the school, policies and practices that reflect New Zealand's cultural diversity and the unique position of the Māori culture; and
2. the aim of ensuring that all reasonable steps are taken to provide instruction in tikanga Māori (Māori culture) and te reo Māori (the Māori language) for full-time students who ask for it.

In addition, schools are expected to meet a number of National Education Goals (NEGs) (MoE, 2009b) which reflect the aspirations of the New Zealand government for its educational system. These goals are broad based in nature, and are comprised of a series of statements leaving them open to multiple interpretations. ERO monitors the extent to which schools have achieved these goals as part of their evaluation cycle. The key NEGs that relate directly to issues of social justice are set out below:

Goal 1: The highest standards of achievement, through programmes which enable all students to realise their full potential as individuals, and to develop the values needed to become full members of New Zealand's society.

Goal 2: Equality of educational opportunity for all New Zealanders, by identifying and removing barriers to achievement.

Goal 9: Increased participation and success by Māori through the advancement of Māori education initiatives, including education in Te Reo Māori (the Māori language), consistent with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi

Goal 10: Respect for the diverse ethnic and cultural heritage of New Zealand people, with acknowledgement of the unique place of Māori, and New Zealand's role in the Pacific and as a member of the international community of nations.

Thus, recognition is given to the importance of developing the capabilities of all, promoting equality of opportunity, and respecting the cultural and ethnic diversity of New Zealand's population.

Although the BoT is accountable for the formulation of school policy, and the school principal and senior management team oversee their implementation (MoE, 2010), teachers have the responsibility for ensuring that policies inform their curriculum and practices. From a social justice perspective, school policies developed around the education act and the NEGs outlined earlier, have the potential to make the invisible 'known', provide spaces for silent voices to be heard, and identify the individual *and* collective needs of a diverse student population. As Corson (1992) has argued:

For values of social justice to really count, they need to be inserted into the discourse of the place; they need to be articulated by significant figures in the organisation so they become part of the taken-for-grantedness of the place. (p. 249)

Thus, rather than static pronouncements of ideals, social justice-related policies need to be living documents that are: “systematic and forward looking” (L. Davies, 1990, p. 179), capture the imagination, and elicit the commitment, of all concerned. Positively acknowledging diversity, and affirming social group difference (Young, 1990), can thus go some way to challenging and addressing injustices, and contribute to a dismantling of oppressive and dominating structures (Eisenberg, 2006). Conversely, however, a number of authors have identified that the term social justice is often poorly conceptualised and loosely applied within education (see, for example, Clark, 2006; Gale 2000; Gewirtz, 1989; Sandretto, 2004). Moreover, it is important to add that the term social justice is absent from the CEG policy guidelines and, as my research found, was not commonly used within schools.

Through the discourses deployed, and the disciplinary mechanisms employed at the level of the school, social justice-related policies can reflect the philosophy, values and aspirations of the local community (Thrupp & Lupton, 2006), and inform curriculum content and delivery. However, a cautionary note must be added, as policies that may be well-intentioned on the surface can also become oppressive when the individual is isolated from the wider social context



and/or measured against dominant educational and cultural norms (Gale, 2000). Furthermore, given the floating signification of the NEG's, whereby the ascription of meaning is ambiguous and contingent on their discursive reading (Rear & Jones, 2013), social justice-related policies have the potential to reinforce oppression and domination. For example, positioning 'at risk' students as worthy of 'charitable' (Beilharz, 1989) and/or 'benevolent' (Tomlinson, 2001) interventions to help *them* overcome *their* individual 'deficits' can render invisible the impact of wider social, economic and political structures and influences on their engagement with school (Apple, 2000; Zyngier, 2008). Hence, there is a need for career advisors to articulate clearly how school-wide social-justice related policies have informed their thinking, and been incorporated into their career education practice.

### **Connecting career education to social justice-related policies: A distant echo**

Nine of my participants talked about how they engaged (or not) with whole-school policies relating to social in/justice. All of these participants were aware that such policies existed in their schools; however there was a degree of unevenness about the extent to which they were able to articulate what the policies covered, and how they saw them fitting, or being fitted, with/in their career education practice.

Louise provided an insightful introduction to how social justice-related policies were deployed. In response to my question about whether her school had equity, equality or social justice policies, she commented:

We have an equity policy, don't *ask me what's in it cos I just printed it off* [emphasis added] and I've no idea. We don't have a social justice policy, cos I went looking for it, and we have nothing that says social justice, we have equity policies, and we have policies that try and raise the achievement of certain groups in this school that you would say need extra help. So *we have a few policies directed towards Māori and Pasifika students* [emphasis added] to raise their academic achievement. [Louise]

What is noticeable in the above excerpt is that whilst Louise was aware that her school had an equity policy she appeared to pay it little regard, being unaware of what it actually contained prior to our interview. Moreover, Louise commented that there were further equity policies in her school, yet she did not elaborate on what issues or concerns these sought to address. She did, however, identify the existence of 'other' policies which were targeted at raising the academic achievement of Māori and Pasifika students. Reflecting a commonly held view within education that academic underachievement is the primary cause of social disadvantage experienced by Māori and Pasifika, little account is taken of the cultural dimensions of difference in relation to, for example, approaches to learning, ways of knowing/being, the influence of communal values, and a desire for self-determination (Bishop, 2003; Ferguson, Gorinski, Wendt Samu, & Mara,

2008; Manning et al., 2011). Moreover, the effects of neo-colonialism that privilege the “interests of a mono-cultural elite” (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2009, p. 735), and marginalise the aspirations and experiences of those from non-white dominant groups, are also rendered invisible. This deficit view positions *cultural* injustice as an *academic* problem, and is also normalised within the CEG policy guidelines (see chapter five). Hence, it is assumed that the provision of extra academic support will assist Māori and Pasifika students to overcome what is erroneously constituted as ‘their own’ disadvantage, and thus enable them to compete equally with members of the dominant social group.

In relation to career education, the marginal and/or invisible nature of whole-school policies concerned with issues of social in/justice became more apparent as my interview with Louise progressed. When I asked Louise whether any of her school’s social justice-related policies had influenced her approach to career education, either explicitly or implicitly, she told me, “probably if I looked at them I’d probably do some of this stuff that’s in there, so it’s probably implicit. I’ve never sat down and read the policies ‘til you asked for a copy”. Here, it is assumed in hindsight that the career education curriculum *probably* connects (in some tenable way) with school-based policies that seek to address social injustice. This sense of post-hoc rationalisation is further articulated in the following excerpt from my interview with Gaynor:

**Me:** And in terms of your own school’s equality, equity, or social justice policy

**G:** Which I went and found, our equity policy (laughs).

**Me:** How did that inform what you do in your programme?

**G:** Well our two main aims in terms of our equity policy are to provide social, financial and emotional support and learning assistance to needy students; and to ensure all the school's policies and practices achieve equitable outcomes for all students. So in terms of providing support to those students that are most in need I guess it's probably where we would fit in with the most . . . so we make sure that everyone has access to that information, and then those that might need a bit more support are able to get that support, and sometimes we have to sort of say come and see me rather than them self-identifying, often they'll need a bit more of that direction for them to be able to access the information, they won't go and seek it themselves.

The excerpts above capture the general responses of many of my participants who described their engagement with, and utilisation of, their schools' equity policies. Demographic differences between schools appear to have had little influence. For example Gaynor was a career adviser in a predominantly Pākehā decile nine girls' school, and Louise worked in a decile three girls' school which has only a very small number of Pākehā students on its roll. Hence, a conceptual gap was apparent as career advisors struggled to relate whole-school social justice-related policies to their career education practices.

At a surface level, what emerged was an initial lack of awareness about, or engagement with, whole-school policies relating to social justice concerns. However, whilst these policies were ostensibly invisible, a cursory glance was all that was required to enable these participants to talk knowledgeably about what they were primarily focused on, how they related to career education in a general sense, and how the various policy intentions were potentially infused throughout their programmes. The underlying reasons for this become more apparent in the excerpt from my interview with Rosemary, where the complex and contradictory nature of policies related to social in/justice within schools (Gale & Densmore, 2003), and their lack of specificity, is illustrated:

**Me:** Again, staying with your own programme, does the school have equal opportunities, social justice policy, and if so how do you incorporate or fit them into your own career education programme?

**R:** We haven't got a policy called social justice so if you're talking about . . . justice in terms of our students we have lots of policies that would fit within that, you know there's [anti] discrimination policies, the way we deal with students, fairness, equity, I mean the whole education system in New Zealand surely is based on social justice, and where . . . every student is able to access . . . the core curriculum for instance, that's all social justice, non-violence . . . so yes school practices social justice every minute of the day, we hope, yes I would think so.

**Me:** So social justice as you identify can actually incorporate a range (yes) of different areas like equity (yeah), equality (yeah) anti-discrimination (yeah) that type of thing, In your own career education programme then do you have something that implicitly or explicitly identifies where those types of things fit in?

**R:** . . . we do employment rights, so we're doing anti-discrimination there so that's an explicit look, and an aspect of social justice . . . with our career research Units with the [year] 12 and 13s I mean the concept of social justice is implicit there, that everyone has opportunities and choice . . . they choose a career and they research it . . . and it's implicit in that everyone has a choice of a career but you have to take certain actions to make it happen for yourself . . . if you're choosing something that's got a long pathway of study then you have to work in a certain way to make sure you pass the exams so that, social justice is there in that we're saying anybody can do that . . . it's just built in implicitly into the way we do things, yeah.

Initially Rosemary's view of how social justice concerns are articulated within her school's policies, and located within the curriculum, appeared to be quite different to those expressed by Louise and Gaynor. Rosemary implicitly linked the work she did with her students on anti-discrimination issues in employment rights to her school's policies, but more explicitly related her curriculum activities to her own understanding of social justice. Here, Rosemary took up wider educational

discourses which make reference to the (supposedly) egalitarian nature of New Zealand's education system, which is premised on the notion everyone should be given a "fair go" (Harker, 1994, p. 277). This is illustrated in her view that *all* students have equality of access to a 'core curriculum', and that opportunity and career choice is open to everyone.

For Rosemary, future 'success' resides with the individual student who must learn what is required, and then do what is 'right', if they are to progress. Reflecting a liberal humanist version of social justice which privileges individual agency, career choice and opportunity is thus positioned as the product of *individual* efforts and achievements. This plays down the structural effects of discrimination, and can undermine employment rights when positioned as individual 'problems'. These issues exist because of the absence of equality for members of non-dominant social groups within New Zealand (see Rashbrooke, 2013). Moreover, Thrupp (2007) contends that an 'inconvenient truth' in New Zealand is that far from being egalitarian, education has benefitted the children of more affluent parents who continue to gain advantage from the underlying middle-class values, behaviours and expectations that dominate in terms of curriculum and assessment, and school organisation.

Embedded within the accounts of the social justice-related policies cited by the three participants, are concerns with enabling equality of opportunity. Riley (1994) situates the concept of equal opportunities on a continuum. At one end is a 'weak' form which relates to enhancing access to opportunity and facilitating

‘fair’ competition. Here, it is argued that the establishment of a ‘level playing field’ on which all have the same opportunity to compete ensures fairness. Situated at the other end of the continuum is a ‘strong’ approach which seeks to secure equality of outcome by “ensur[ing] equal rates of success for different groups in society through direct intervention to prevent disadvantage for example via positive discrimination or affirmative action programmes” (Gewirtz, 1998, p. 472). Although a strong approach to equality has the potential to disrupt particular practices of oppression, desired outcomes continue to be informed by distributive meritocratic principles, whereby ‘success’ is measured in terms of individual ‘competition’, ‘progression’ and ‘achievement’. Rather than acknowledging, questioning, and/or challenging those structural processes and institutionalised practices within education (and society at large) that impact differentially on the diverse aspirations held by members of social groups (Gale & Densmore, 2000), a dominant middle-class understanding prevails which normalises such privilege.

What also flowed throughout the participants’ accounts was a normative understanding of justice saturated by liberal humanist discourse, and neoliberal goals. These were sustained by reference to many overlapping discursive formations relating to access and opportunity, achievement and meritocracy, individualism and choice, beneficence and paternalism, cultural deficit and discipline. Whereas the liberalism of Rawls promoted a benevolent view of individual equality and access to opportunity, which I outlined in chapter three, neoliberalism replaced the language of fairness with that of self-interest,



privileging competition, individual property rights and the pursuit of economic goals. Moreover, as will be discussed in chapter nine, where the liberal humanist view has been appropriated by neoliberalism such expectations are reformulated. Schools are becoming accountable for the production of the self-regulating citizen who conforms to dominant expectations, and, note Nairn, Higgins and Sligo (2012), strives to achieve academically, and is held individually responsible for their situation, rendering structural constraints invisible.

Whilst the language of equity and equality was employed by the participants, there was a disjuncture between their deeper knowledge of the social justice-related policies of their schools and how these might inform career education practice. Overt concern with the multiple ways in which structural influence privileges the dominant social group, and how the processes that contribute to this may be played out within career education, was a distant, barely audible, echo.

As education became more closely associated with the neoliberal imperative of economic goals (see Apple, 1996; Olssen & Matthews, 1997; Peters, Marshall & Massey, 1994), the emphasis within schools shifted from a concern with learning to a culture of achievement (Harris, 1999). Underachievement came to be utilised as the primary signifier of social disadvantage, with the 'problem' constructed in terms of individual deficits (Edmondson & D'Umo, 2007) which are bound up with the pathologising discourses associated with non-middle-class 'deficiencies' (Smyth & McInerney,

2013) and/or cultural behaviours, values and beliefs, rather than the effect of structural inequalities (Zyngier, 2008). For example, within New Zealand the use of deficit discourses to explain the underachievement of Pasifika and Māori students, who also tend to come from lower socio-economic groups, masks broader issues concerning the cultural domination of knowledge, inequitable power relations within schools, and institutionalised structures of oppression (see Bishop, 2005; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2009; Cahill, 2006; Smith, 1990; Ferguson, Gorinski, Samu & Mara, 2008; Mara, 2014). Failure to address educational bias, and to make group difference visible in an affirming sense, can thus feed into “cultural imperialism that stereotype a group and simultaneously render its own experience invisible” (Young, 1990, p. 174).

As I have shown, many participants struggled to connect social justice-related policies to their career education curriculum and practices. However, whilst career advisors in secular schools had little knowledge of the term ‘social justice’, what differentiated the experiences of those employed in Catholic schools related to the religious ethos of their institutions. This was seen to mediate the underlying discourses of the state, and transcend the requirements of the ‘Charter’ (discussed earlier in this chapter), by providing an over-arching ‘in/formal’ social justice policy that they could call upon.

### **Shifting meanings: Deferring to a higher authority**

Patricia and Bryony, who were career advisors in Catholic schools, made reference to a ‘higher authority’ as they discussed, and legitimated, their practices

in relation to social justice concerns. As I discussed with Patricia whether she felt there was an even balance between an understanding of career as ‘occupation’ and career as ‘life’, she made direct reference to her school’s mission statement, recounting that it aims to:

provide an excellent education for students enabling them to take their place in society as confident lifelong learners, as women who value and hold the truths of the Catholic church in the Mercy tradition of compassion and social justice . . . so that’s where social justice is, there in our mission statement, so it’s looking to prepare them for lifelong [this sentence remains unfinished]. [Patricia]

Bryony responded in a similar vein when asked whether school policies concerned with equity, equality or social justice explicitly influenced or impacted on what she does in her careers work:

our four main words are service, justice, truth and respect, you know we truly try and live by them, and you know they are the school’s core values and they’re certainly and I try and install those in the kids. You know it’s so simple, if we live by those things then we’ll all be incredible people . . . if the kids leave with nothing else but those four things we’ve done a good thing. So do I try and make that part of my careers work? Absolutely, every day.

Thus, it would appear that it is religious philosophy, rather than formal social justice-related policies, that implicitly informed and underpinned both Patricia's and Bryony's approach towards career education.

Whilst few would argue against these core values, there is a need to consider how they play out in practice, and whether they go far enough. This dilemma was highlighted by Bryony as we talked about how she saw her school's policies in this area fitting into her career education practice. She told me that "all of the opportunities that come across my desk are open to everybody, regardless of if a kid can afford to pay or not". A tension was apparent as she continued:

I do try and encourage those kids more than others that I know will have the opportunity out of school maybe, so then maybe my equity isn't good then, maybe my focus is too swayed on the kids that struggle . . . we have daily notices and opportunities open to everybody, if I had to pick and choose about who did what . . . probably the kids that needed it most would probably get it first, without making that painfully obvious.

[Bryony]

And when asked what the school's policies cover she commented:

Well I'm sure we've got 50,000 policies . . . basically every opportunity is open to everyone, that's as far as it goes, and no one should miss out because of social, financial, behavioural circumstances . . . I had a young

boy who had got kicked out of two primary schools . . . now he's in seventh form, miracle he's still at school, absolute miracle . . . you know sometimes you have to fight to keep kids in the system and, because at what point did that cost the other kids, I don't know, I don't think anyone was severely damaged, or probably what it did was to open those other kids eyes [to the fact that] someone's always willing to give you another chance . . . Maybe because we're a Catholic school we give kids too many chances, but you know we all make mistakes and now my young man is . . . he's going to volunteer on our camp in April, like he's just turned . . . and his social situation is so and his family situation is so horrific that it is incredible that he's still here, and if I can get him some way into further education then I'll do my damndest you know, but maybe to put so much effort and time into one kid isn't so good either.

Whilst Bryony indicated that she believed her school had many social justice-related policies, what underlay her practice was the Catholic ethos of her school, rather than reference to specific policies as such. Furthermore, Bryony's account brings into focus the limited nature of liberal humanist conceptions of the 'known self' as she demonstrated fluid, multiple and contradictory subjectivities. Her expressed desire that *all* students should have access to the same opportunities is mediated by a belief that, if given extra help, encouragement and support, everyone is redeemable despite their backgrounds. She struggles to reconcile discourses of compassion, forgiveness, and guilt, as she talked of how engaging in affirmative action, such as prioritising the needs of "kids that struggle", or who

are ‘at risk’ of exclusion due to their behaviours, might disadvantage other students whose needs are different. Bryony’s desire to focus her support on students ‘in need’ is qualified, as attention is given to the *individual* student which reflects a liberal understanding of equality. Bryony thus wavers between weak and strong versions of equal opportunities discourse as her overall desire is to act in an impartial and equitable way to avoid ‘damaging’ the chances (and lives) of her ‘other’ students, whilst allocating greater resources to those who are likely to have least access to opportunity.

Although Patricia and Bryony were able to talk at length about the concept of social justice in general terms, the question that remained was how career advisors themselves understood this concept. This is particularly salient as it concerns how ‘we’ come to know, and understand, social in/justice, and how ‘we’ determine whether we are doing ‘the right thing’ for our students. This connects with the way(s) in which policy intentions related to issues of social justice, are articulated and understood by career advisors through their reflections on, and in, practice.

### **Reflexive responses and rhetorical turns: Have I got it right/am I being fair?**

Skelton and Hanson (1989) argue that “to address equality issues is not to deal with external exercises restricted to the realms of the professional or the academic; rather it involves a challenge on a personal level. Confronting equality involves the individual in self examination” (p. 120). This observation is

particularly apposite within a social justice context as engaging in a critically reflexive way enables ‘us’ to draw on a multilayered *emotional*, and *relational*, as well as a *rational* self. Furthermore, note Carr & Kemmis (1986), “Creating a culture of critical reflection enhances our educative potential, and provides practitioners with opportunities to deconstruct conventional ... practices” (p. 33). Yet, Zeichner and Tabachnick (2001) identify, there is a need to question what teachers are being asked to be reflective about, and to contextualise why to avoid a depoliticisation of the process. Hence, while school-wide policies or policy statements relating to social in/justice may be helpful in establishing the general values, philosophies, beliefs and/or intentions of the institution, there is an inherent risk that practice may be delimited if career advisors take these up as the *only* markers of engagement with/in this arena.

Whilst some participants sought to justify their practices, it was noticeable that for others an element of personal challenge was presented as they talked about how their school’s policies in this area influenced their work. My interview with Ken illuminated the ways in which these reflexive responses, rhetorical turns and discursive shifts surfaced as he explored how social justice-related policies had impacted on him at both a professional and personal level. Ken is one of two career advisors at a co-educational school which has over 1000 students on its school roll, and is predominantly Pākehā. However there is a cosmopolitan mix of students represented by more than 50 nationalities, including 20% Māori and 20% Pasifika, along with a small number who came to New Zealand as refugees.

When I asked Ken whether his career education programme had a statement around equity, equality or social justice he commented, “I guess it’s something that’s not overt in what we, do it’s just, it’s infused into everything we do, and the whole philosophy of what we do that, um, it’s not probably”. As he grappled to make sense of this question it led him to reflect on his practice, to articulate where equity, equality and/or social justice concerns ‘fit’. A discursive shift is evident as Ken went on to say “I guess it will now [he laughs], now you challenge, I’m feeling a bit challenged . . . yeah perhaps it should”. Hence, the interview provided Ken with an opportunity to reflexively engage with his existing beliefs and practices. This continued in the excerpt below as Ken outlined his concern that attempts to define social justice in a formal sense might lessen the personal value and meaning he attached to this concept:

it’s hard to do that in a sense without it being a platitude or without it being, you know, I just think I’d like a sense of social justice to just be like, you know . . . to put it another way there’s nothing in my programme that suggests that you ought to breathe or have your heartbeat every [sentence remains unfinished] . . . you know to me the concept of social justice is that import . . . [the word and the sentence remains unfinished].

[Ken]

Thus, Ken sought to position social justice as an integral and underpinning philosophy for his programme, reflecting his own values and beliefs.

Paradoxically perhaps, what appeared to concern Ken was that the articulation of



where social justice-related concerns might actually fit with, and inform, his practice may lead to a formalising of what he actually does. Here formal policy statements are at risk of becoming rhetorical devices, seemingly empty vessels, simply words on a page, or merely significations that are restrictive or devoid of action(s).

At this point Ken extended his responses to include his colleague who, he suggested, implicitly shared his understanding of social justice, noting that “when a child comes in here and they’ve got, they’re starting, you know, from further behind we will go out of our way, and they know that”. A great deal of emphasis is placed on the need to build trust, emphasising the importance of continuity as the students:

are very used to people coming into their lives and going again, you know, whether it’s parents, teachers, whatever, and it takes a while to get their trust. Once you’ve got their trust and they know that you’re going to be around and that you’re there for them, then you can grapple with these issues of social justice. [Ken]

Here, Ken saw the establishment of trust coming before social justice, rather than recognising the integral relationship that exists between the two. Thus, consistency of presence was considered to be a precursor to social justice engagement, which may reflect a limited understanding of the concept. As the interview progressed it was clear Ken was engaged in a reflexive questioning of

his current practice, agonising about whether or not it would be helpful to have some form of statement on social justice that could articulate how, and where, it fitted into his programmes and practice. In his conclusion to this question he commented that his engagement with issues of social justice “isn’t overt but perhaps it should be, perhaps I should think of some way of doing this, it might be part of what we do with the [New Zealand] Careers Service”, who he referred to as his source of professional support. Whilst it was clear that Ken was concerned with social in/justice, and expressed a desire to address this more explicitly through his practices, he appeared to have few resources that he could call upon. Looking beyond the school for support, he assumed that New Zealand Career Services would be able to offer expertise in the area of social justice. However, as identified in chapters five and six, the relationship between career education and social justice in the Career Education Benchmarks, which were developed by New Zealand Careers Services, presents a particular version of social justice which fails to engage effectively with structural injustice, and actively excludes competing viewpoints.

Marjorie responded to my question about whether she had a statement of equity, equality or social justice for her career education programme in a similar way to Ken. She reflexively revisited her practices, telling me that at the current time her inclusion of social justice concerns was implicit rather than overt. Yet, as shown in the excerpt below, Marjorie concretises this notion as she considers what might be done:

No I haven't [a statement on social justice or a related area] . . . but maybe that's something I haven't . . . but if that's something that would be helpful . . . cos it's good to have frameworks to hang things off and guiding principles to go back to and think how does this fit in, so that would be a helpful thing, thank you. [Marjorie]

Marjorie expressed the view that a coherent social justice framework would (probably) help to provide her with “guiding principles”, whilst also contributing to a process of critical reflection and evaluation (Sandretto, 2004). What remained unsaid, however, is how, when, and where, she would progress this ideal. The personal and professional challenges for Marjorie in engaging with issues of social justice became clearer when I asked whether she introduced her students to the ways in which culture, gender and socio-economic class might impact on their choices and opportunities. She told me:

Yes, and that's something that came up earlier in our discussion wasn't it and I said that that is something I need to look at more because it is, it's really tricky and it's something I'll take away from this interview, and I'm aware of it but I haven't, I haven't overtly, overtly, addressed it with students. One on one yes I have, but in the larger group situation I haven't, and it's a very interesting point and I will, mmm, I have to think deeply about that and talk to other people, get some guidelines on it.

Although Marjorie appeared to have broached the effects of structural injustice with students on an individual basis, she was less sure about how she might incorporate such issues into group-based activities. Here, there is a sense of helplessness in knowing what can be done, yet also a desire to be proactive. This was evident in her recognition that she *should* seek advice from “other people” and “get some guidelines” on how to introduce issues of social justice into her career education practice. As the question moved from an individual focus to a collective understanding of career, Marjorie clarified why she felt it was “tricky” to engage students in examination of issues of structural injustice by locating it within a wider social context:

Also there are many things that aren't talked about. In our society we say we're classless and that we're not racist and that we we're a multi, oh no we say a bicultural society, that we delight in all the different cultures in our society we all say all these things . . . it's quite difficult to get down to looking at the barriers, because I think your question is talking about the barriers that students might have, or because our boys do come from a particular ethnicity which is seen as, which is [here Marjorie struggles to find the right words]. I mean the poor health statistics and the poor employment statistics, the poor education statistics, that's our group isn't it, so there are significant issues there, which I admit I don't know. I think I'll liaise a lot, what I might do is, we have now got a new guidance counsellor just been appointed, Samoan woman, these issues that I can check out with her as well so it's very much working where I don't feel I

have the expertise, then I need to call on other people who might have something that they can work with me on this.

Marjorie identified how socially embedded dominant discourses such as those that underpin the assumed egalitarian nature of New Zealand society (discussed earlier in this chapter), can delimit deeper discussions of inequality. This highlights one of the challenges that can be encountered when engaging in social critique of the society of which you are a part. At a personal level, Marjorie was aware of measures of social injustice, and how the effects of these were likely to impact differentially on the students within her school. Thus, as the discussion progressed she began to critically reflect on, and actively explore, how her own understanding of issues that contribute to social injustice might be deepened, and addressed through her professional practice. Marjorie recognised that there could be value in liaising with ‘others’, such as the Pasifika counsellor who had recently been appointed, who, she anticipated, would help to deepen her cultural awareness, and understanding of the issues surrounding social justice.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explored how, or whether, whole-school policies related to social justice concerns have informed the programmes and practices of the career advisors who commented on this area. I have also examined how reflexive moments can assist career advisors to think more deeply, and critically, about their own values and beliefs, and relate these to a social justice context. What resonates throughout is that whilst all of the participants identified that their

schools had varying forms of social justice-related policies, few were able to identify how these had explicitly informed their career education programmes.

Thrupp and Tomlinson (2005) observed that:

As policy discourses have become individuated, notions of equity, redistribution and the common good, usually associated with social justice, have been conspicuously absent. The licence given to people to pursue personal and familial profit has been at odds with talk of a cohesive community. (p. 551)

This may go some way towards explaining why there was a conspicuous absence in the participants' accounts about the interconnected nature of ethnicity, socio-economic class and gender as potential sites of group and/or structural oppression and domination (Young, 1990). Where explicit references were made by participants to whole-school policies in relation to issues of discrimination and Māori and Pasifika underachievement, for example, the 'problem' was seen to rest with the student and/or their culture, where they were identified as being at risk of *their own* 'failure'. It was also noticeable that whilst career advisors in Catholic schools were generally familiar with the term 'social justice', and some career advisors made reference to the implicit engagement with social justice through their programmes, little connection was made to the social justice-related policies of their schools. Yet without coherent articulation of what social justice means within a career education context, and identification of how whole-school policies that connect with social justice fit within the career education curriculum, how

will career advisors know what they are actually engaging with, and implementing, in and through their practice (Gale, 2000)?

The question here, then, is how can career advisors be confident that what they are doing is in the best interests of their students, particularly those who are the least advantaged (Young, 1990), and can/do ideas and values about social justice that are well articulated contribute positively to practice, or do they constrain? Clark (2006) argued that:

If policies are to be adopted which have as their aim the promotion of social justice and require particular strategies to achieve this goal, then we need to have a very clear understanding of what social justice, as an end, commits us to". (p. 272)

Clark is not arguing for a utopian 'end game', but emphasises the importance of clarity regarding how the theory and language of social in/justice is being employed in policy. Hence, there is a need to be more explicit about what such policies are seeking to achieve (Griffiths, 2003), which forms of social justice are being called upon (see Irving, 2010a), and greater openness about how, whether, and/or where these are *actually* informing practice. However, the use of technical-rational measures to judge the success of social justice-related policies, such as the number of girls or non-Pākehā students entering non-traditional occupations or continuing into tertiary education, can delimit practice by shifting attention away from broader issues. Equality of opportunity, for example, needs to

be located within a broader social justice discourse which values and affirms social group difference, and opens up existing power relations to scrutiny. This may contribute to the challenging of dominant norms, and go some way to addressing the potential for domination and oppression.

What makes the career education curriculum different from many academic subject areas is that it engages students in a learning process that connects with the messiness and everyday realities of social life. Consequently, concerns with social in/justice should not simply be restricted to school policies, processes and practices, but also considered, contextualised and explored in relation to the world beyond. This is particularly pertinent as it can lay bare oppressive and dominating structures, and how these play out in practice, thus opening up spaces for resistance. In the following chapters I will return to many of these issues as I explore further the discursive influences that underlie, and inform, career advisors understanding of career education, and the practices they engage in.



## **Chapter Eight**

### **Liberal humanism at play: Shaping and shifting career/identity**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous three chapters I discussed the multiple ways in which policy statements, whether emanating from the Ministry of Education or the school itself, can inform how social in/justice is conceptualised and positioned within career education, and might construct discursive boundaries around this curriculum area. I have shown that this curriculum area continues to be premised on liberal humanist assumptions, although complicated by the impact of neoliberalism on the priorities set for career education (see chapter five). In this chapter I move from the textual authority of policy, and how this was interpreted by the career advisors in my study, to a deeper philosophical exploration of the assumptions they drew upon as they sought to constitute the career/identities of their students, and how this informed their understanding of career education. From a social justice perspective, this will help to illuminate how the benevolent ‘good intentions’ within liberal humanism (Tomlinson, 2001) play out in (career) practice.

As discussed in chapter two, career identity and personal identity are becoming intertwined in career education and guidance in New Zealand. Captured

by a 'new' career discourse, everyone is now deemed to have a career which is primarily self-constructed (see Patton & McMahon, 2006), and can occur in a range of paid and non-paid settings (MoE, 2009a). Informed by liberal humanist discourse, in which an essentialised, psychological, prediscursive self is believed to exist prior to, and outside of, language, culture (LaPointe, 2010) and a collective sense of belonging (Young, 1990), career education seeks to enable students' to form a stable self-concept, i.e. a clear sense of who 'I' am, by uncovering their (assumed) latent talents and 'essential' qualities. Through a process involving introspection, reflection, self-examination, and investigation, it is envisaged that *individuals* will discover (what is considered to be) their true essence (Weedon, 1997). It is also believed that this will facilitate the development of rational capacities, and a sense of personal responsibility for their decisions and actions. Allied to this, is an expectation that students will thus be able to identify the kind of life they desire in the future and, in their pursuit of self-fulfilment and self-actualisation (Sinclair & Monk, 2005), feel 'empowered' to aspire to be 'the best they can be' (Osberg & Biesta, 2010).

Like the transition from a pupa to a butterfly, it is anticipated that career education will enable unique, 'free-floating', *individual subjects* to emerge, who are able to make 'realistic' and 'well-informed' career decisions that relate to 'appropriate' educational/occupational choices (see MoE, 2009a). The perceived veracity of these choices are based on how well students come to 'truly know' and accept who they are, which informs how they ascribe 'authentic meaning' to the information they receive and the events that surround them (Traynor, 2009). For

example, one of the aims of career education is to enable students to uncover an inner ‘authentic self’ by helping them to gain a deep understanding of their individual personality traits, skills and talents. This is supported by the fostering of ‘positive attitudes’ and behaviours (see <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz>). Hence, as LaPoint (2010) observes: “career identity is approached as a variable that is internal to the individual” (p. 1). Here, career advisors are (re)positioned as a knowledge/able facilitator, there to assist students to construct ‘realistic’ career plans that are congruent with a stable self-concept (Savickas, 2011), within a predetermined world (Colley, 2000).

However, essentialist notions embedded within liberal humanism exist in tension with structural explanations where, for example, individual characteristics and career/identity are ascribed by teachers on the basis of a student’s social group location (Gale & Densmore, 2000), rather than as effects of power. Through institutional practices, desired values, behaviours, beliefs and attributes that reflect dominant norms may thus be reified (Gale & Densmore, 2000), resulting in the career/identities of those who do not conform being “defined as different” (Young, 1990, p. 170), or deficient. For example, within mainstream schooling educational deficits ascribed to Māori students, with regards to individual behaviours and engagement with learning, are judged to be embedded within their cultural practices (Bishop, 2003; Bishop, 2005; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2009; Stewart, 2012). Thus, who ‘I’ am, and who ‘I’ might become may be influenced by socially derived assumptions which can shape conceptualisations of ‘career’, and inform our understanding of ‘self’. Hence there can be an

individual *and* a collective dimension to essentialist discourse that sits in tension with how ‘self’ is conceptualised, and whose version of ‘self’ is deemed to be desirable. Therefore, I begin this chapter by considering the multiple ways in which the career advisors in my study drew on psychological conceptions of the ‘self’ informed by liberal humanism, whereby individual difference and ability is believed to emanate from within (Gale & Densmore, 2000).

### **A psychological awakening: (In)determinate pathways and (ir)rational destinations**

Liberal humanist discourse, based on the premise that each individual has a core inner-self or essential identity which “is unique, fixed and coherent” (Weedon, 1997, p. 32), permeates career education (see MoE, 2009a). The need for students to gain a deep understanding of their ‘true-self’, or what Wilson (1997) terms a “self-as-entity . . . which is intimate and bounded” (n.p.), was expressed by many of the career advisors in my study. Career education draws on a liberal humanist discourse in its assumption that if career enactment is to be meaningful and self-fulfilling, a stable and transparent career/identity must be formed from an early age. As Bryony commented, there is a need to be “planting the seed early enough so that [students] are building on their skills the whole time”. Career education is thus positioned as a process of personal development, associated with a series of life/career stages that individuals must successfully navigate if they are to become a ‘whole’, unified, and well-adjusted individual.

The relationship between an unfolding sense-of-self and the emergence of a 'mature' career self-concept was exemplified by Ken as he discussed his own philosophy concerning the main purpose of career education:

[I] see the idea of career as something that is a gradual dawning for the students, starting from year 9 where we want them to develop their awareness of themselves, and of the possibility that if they develop their understanding of themselves that they're going to be starting to think about the fact that what they do in later life, and all those things that can make up career in the broadness of that term, will suit them, and that they will actually enjoy their adult life . . . in career terms, so that self-awareness sort of starts in year 9, and we don't really go beyond that in year 9, we do get them to do a sort of very rudimentary CV and the kind of, you know, just starting to get an appreciation of the fact that they have skills, they have strengths, they have likes and dislikes . . . Year 10 we move on . . . we develop a learning and career plan and get them thinking in a bit more depth about career . . . and then by year 11 when we visit them they're having to make option choices, they're having to fine down their thinking. (Ken)

Thus, Ken constructed career learning as an individual project, where making 'good' decisions was part of a consciously planned, age-related, rational-linear pathway. Here, the individual subject is endowed with a sense of agency, that is irrevocably tied to notions of freedom, personal empowerment and self-

direction (Seaman, 2008), as long as they remain true to their inner-self (Wilson, 1997). This was apparent as Ken continued to share his thoughts with me:

I have a little analogy that I use with them because . . . when [students] think about career they think they have to plan their whole life . . . I say to them all, if . . . you had to suddenly leave and go to Wellington, it's night-time and you're thinking I'm going to be driving to Wellington, it's going to be dark, perhaps, it's winter, it's raining, and you know there's all these terrible things down near Wellington, I might crash somewhere down Paraparam or something, if you worry about that you're probably going to go off the road before you get to the southern motorways, so I want you to think about what's in your headlights now, and if you can plan effectively for what you can see in your headlights . . .

Ken told me that this analogy is used to allay student panic in relation to career planning. This is informed by his belief that telling students “you don't have to plan your whole life” but focus on what is immediately ahead, proves to be “very empowering for kids, to feel that they're not having to plan their whole life”. Here, the individual is positioned as a rational ‘free’ agent who is ‘empowered’ through career education to exert (self) control over their immediate future. The journey Ken talks of is self-initiated, self-managed, of limited duration with a finite end, and restricted to what can be seen (or known). It is constructed as a journey that is taken alone, without the involvement and support of others, isolated from the wider social context (such as the other road users or diversions

that may be encountered along the way, to continue the analogy), and oblivious of the structural constraints that may impede its successful completion. Impulse, emotion, access to material resources, and a sense of collective responsibility do not feature. Moreover, whilst students are encouraged to think about the potential hazards involved, successful completion rests with the individual who *must* avoid any consideration of risk through ‘positive thinking’, if they are to undertake this potentially hazardous journey.

The discursive liberal humanist formations articulated by Ken were taken up, and expanded on, by Gaynor. In response to my question about the strengths of career education Gaynor drew attention to “students being able to find a direction, and know who they are, and make them more aware and a better person I guess, for want of a better word, becoming a stronger person I guess”. Gaynor’s understanding of the ultimate goal of career education was to enable students to cultivate their ‘inner-strength’ by helping them to establish a purpose for their lives, and achieve a sense of self-direction (Seaman, 2008). Career education thus became a process of personal development and continual self-improvement, with the identification and pursuit of future possibilities ultimately leading to self-fulfilment. As Gaynor commented, “it’s not necessarily [students] coming to the decision that I want to be a doctor or a dentist or, sometimes they will come to those decisions, but it’s more a sort of what will fit with me”. The focus here is on notions of compromise in relation to the individual’s *own* situation and their emerging self-concept, thus giving their life, and career aspirations, a sense of personal meaning and purpose.

As we moved on to discuss possible weaknesses or gaps in career education, Gaynor suggested that individuals, and particularly teenagers, may be unaware of the ‘skills’ they already possess, or lack the necessary maturity and/or support to make ‘good’ decisions. Moreover, she expressed the view that students may be reluctant to engage in a process of introspection, or be in a position to accept, and respond positively, to the need for personal growth and development. For some individuals, and particularly teenagers, their understanding of their capabilities and responsibilities are seen, by Gaynor, as elusive:

I guess that sometimes, or with teenagers, they’re not, might not be ready to accept some of those things about themselves, or to acknowledge the fact they have skills . . . So there’s, yeah, things like their not knowing or their not being ready to make any decisions, or sort of not being at the right place in their life, or having the right kind of support that might help them make those decisions as well. [Gaynor]

Jenna echoed many of the above comments about the importance of ‘self’ discovery in response to my question about how she understood the term career education. She mused, “career education . . . I guess is the nuts and bolts, the whole thing of them learning about their skills, and their personal qualities . . .”. When asked to outline her understanding of career development, she drew attention to the perceived value of psychological testing:



[career development] it's kind of, I guess, having a look at what the possibilities might be for the future of where that career might lead . . . based on what their strengths seem to be because *we've got quite a good psychometric test which sort of shows you quite clearly whether they're a leader or follower* [emphasis added] . . . so you might talk to them about, well you know initially you might be doing an apprenticeship but [it] looks like you've got the skills or the aptitude that you might end up wanting to own that business and . . . you get a sense of whether what you're talking about is pie in the sky or whether it's something that they probably have thought about or on some level, yeah. [Jenna]

In the excerpt above, Jenna utilised psychometric testing to determine innate personality traits and characteristics, and used the information gained to influence her understanding of the future potential of her students. Thus, she appeared to distinguish between those 'born to lead', as a result of their innate entrepreneurial characteristics, and those 'destined to follow', and occupy subordinate roles in the labour market. This is tempered by her self-perception of an individual student's capacity to accept and internalise the given 'truths' they are presented with. Here, the overlapping relationship between career education, and the development of a 'realistic' long-term career identity, is underwritten by a sense of psychological determinism (Richardson, 2012a) and benevolent paternalism (Tomlinson, 2001). The assumed objectivity underlying psychometric approaches restricts the richness that may be gleaned through discursive interactions between self and 'other' (Iversen, 2012). Moreover, psychometric instruments might also be

underscored by biases that may privilege dominant cultural values and social norms (Dodge & Silverberg, 2015; Keegan, Brown & Hattie, 2013).

What the accounts of Ken, Gaynor and Jenna share in common is a liberal humanist understanding of the well-adjusted individual who must develop a stable and secure core career/identity which is rational and knowable. Through this process, it is believed that individual students will be able to make ‘good’ decisions, which are the product of a holistic, rational and unitary understanding of the ‘self-as-entity’. Little account is taken of the wider socio-political and economic environment which is not only implicated in the structuring of opportunities, but also discursively informs the positioning of different groups, and how they might position themselves, in relation to the subject positions made available to them. Thus individuals are situated as atomistic psychological beings, rather than subjects who are also structurally positioned by society (Young, 1990).

### **I think therefore I am: Authentic experience and the constructed ‘self’**

From a liberal humanist perspective, *authentic experience* is an essential component in the development of the conscious and rational ‘known-self’ (see Cosgrove, 2007) as it provides individuals with opportunities to ‘test out’ and refine their career identity through reflection, story-telling, and social interaction (Savickas, 2011). It also enables them to gauge their own understanding of ‘who they are’ in relation to the perceptions others might hold of them (Miller, 2004). As Potter and Wetherell (1987) note, “it is taken for granted that this self, the

object to be discovered, is the centre of experience, an initiator of action, a coherent whole, separate from other distinct selves" (p. 101). By drawing on an inner 'true essence' to interpret their experiences, it is believed that individuals thus give authentic meaning to their feelings, decisions and action(s).

Whilst career advisors are not directly subject *to* career education in the same way as their students, given the different positions of power they occupy in relation to curriculum content, they are active participants in the career learning process. Hence, they may employ their own voice of experience to convey 'authoritative truths' about the 'real world' as they seek to prepare their students to manage uncertain and indeterminate futures. From a social justice perspective, it is important to consider the slipperiness attached to the supposed 'reality' and 'uniqueness' of individual experience, as these are contingent and partial (Nairn, 2005), shaped by the complex interplay of 'self' with/in a politically dynamic and fluid society. As Fox (2008) cogently argues:

no one knows everything about oneself, and accounts of experience are affairs of language, memory, desire, intent, and cognition, which are all problematic, ambiguous, and translations. Whether we pursue desires and needs, they are both socially produced. This does not deny the reality of the experience of desires, needs, and commitments but locates experiences in history as social and material (p. 45).

Therefore, in my discussion of the assumed authenticity of experience, and the meaning(s) participants' attributed to it, I show how this is mediated by the materiality of discourse which not only shapes career/identity, but provides the conditions through which thought, intentions, and action are both constrained and made possible on an ever-changing basis (Davies, 1989).

Several participants reported that their own life experiences were used as exemplars for their students. This was supported by the notion that the 'real life' knowledge they shared would help students to more effectively prepare for their futures, and avoid potential pitfalls. For example, Bryony talked of how, in her life skills class, she was:

teaching the kids that no one else wants . . . Or the kids that certainly haven't passed [academically] and they're here just filling in space and time. So I have all of those kids in my class, and I talk them through that university is not out of their reach, and being a tradesman is the fastest way to owning your home than going to university, and what the student loan actually means in real life. *All of those things that I've personal experience of* [emphasis added] I try and pass on to them.

Drawing on an equality of access discourse, informed by her own experiences, Bryony constructed a world of 'positive' futures through which her students were offered "many ways of seeing and being themselves; [with] many positions to occupy" (Kenway, Willis, Blackmore, & Rennie, 1994, p. 192). However, the

subject positions Bryony made available were located within a conflicting and contradictory discursive web concerning the ‘reality’ of the choices on offer, and the career/identities that she determined might be most appropriate for them (Kenway et al, 1994). Davies (1989) identifies that there is a materiality to discourses which not only shapes identity, but provides the current conditions through which thought and action are both made possible and constrained on an ever-changing basis. For example, through the discourses employed and the language deployed (Adams et al, 2000), Bryony drew from her own experiences to open up the possibility of tertiary study for her students, yet warned them that this entailed the greatest financial risk and may, therefore, be a less appropriate or ‘desirable’ choice. Hence, whilst she espoused notions of individual opportunity and freedom associated with liberal humanism, she also exerted a form of disciplinary power by privileging particular career/identities for this student group that reflected their assumed socio-economic status.

The perceived value of experience, and how it can shape subjectivities in particular ways, was further exemplified in my interview with Joanne. Joanne talked of her career as “a perfect example of the happenstance theory”, characterised by a series of un/planned events that occurred primarily by chance rather than design. As Joanne reflected on her occupational aspirations she commented that, “I went primary teaching because I knew I always wanted to go teaching and I wanted to go into intermediate”, yet this was mediated by her desire “to go up North because that’s where my fiancé was, and there weren’t any primary teaching jobs that I wanted so I went high school [teaching]”. Thus, in

part, Joanne took up a traditional female subject position, where her decision to move to another part of the country to join her fiancé resulted in her making compromises in relation to her own professional aspirations. Joanne located her career progression within a depoliticised and individualised discursive framework, justifying her shift from teaching to sales:

each time something comes up and then I decide I will change, and then someone will say we'd like you to join us in sales, and so I thought why, but it's always been people recognising something that I didn't know, so nothing has been planned, ever, in my career, so you know I've gone from sales back in to teaching, into farming, back in to teaching, and so it's a very happenstance, but very grateful for that because it's given me that huge knowledge that I think is helpful as a careers advisor.

Entwining notions of 'happenstance' with the external attribution of 'hidden' personal qualities, illustrates the fluid, multiple and elusive ways in which Joanne's career/identity was re/constructed on an ongoing basis. Yet, Joanne talked about her experiences as a transparent reflection of the 'real' world, where *she* was able to construct a positive career that was, ostensibly, free from discrimination. Ascribing both symbolic *and* material importance to the lessons learnt in, and through, the uncertainties she had personally experienced, Joanne felt qualified to speak to her students about 'career' with an authentic voice. This was shown when I asked her to consider how occupational or educational progression fitted with the notion of a life/career. She replied:

Well this might be simplistic but I believe that when someone has peeled the onion enough so they really understand why they think and act as they do then it just comes together, and so long as they know that there could be at least . . . three to five or whatever changes in their life, that information is letting them know this is normal, and it's okay to be 35 and still at the adolescent stage of career development . . . to me, *I believe that the more you get to know yourself . . . that hopefully gives them self-confidence to be aware of opportunity because this is what's happened in my life* [emphasis added], and I think, okay I'll do that again.

Thus, Joanne reiterated the liberal humanist claim (discussed earlier in this chapter) that once the outer layers of an individual's 'surface' identity are peeled away, what remains is a 'true' essential self. Acquiring self-knowledge, asserted Joanne, would enable students to emulate her own experiences by confidently traversing the occupational uncertainties they are likely to experience throughout their lives. The internalising of such experience serves to legitimise individual existence, and reinforces the 'rightness', or 'wrongness', of decisions that are taken. Yet within this binary, 'right' and 'wrong' take on a particular significance as it is the *individual* who is held solely responsible for their choices and decisions. Consequently, the role of social structures with regards to the shaping of, and access to, opportunities is eclipsed by a focus on the individual.

Unlike Bryony and Joanne, Jenna raised doubts about whether the traditional concept of career as primarily an occupational identity still had

salience. As we discussed the notion of a holistic career, Jenna identified it as being “all about, sort of, mind, body and spirit”. Thus, she advocated for the “[traditional] idea of career almost disappearing”. She replaced this with “the whole idea of [students] just developing a strong sense of who they are, and a strong sense of their identity . . . and then their first move, wherever that may be, not being their last”. This reflects a broader understanding of career/identity that takes into account the multiple facets of an individual’s life, resonating with the writings of Richardson (1993, 2009, 2012a).

Whilst emphasising the importance of preparing students to manage their life/career effectively, Jenna drew particular attention to “that whole life-work balance”. She commented, “I mean I don’t know whether we really teach them that, or talk to them about that much”. Whilst she “did with adults, you know that sort of whole ‘where does work fit into your whole life’ type of thing”, Jenna consciously omitted this area of study from her school practice. This was justified by her belief that

kids . . . haven’t had [that kind of] experience that you can really talk to them about so much. They’ve had school and they might have had a part-time job, but they’ve not really had a whole job, and talking about how it impacts on their life [this sentence is left unfinished].

Hence, Jenna positions young people as ‘innocent’ and ‘insular’, divorced from the gritty experience(s) of ‘life’ in the adult world. Thus, assumptions are



made about how a young person's lack of *direct* life experiences will limit their understanding of how, for example, career might be holistically conceptualised and differentially experienced. Whilst it is conceivable that the *direct* experiences of many young people in New Zealand may be limited due to their age, they live within a web of social relations through which they are discursively exposed to multiple experiences which occur in a range of contexts, either in an actual or a virtual sense (through social media for example).

The above discussion raises important questions about how the 'voice of experience' might be translated in socially just ways within career education that help to expose the complex workings of oppression and domination. Fox (2008) observes that, "What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always political" (p. 52). Rather than providing a transparent window through which the 'true' world becomes known to the individual, uncritical use of the evidence of experience may reify particular forms of career/identity construction and the shifting subject positions that are discursively made available at particular moments in time (Scott, 1992). For example, by privileging a liberal humanist subject position within career education where the 'self' is seen to reside with/in the individual, attention is shifted away from the political and structural influences on the shaping of career and opportunity, and distort the social dimension of career construction (Stead & Bakker, 2012). Therefore, if career education is to be positioned as a critical social practice (Irving, 2013a) which disrupts normative dominant discourses, there will need to be a rethink about how the notion of experience itself is constituted (Fox,

2008). Regarding ‘experience’ as a social phenomenon which occurs in a range of ‘lived’ or imagined socio-political and cultural settings (Irving, 2010b), career advisors can facilitate a learning process which allows students to explore, interrogate, and envisage how career(s) might be constructed within a range of diverse contexts, and how its enactment might be enabling and/or restrictive for different social groups.

### **Challenging essentialism: Drifting constructions of the ‘self’**

Whilst liberal humanist discourse was dominant in the accounts of many of my participants, and the voice of experience was used to provide salutary examples and legitimate particular worldviews, essentialist explanations were also drawn upon. Essentialism, note Gale and Densmore (2000), “is the belief that individuals have a unique essence that transcends historical and cultural boundaries and/or that there are intrinsic characteristics particular to groups that reinforce these boundaries” (p. 128). As I will show, assumptions about gender, or the use of deficit discourses where negative characteristics are accorded to individuals and/or members of social groups (Thrupp, 2014), can result in the problematising of the person (Reid, 2008). As a result, through the application of normative frameworks in relation to group difference, attention is shifted away from the effects of social structures (Young, 1990).

The complex working of essentialist assumptions was particularly noticeable in the responses of a number of my participants when I asked them whether they felt gender impacted on life plans or career choices. This was

particularly prominent in my interview with Gaynor, a career advisor in a decile 9 girls' school with a predominantly Pākehā student cohort. For Gaynor, occupational aspirations and outcomes were shaped by attributed differences in character traits, and the gendered roles that society assumes for men and women. She stated, "it's sort of that whole perception of society I guess of feminine roles and masculine roles . . . which is why we've still got a lot of unequal roles in senior management and things like that as well". She asserted that:

[gender] does impact on, I mean men can't have children, women can have children, so that's going to have a bigger impact on their careers, rather than men, because they'll take time out, they're still developing skills but it's a different skill set . . .

Thus, Gaynor conceptualised issues of gender difference in essentialist ways. She positioned the masculine/feminine binary as a consequence of biology, reinforced by sex-role expectations (see Davies, 1989; Kristeva, 1981). This explanation was used to legitimate the different career paths and trajectories of women and men. Moreover, for those women who chose to have children, and thus voluntarily absented themselves from the labour market for periods of time, their disrupted progression was deemed to be inevitable.

Gaynor also generated a relationship between the ways in which skills acquisition in different contexts contributed to the shaping of a gendered 'self', which lead to differential outcomes where, she noted, "it's all going to have an

impact on the kind of person you are, and the kind of career path you end up taking”. Whilst Gaynor drew on liberal feminist discourses by identifying issues such as sex-role stereotyping as being a fundamental source of women’s disadvantage (Middleton, 1993; Skelton, 2010), she located this within an essentialist discourse that, in career/occupational terms, not only differentiates the desires of women from men (Dyke & Murphy, 2006), but has a tendency to position women in subordinate economic roles which is attributed to their biology (te Velde, 2011). Thus, Gaynor actively questioned whether ‘career’ choice, and occupational progression, *can* be the same for women and men.

Young (1990) argues that being/becoming a woman is more than a process of self-identification, shifting psychological and/or social perceptions, and essentialised biological difference. It also reflects the multiple ways in which female subjects are positioned in relation to males through social and institutional structures (Young, 1990), *and* by other individuals (Levinson, 1997), both male *and* female. Pihama and Mara (1994) maintain that gender should not be confused with biological characteristics as it is a social construction that “encompasses the beliefs, values, roles expectations and practices which are associated with being either male or female within a given cultural context” (pp. 215-216). Therefore, rather than having unfettered freedom to choose who they would like to be, girls (and women) avail themselves, consciously and unconsciously, of the subject positions that are made available to them by negotiating the multiple discourses that normalise their existence (Davies, 1989; Young, 1990). Thus, the fracturing of gendered roles, and the weakening of traditional anchors, can be seen to have

further complicated the lives of women in particular, as they are exposed to ever more complex, confused and contradictory discourses (Wetherell, Stiven & Potter, 1987; also see Becker, 2010). For example, a dominant discourse circulates that posits 'girls can do anything' (Goodkind, 2009; Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012; Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin, & Frame, 2005).

Gendered identity discourses do not stand alone, but are implicated with the workings of power that are embedded within a range of other contextual factors such as ethnicity and socio-economic class (Barker & Irving, 2005; Bowl & Tobias, 2011; Bradley, 1996; Keddie, 2009; Ohn, 2009; Ringrose, 2007). In part, the intersection of gender with ethnicity was illustrated in my interview with Joanne who drew parallels between her earlier experiences as a Māori student, and the contemporary challenges faced by the girls in her school. In response to my question about whether ethnicity impacts on life plans and choices, she located her answer within a gendered context, relating this to her own struggle to counter cultural deficit discourses that position Māori as troubled and troublesome. She commented that:

I think [ethnicity] definitely has an impact, and being put down as a Māori when I was little, not because I was stopy, that was my driving force to show everyone I'd be top. Now I hate everyone to do that because that was quite a hard personal battle . . . I also see that in the girls here . . . I personally think that in year 9 and 10 the girls should have separate classes

so they're allowed to be themselves, and then when they merge the boys are up to that standard of academia . . .

Although 60% of the student cohort in Joanne's school was of Pasifika and/or Māori ethnicity, it was unclear whether she was only referring to this particular group. Joanne's primary concern appeared to be the lack of opportunity for girls to be able to assert themselves academically in the presence of boys. She suggested that separate classes would provide girls with a safe and supportive learning environment where their sense of identity would not be compromised. Teaching girls in separate classes during early adolescence was also justified by her belief that the academic maturity of boys is slower. She went on to tell me that, "I've seen so many girls trying to dumb themselves down so they're not standing out". When I asked Joanne whether they had ever had separate groups for girls and boys, the complex and contradictory nature of gendered discourses, and how they are articulated within educational settings, became more apparent. She informed me "we have actually trialled that for girls, [but] I don't think there was a huge difference, enough to continue it, and in the end sometimes it's expediency versus the other [which remained unnamed]". Although she does not actually elaborate on what was done or how success was measured, it would appear that a pragmatic decision was taken to discontinue this practice.

Joanne drew on discourses that construct academic learning as both a personal struggle and a gendered experience (Beckett, 2001). Thus, the opportunity for girls to *collectively* develop their academic capacities, and engage

in a process of ‘self-determination’ in single-sex classes might be construed, at one level, to be an enabling practice. However, classrooms, like schools, are not solely places of academic learning, they are also social spaces. For example, in recent years an assumed crisis in masculinity has become prominent, articulated through a discourse of ‘failing boys’<sup>16</sup>, which essentialises boys’ (and girls’) behaviours and their approaches to learning. Bowl and Tobias (2012) challenge the assumptions that boys’ education is ‘problematic’; that education has become feminised and is thus not conducive to boys; and that the solution is to ‘tailor’ education in ways that accommodate masculine ways of learning (pp. 14-28). They contend that “masculinities and femininities are socially produced and constructed” (p. 24). As such they can be both resisted and recast. Therefore, to simply suggest that the presence of boys in classrooms is problematic due to their lack of academic maturity downplays the normative dynamic of gendered power relations, and fails to recognise *why* differences exist between and amongst males (Bowl & Tobias, 2012), *and* females.

The importance of ethnicity on career/identity formation, and the multiple ways in which this intersects with gender, were more clearly articulated by Rosemary. As a career advisor in a co-educational school where 95% of the student cohort identified as Pasifika or Māori, Rosemary drew attention to how the career decisions and work choices made by her students when they participated in the ‘Real Game’ reflected their cultural attachment. In brief, the ‘Real Game’ is a career development activity that is used in most publicly funded

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Davies and Saltmarsh, 2007; Epstein, Elwood, Hey & Maw, 1998; Ferguson, 2012; Lashlie, 2005; Martino & Meyen, 2001; Skelton & Francis, 2011.

New Zealand schools, and encourages students to engage with the implications of different career/occupational choices using simulated employment-related scenarios (see [www.careers.govt.nz/educators-practitioners/tools-and-activities/the-real-game](http://www.careers.govt.nz/educators-practitioners/tools-and-activities/the-real-game)). The overall focus of the 'Real Game' module Rosemary used was on participation in full-time paid employment (part-time and/or casual employment is not accommodated by this activity), and how students might balance their values, interests and expectations against potential occupational choices. Rosemary commented that:

When we do the Real Game they all want to live close to their families, they all want to provide for their extended families and they want to be living in a community very similar to ours, which is probably different from other schools who are thinking more individually about benefits for themselves . . . so we're looking at the whole person and their communities, and how they're going to make the best choices for themselves and their community.

Here, Rosemary highlighted how the career aspirations of her students reflected a collectivist worldview (see Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005), and likely contrasted with the values of the majority Pākehā population in New Zealand where there is an assumed stronger individualised ethos (Dries, 2011).

The complexity of the career decision-making process, the multiple dimensions of cultural expectations, and how language is used to construct a



range of subject positions, is particularly noticeable in the following excerpts.

When I asked Rosemary whether she foresaw challenges in trying to her encourage students to balance their occupational or educational plans against life plans, her understanding of the effects of cultural influence was articulated in more detail:

well some students might be, not want, when they make their choices they make their choices perhaps so they can stay at home or care for sick family members, or might be thinking well, you know, that they only need to work, you know, if they're women they don't need to work for too long if they're having, you know, going to be having families in the future. So the challenge is to get them to balance their own needs against the needs of the community and to make their choices where they can achieve their potential.

Initially there was a sense of gender neutrality in Rosemary's language as she talked of *students* taking into account familial expectations in their exploration of future career possibilities. This reflects how, within collectivist cultures, the development of 'self' is often a complex negotiated process, with individual desires mediated by responsibility to extended family and community. Thus, Rosemary's reference to the negotiation of cultural expectations as a "balancing act" recognises that students may exert a degree of agency in how their futures are determined. Whilst the privileging of the desires of the individual/ised self fits comfortably within liberal humanist philosophy, this perspective is inconsistent

with a collectivist worldview where the development of a cultural sense of identity may take precedence (Kao, 2000). For example, Stewart (2012) has identified that “Māori people experience themselves as different, but not completely different, from non-Māori, as captured by the common expression that ‘Māori walk in two worlds’” (p. 54). This assertion could equally be applied to those with a Pasifika heritage, or from other non-Western cultures. Hence, career decisions can be the product of compromise where, in some situations, the individual pursues opportunities that may not be their first choice, but reflect the family’s and/or community’s interests (Greene & Debacker, 2004). However, Rosemary’s reference to the importance of students’ making choices that will enable *them* to achieve *their* individual ‘potential’ implies that this may be in tension with the cultural desires of family and/or community.

Rosemary also drew attention to a gender divide in her talk of some girls envisaging futures as mothers and homemakers. This is elaborated further in the following extract where she commented on the ways in which gender and culture impacted on career decisions:

most of the girls actually are very motivated, but we still get some students that aren’t *expected* [emphasis added] to be working at all because they’re *expected* [emphasis added] to be minding sick family members, sick parents, or going back to the Islands to care for grandparents, or they’re *expecting* [emphasis added] to be in a relationship quite quickly . . . I mean

some of course leave because they're pregnant, but most of the girls are quite determined and quite far sighted.

Here, there was a subtle shift in terminology from a language of 'choice' which she utilised earlier, to a more deterministic use of the term 'expect'. A dichotomy was constructed between the majority of girls who *choose* to be well motivated, determined, and forward looking; and the minority (of young women in particular) who are dutiful and acquiescent, making restricted 'choices' that conform to cultural expectations as 'carers'.

The gendered subject positions that may be made available to young women from collectivist cultures was also mentioned by Louise, a career advisor who worked in a girls' school where the student cohort was comprised of 43% Pasifika, 17% Māori, 15% Asian/Indian, 11% Pākehā and 11% 'others'. Louise observed that some girls engaged positively with a range of gendered subjectivities when contemplating their future career options:

I think in certain [social groups] like Pacific Island culture, Māori, and even the Muslim cultures, the whole thing about being a wife, mother, are part of what young, certainly the girls here take into account when they make decisions, it's probably more so than the co-ed school I worked at, it's there where you discuss life after school. For some of them, it is, if you like, their career aspiration.

Thus, both Rosemary and Louise identified the multiple ways in which non-Western cultural values might influence how career/identities are imagined, constructed and enacted. Yet, within the career *education* literature little attention is given to those career choices that are enacted outside of the formal labour market, such as the role of wife and mother, or full time parent and/or homemaker - which in theory is gender neutral. Such activities are identified as career interruptions at best, or positioned as peripheral to their *real* career which can only be realised within paid employment. This reinforces the notion of career/identity as primarily an economic concept, implicated in discourses about the work-life balance and the need for labour flexibility. As the New Zealand Ministry for Women (MfW) state on their website:

Increasing the opportunities for women to contribute to the workforce to the full extent of their skills and abilities will assist New Zealand to further develop a productive and competitive economy. Increasing women's participation in paid employment improves outcomes for themselves, their families, decreases benefit dependence, and increases productivity" (n.d.).

Hence, women who intend to engage in paid labour, aspire to 'meaningful' careers (in an occupational sense), and display a desire to be economically independent, are valorised. This is found in the work of New Zealand research reported by Gibb, Fergusson, Horwood and Boden (2014) who noted that early motherhood (before the age of 20) leads to long-term economic disadvantage. They suggest that "policies and initiatives aimed at mitigating or reducing

economic disadvantage should include some component aimed as deferral of pregnancy” (p. 9). Such behaviour is hailed as a virtue for *all* women, regardless of culture or desire, signifying an end to state welfare dependency, and freeing them from economic oppression. What this position disavows, however, is a *collective* economic and social responsibility, vested in the state, towards the nurturing of future generations of New Zealanders, and ensuring the wellbeing of *all* citizens.

Teenage pregnancy and early motherhood, meanwhile, is used to signify individual failure, deviant social behaviour, and/or flawed moral values (Breheny & Stephens, 2010). Not only are young mothers positioned as being ‘at risk’ of unfulfilled futures, the social and economic disadvantage that is seen to accrue is attributed to their own individual ‘irresponsibility’ (Marie, Fergusson & Boden, 2008). Thus, they are positioned as the perpetrators of their own oppression. There is also a cultural dimension to this, with the children of young Māori mothers identified by the state as being prone to future criminal behaviour (Ministry of Social Development, 2008).

The conceptual challenge posed by cultural difference for career advisors from Western backgrounds was highlighted by Marjorie, a Palagi (white European) career advisor in a boys’ school with a student population of predominantly Tongan and Samoan heritage. When asked about the influence of gender on how a holistic career might be conceptualised, she reflected on her own

identity and experiences before moving on to explain why she felt this was not a primary issue:

[as] a middle aged middle class Palagi female in a Pacific Island boys' school, gender, I must say I have learnt a lot. I've got sons myself now, that's taught me a lot about boys. I think that has made a big difference, it does help, when you live it yourself in your personal life and realise that there is a difference between boys and girls in the way they communicate, the way they see things, I find it [this sentence remains unfinished]. I'm possibly less worried about that at school than I am about the cultural differences, because I think that maybe the gender ones are more overt and more easily dealt with, and the cultural ones are deeper and more difficult to get to know.

Reflecting on her personal experiences as a mother, *all* boys were positioned as being 'the same', reiterating my earlier discussion in this section with regards to gendered subject positions. However, as will be shown, gender difference re-emerged as an issue of concern, yet is differentiated by assumed cultural practices. Marjorie talked of how she often projected her own values onto the culture practices of her students:

I make assumptions all the time that are found not to be valid because the students I am dealing with are Tongan and Samoan and they often see things differently . . . I try not to make assumptions but it's hard not to

because our values are so embedded, it's very hard to know your own values . . . I think that for our students what I would see as a 'success' . . . might be what they say is a success, but may not feel it's a success . . .

For Marjorie there was a sense of personal insecurity due to her lack of knowledge of the 'other'. This was displayed in the tension and uncertainty she expressed regarding the potential differences between her own views, values and expectations, and those of her students. Moreover, as she engaged in a reflexive process she also recognised that the concept of success may be culturally derived, and not hold the same meaning for all.

In the following excerpt, Marjorie called upon an essentialist gendered discourse as she responded to my question about whether there were any potential tensions between the school's expectations and her own:

I don't know if tensions is the right word, difficulties to overcome. Maybe it's that cultural thing coming back to bear . . . but difficulties such as boys turning up, boys filling in forms, boys being organised, boys actually doing it as opposed to me, maybe even taking it, that kind of thing, so the practicalities of the detail of everyday life . . . the school wants to see the boys succeeding in work, in study, something, when they leave school, and informed and confident, and growing in knowledge while they're at school . . . but how will I achieve it, that's where the difficulty lies. But we're all [the school] working towards the common goal.

There is a noticeable sense of cultural dissonance between the institution's expectations, Marjorie's sense of personal/professional responsibility to 'make things happen', and whether the students themselves are aware of, and committed to, the same 'shared goals'. This is evident in the degree of frustration she expressed concerning, what might be perceived as, the 'laid back' behaviour of her students, and their failure to take responsibility for their actions. Marjorie positioned herself as one who knew what was required of herself *and* her students, but was unsure about how to achieve this. In a recent report by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (2014), it was noted that even though school principals felt they were creating collaborative learning environments "investment in activities that enhance the self-confidence and self-belief of students in school settings is limited" (p. 5). Taking a somewhat gender-neutral stance, the report paid little attention to boys' engagement more specifically. Hence, the lack of research into the relationship between Pasifika boys, schooling (Ferguson, Gorinski, Wendt Samu, & Mara, 2008) and their relationships with career advisors/teachers inhibits current understanding of how this issue might best be addressed.

In my discussion of essentialism, what emerged is better understood when viewed through the prism of hegemonic masculinities, which intersects with ethnicity and socio-economic class in a range of complex ways. Connell (2012) contends that within contemporary Australia (and possibly elsewhere), hegemonic masculinities are embodied within the corporate world which, through its display of "callousness towards poverty and social distress [have become]



institutionalized in the political world as neoliberalism” (p. 14)<sup>17</sup>. This coalesces with masculine values and behaviours associated with the ‘ideal neoliberal worker’, such as individualism, competitiveness, and ‘image management’ (Lewis & Humbert, 2010). This has resonance within a New Zealand context. Horton (2007) contends that hegemonic masculinity is embedded within a discourse of the idealised ‘Kiwi good bloke’: embodied by the New Zealand All Blacks rugby player who demonstrates competitiveness, aggression, tenacity, and the expectation of ‘success’ at all costs. Thus, hegemonic masculinities can contribute to oppressive environments by subordinating those girls *and* boys who do not identify with this ‘ideal’ (Jackson, 1998) through its devaluation of other forms of masculinity (Wyn & White, 1997).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explored the importance attached to the development of a liberal humanist known ‘self’ within career education, and highlighted the ongoing tension between notions of agency and structure. I identified that career/identity may be inscribed and internalised in multiple ways, and showed how the turn to experience, and essentialist discourse, can shape career advisors understanding of what they believe is ‘right’ and ‘true’, for their students *and* themselves.

In the accounts of the career advisors, liberal humanist discourse was located at the heart of their practice. This reflects the discursive influence of

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<sup>17</sup> Neoliberalism was discussed in earlier chapters, and will be developed further in chapter nine.

developmentalist theory which is linked to notions of ‘age and stage’, such as Super’s (1990) life-span and life-space model, and continues to inform career education in New Zealand (see Careers New Zealand, n.d.b; MoE, 2009a). Moreover, career advisors tended to endow individuals with unique and/or predetermined characteristics based on their location within social groups. It was anticipated that career education would help them to overcome any assumed deficits or disadvantages by facilitating their progress towards ‘realistic’ career decision-making. Hence, participants placed much importance on assisting students to ‘get it right’ in their desire to assist them to construct a stable career/identity. Consequently, whilst this opened up a range of subject positions, at the same time possible alternatives were closed down through the career advisors’ conceptions of what constituted a ‘good’ and ‘appropriate’ career choice for individual students. Thus, the conditions were created through which students (and teachers) were obliged “to take themselves up as a knowable, recognisable identity who speaks for themselves and who accepts responsibility for their actions” (Laws & Davies, 2000, p. 208). In varying degrees, *some* recognition was given to the influence of the wider social context where identity construction and career decision making was seen to be part of a complex mediated social process, yet this remained peripheral.

What the liberal humanist (and developmentalist) paradigm fails to account for are the multiple, fluid, and constantly shifting ways in which concepts of the ‘self’ are discursively formed (Wilson, 1997). Here, career/identity is (re)constructed by, and concomitantly for, individuals as they interact with the

discursive signs, signals and language-in-use (Lock & Strong, 2010) which they are exposed to within the/ir everyday world(s). Hence, as Fox (2008) observes, far from being unitary, individual identity is elusive, and can never be *truly* known. For example, in this chapter I showed how gendered expectations continue to exert an influence on ‘who’ girls (and boys) might be/become, which exist in tension with the assumed ‘freedoms’ extolled in liberal humanist concerns with equality.

Thus, the voice of experience, and a belief in the development of an ‘authentic self’ can deflect attention from the multiple ways in which dominant social, political and economic discourses (such as the emergence of neoliberalism) contribute to the shifting subject positions made available at different points in time (Scott, 1992). Alongside this, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic class also intersect and contributes to the shaping of career/identifies. Hence, I have identified “multiple [competing and contradictory] forces at work in and through individuals and groups” (Gale & Densmore, 2000, p. 124), which informs how social in/justice is understood. Consequently, the career options that emerge for young people, and what they construct as desirable, may reflect how different possibilities are recognised, positioned, valued, and legitimated by significant ‘others’, such as their peers, families, communities, *and* state institutions (Richardson, 2009).

In the following chapter I examine how the individualised and benevolent characteristics associated with liberal humanism (Tomlinson, 1988) sit in tension

with neoliberalism which has appropriated and reframed many of its philosophical goals, and now informs schooling within New Zealand (see N. Lewis, 2003).

Locating this within a depoliticised discourse of credentialism, which is implicated within the neoliberal knowledge economy, I consider how this has contributed to the multiple, complex and contradictory subject positions being made available (Larner, 2003) to career advisors (and hence their students), and contributed to competing conceptions of social justice within a career/education context.

## Chapter Nine

### **A neoliberal re/writing of career/education: Constructing the responsabilised and enterprising ‘subject’**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I discussed the multiple and contrasting ways in which liberal humanist and essentialist discourses influenced the thinking of New Zealand career advisors with regards to the career/identity formation of students. I showed how connections were made with the notion of ‘self-discovery’ as a means of facilitating ‘rational’ and ‘realistic’ career decisions. I also signalled that many of the characteristics of liberal humanism are being overwritten by a broader discursive range of political ideas and practices associated with neoliberalism.

In this chapter I examine how the political discourse(s) of neoliberalism, which has been dominant in New Zealand since the 1980s, has appropriated and reframed many of the philosophical principles of liberal humanism<sup>18</sup>, leading to contradiction and confusion within career education. From a social justice perspective, consideration is given to how the market-oriented goals of neoliberalism, and its premise of the competitive, ‘selfish individual’, sit in tension with liberal humanist notions of ‘self-discovery’, and distributivist concerns with equality of access to opportunity. Attention is paid to whether

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<sup>18</sup> This was discussed in more detail in chapter two.

career advisors, perhaps unintentionally, actively reinscribe a neoliberal economic agenda through their understanding of career education. I also examine how the inscription of an individualised depoliticised discourse which is “unencumbered by collective identities” (Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012, p. 65), has shaped the processes and practices of career education, framed the concept of social justice within this curriculum area, and made available complex and contradictory subject positions to career advisors (and in/directly to their students).

### **Credentialing (career) education: Constructing the learner/citizen**

The normalising of academic qualifications has contributed to, and legitimated, an age of credential inflation, with many students delaying their transition to the labour market (Higgins, 2002; Lakes & Carter, 2011; Roberts, 2005; Wyn, Cuervo, Smith & Woodman, 2010), and continuing their education beyond age 16 (Higgins, Nairn & Sligo, 2010; Webster, 2008). It is noticeable, that in the CEG guidelines (MoE, 2009a) it is not until years 12 and 13 when students are expected to “begin to visualise themselves in pathways beyond school [and] understand how school qualifications relate to tertiary education, training options, and to occupations” (p. 16). Allied to this is the link between education and the ‘knowledge economy’ (Nairn & Higgins, 2007), and the importance attached to lifelong learning (Brine, 2006; Field, 2006; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Zepke, 2009), which has become part of the everyday discourse in New Zealand (Department of Labour, 2008; Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012; Vaughan, 2010) and elsewhere (see Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004).

The commodification of qualifications (Jarvis, 2001), and the (presumed) move towards a knowledge-intensive high-skills economy in response to the global economic challenge (Houghton & Sheehan, 2000), are embedded within the neoliberal knowledge economy discourse (Mutch, 2013b; Patrick, 2013). Within this discourse, the development of highly skilled and qualified workers is regarded as crucial, an economic imperative that will determine the future well-being of nations (Peters, 2003). By raising student achievement and facilitating access to tertiary study for *all*, schools are held responsible for ensuring that the future workforce will have the knowledge and skills valued by the global labour market (Brown & Lauder, 2006). Moreover, credentialed learning opportunities are positioned as the panacea for social injustice (Brown & Lauder, 2006), as they are expected to “open up and democratise career pathways” (Lehmann, 2012, p. 203). As “economically self-interested” (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 314) consumers, students are expected to be/come willing participants in the race for credentials, and the competition for jobs by taking *individual* responsibility for their ongoing employability, and being able to offer employers a ‘value-added product’, a situation not unique to New Zealand. For example, Winchester (2001) has noted that the Department for Education and Employment in Britain has actively reinforced the importance attached to “attainment, and ultimately employability, rather than helping young people to develop and achieve their potential in its broadest sense” (p. 19). This raises questions about the market/able value of qualifications, what they might come to signify to employers, young people *and* career advisors, and how this might impact on how social justice is conceptualised and located within career education.

*Raising academic achievement: A qualified success*

As I identified in chapter 2, the Ministry of Education has set targets for the achievement of qualifications, linking these to enhanced economic competitiveness and productiveness. In a number of important respects, school effectiveness is being measured against how many NCEA passes students gain, at what levels of credit (Crooks, 2011; MoE. 2012), and how many actually continue on to tertiary level learning, with a place at university being the most vaunted. The discursive reasoning beneath this are the dual assumptions that the acquisition of qualifications offers the promise of social mobility (Young, 1990), and that the emerging knowledge economy will require workers who have higher order competencies (Brown & Lauder, 2006; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), if they are to be employable and economically successful (Lauder, Young, Daniels, Balarin & Lowe, 2012).

The importance attached to the market value of qualifications, and how these might contribute to perceived boundless choice and opportunity, was highlighted by Bryony, whose student cohort was primarily from more affluent backgrounds. As we talked about career education, she identified its strengths as being:

basically opening kids eyes to what's available, and yeah, giving them options, it's all about options, and I tell them every day, you know the better you do in the classroom the more options you have, you leave school with your university entrance credits and your [NCEA] level 3, and



then you can do anything you want, you know, you can go on to university if you would like to because you've got that opportunity, you can take an apprenticeship up, or you can get on a 'plane and go somewhere else and work somewhere else for a bit, like, I mean you have options if you do well in school. [Bryony, decile 8 school]

Hence, qualifications were positioned as the gateway to opportunity, based on the notion that these will open up a 'world of choice', both literally and metaphorically.

Whereas Bryony *encouraged* students to continue with their studies, the ethos in Patricia's school encompassed the push towards higher levels of academic achievement, and the expectation that students would continue to pursue these in further study. Patricia noted that "in the narrower sense, the [decile 4] school's very focused on high achieving academically, and that's in school results and in the courses that the students go on to". This theme was elaborated on by Louise, who provided a more nuanced understanding. When I asked whether her career education programme might be influenced by economic, social and political factors, she drew attention to the importance of:

school politics . . . school is always trying to raise its academic achievement. If we get into league tables and stuff, then it's about whether they've got NCEA level 1, 2, 3, and sometimes not particularly about what that's in. [Louise, decile 3 school]

Here, her school's desire to raise the academic achievement of students was intertwined with how the school would be perceived, and positioned, within the wider educational 'market'. It was also apparent that, in some cases, what 'counted' was the number of qualifications gained by students, regardless of the content.

Louise further explained that within her career education curriculum the emphasis on qualifications and academic progression became more pronounced during year 11, the final period of compulsory schooling in New Zealand:

I try to do a bit of everything at year 10, from the point of view of getting them to think, you know, it's not just about your qualifications, it's about who you are as a person, if you don't enjoy what you are doing then you're not going to do it, and you're not going to enjoy it and you're not going to do it very well . . . [in] year 11 the focus is very much on them getting to NCEA . . . school policy may be dictating the careers education approaches, by how can we make them succeed at that possible level of the qualification, because if [they do] they're more likely to want to come back and want to do level 2, and really at the present time unless you have a level 2 there's not many opportunities open to you [Louise, decile 3 school].

In year 10, Louise's career education practice was constructed around a desire to assist her students to identify meaningful career pathways. Self-

awareness, personal fulfilment and ‘enjoyment’ (which are characteristics of liberal humanism) were positioned as the key to ‘good’ occupational choice. However, in year 11 Louise shifted the focus of her programme from the development of the ‘self’, towards encouraging the achievement of NCEA credits. Reflecting the knowledge economy discourse, Louise’s implicit belief that the acquisition of higher level qualifications would translate into greater advantage in the labour market provided students with few alternatives. Moreover, it assumed that young people in the New Zealand labour market are unable to secure their ‘ideal job’ due to their lack of qualifications, rather than a shortage of quality employment opportunities (Human Rights Commission, 2011).

The discursive tensions between a benevolent desire to act with the best of intentions towards students (Tomlinson, 1988), and neoliberal demands engendered through the knowledge economy discourse, emerged during my interview with Marjorie. Reiterating many of Louise’s comments about the value of credentials and continued study, Marjorie talked of how:

in practice . . . we’ve had boys in previous years nobody’s got university entrance, now we’re restructuring the timetable, restructuring the credits etcetera etcetera. [There is an] expectation that boys *will* get university entrance . . . *they’ll go to university and then do . . . a professional job with good employability* [emphasis added] . . . we don’t want boys just settling for something, *we want them to aspire, and to work to achieve it*

*and to aim high* [emphasis added], but aim high not just to be a lawyer, *but aim high for what they want to do* [emphasis added] (Decile 3 school).

As noted in chapter eight, the majority of the boys in Marjorie's school are of Pasifika heritage, and there has been concern in New Zealand about the underrepresentation of these groups in tertiary study (Ferguson, Gorinski, Wendt Samu, & Mara, 2008). Aligning herself with the changes taking place in her school to facilitate student progression, Marjorie perceived this as an opportunity for students to pursue *their* aspirations at a higher level, reflecting a distributivist approach towards social justice. This is supported by the Tertiary Education Commission's (TEC) Pasifika framework 2013-2017 (TEC, n.d.), where university study is positioned as a way for this group to overcome their social and economic disadvantage. However, a critical-recognitive reading uncovers a tension between a desire to 'empower' students from non-dominant cultural groups, and the pressures for self-regulated conformity and compliance which are embedded within the neoliberal knowledge economy. For example, the only subject position being made available to Marjorie's students was that of the 'industrious learner' who *must* strive for academic success, who *will* continue their studies at university, who *must* seek to become professionally qualified, and who *can* overcome the effects of 'race' inequality. It appears that if any resist they will be positioned as being 'at risk' of (perpetrating their own) failure.

Hence, the 'chasing' of qualifications (Jackson & Bisset, 2005), the apparent market advantages that the acquisition of credentials bestows, and the

need to continue studying is normalised by schools, yet the benefits that might accrue to students remains contested. Far from being ‘value neutral’, academic credentials act as cultural signifiers which indicate the degree to which a young person has conformed to dominant expectations (Bourdieu, 1986), with those who ‘fail’ at risk of being labelled as ‘deficient’, or deviant in some way (Gesthuizen, Solga & Kunster, 2011).

Gaynor’s account drew attention to the ways in which schools are ordered and organised, and can become a constraining and potentially deleterious experience for some (Zyngier, 2008). Gaynor actively questioned those discursive educational practices that reified student retention and progression for all, as we discussed her expectations for her students in relation to her career advisor role, and how these fitted with her school’s expectations:

well school’s expectations are that we have a majority leave and go to their tertiary study, a huge majority, that will get university entrance, or at least level 2 which I think is the new benchmark that we’re aiming for. *Often students will not fit in with that*, they might have other plans. For example we’ve got a year 12 leaving at the end of this year who is passionate, absolutely passionate, about agriculture. We don’t really offer that here so she’s off to [an agricultural institution] next year which I think is fine. I think that will suit her down to a tee. *She’s had discipline problems this year but that’s mainly because she’s not a classroom kind of girl* [emphasis added] and she’ll flourish down there. I don’t think school

expectations always match up with what *I think students, or what students think they should be doing* as well, so *we look for alternative pathways for them* [emphasis and bold added] such as heading to [agricultural college], or through the Gateway programme we often have students that get full time paid employment at the end of the year. We've had one this year and one last year, which is really good because this is what they want to be doing, *so sometimes they* [her own and her school's expectations] *clash a bit, often they don't* [emphasis added], and if a student is academic so that they get good marks, they're really interested in a certain subject . . . then *I'll usually point them in the direction of university* [emphasis and bold added] if they've enjoyed school (Gaynor, decile 9 school).

Eschewing the knowledge economy discourse, Gaynor guardedly contested the monological imperative attached to the value of academic progression and the acquisition of such credentials for *all* students. Gaynor recognised that not all responded positively in a traditional school environment, and/or had a desire to remain within an academic setting beyond the official school-leaving age. By privileging the diverse needs of individual students, and questioning her school's expectations, she took up the subject position of student advocate. Engaging in anti-oppressive practice (Mignot, 2001), pathways were identified that would be more appropriate and/or beneficial to the student, whether that be academic, or work-related. In her career advisor role, it was clear that Gaynor sought to actively progress her students' best interests. Whilst not

disregarding the apparently positive student outcomes achieved, it appeared to be *Gaynor* who often took up the subject position of both an advocate *and* an authoritative expert, in determining the pathways her students would be best advised to follow.

This analysis led me to reflect on my past practices as a career adviser when I worked with ‘high achieving’ schools. I also sought to act in the ‘best interests’ of students, helping them to come to terms with the ‘reality’ of *their* situation. Engaging with a well-intentioned distributivist approach towards justice, in a similar way to *Gaynor*, I now wonder whether this might have led to misconceptions about *who* determined the ‘best way forward’, *how* this was arrived at, and for those who did not achieve ‘success’, whether I helped them to understand that it may have been the nature of schooling and/or academic study that led them to feel educationally marginalised.

Ken also sought to work in the best interests of his students by raising their awareness of ways in which the increased demands for academic credentials within the labour market was shaping access to opportunity (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Strathdee, 2001; Tomlinson, 2001; Young, 1990). As Connell (1993), an Australian academic has noted:

more and more jobs in all kinds of fields have become credentialed . . . it becomes more and more difficult to get a job as a sports coach, camp director, company manager etc. without an accompanying degree. The

education system becomes more and more important as a gatekeeper. (p. 14)

Reflecting this ongoing change in the labour market, Ken talked of how the credentialing discourse was reconfiguring the educational and occupational trajectories of his students, and impacting on his teaching:

you do actually have to change according to what's going on out there, and where the prospects are, and what the requirements . . . Recently the education standards for things like apprenticeships, or even the army and navy and so on, have gone up, and that poses more challenges for students. So say, for example, whereas we used to have students coming through school and being able to go straight to the army or navy, very often we now have to send them for some intermediate training in-between . . . I mean that's talking about the career development for individual students, but it affects the education side of it because when you're telling kids how they need to plan what they're doing at school, how they need to, what they need to achieve, and you know the whole idea that for many many more [students] from now they're going to have to staircase into what they want to do rather than just be able to jump into what they want to do. And that becomes teaching, teaching them how to sort of break down the tasks that are in front of them into sort of bite size chunks so they can actually achieve rather than just looking at a kind of hopeless situation.

Rather than following a traditional post-16 occupational progression route whereby a young person would enter employment 'at the bottom', and potentially



work their way up through the ranks, metaphorically speaking, the ‘staircasing’ Ken referred to is linked with qualifications acquisition through extended periods in formal education or training. As Higgins, Nairn and Sligo (2010) have reported, tertiary study is becoming normalised within New Zealand, and is regarded by many young people as a ‘natural’ progression route from school. Career educators such as Ken, therefore, reinscribe this discourse, by ensuring students are aware that they *will* require academic qualifications, and/or undergo other forms of unspecified training if they wish to pursue their ‘career’ aspirations and achieve their occupational desires.

Consequently, as Ken identified, career *education* took on a pragmatic instructive teaching role, focused on transmitting the importance of rational planning and the (perpetual) strategising of pathways, in the expectation that these skills would assist them to turn a “hopeless situation” (Ken) into a conceivable possibility. Thus, Ken’s approach to career education practice was embedded within a career development discourse<sup>19</sup>, where little opportunity was provided for critical exploration or interrogation of the social world. Moreover, career enactment was constructed as a rational process which revolved around short-term planning towards defined goals. However, as I will show later in this chapter, Ken held an inconsistent view about the need to normalise tertiary study, reflecting his fluid and precarious subjectivity as a particular kind of career advisor which was discursively constructed within differing career learning

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<sup>19</sup> The conceptual difference between career education and career development was discussed in chapter 2.

contexts. Allied to this is the increasing importance attached to the acquisition of qualifications as a marker of equality and (assumed) evidence of ‘social justice’.

*Beyond qualifications: Inscribing behaviours and ‘adding value’*

Traditionally, employers used academic credentials as an initial sorting mechanism to identify potential employees. However, with the increased numbers acquiring these, the responsabilised student must now be able to offer employers ‘something more’. By taking up ‘appropriate’ behaviours, and ‘adding value’ to their formal qualifications, it is believed that young people will enhance their ‘employability’ and maintain competitive advantage. In the uncertainties of a fast-moving global economy (Apple, 2001; Brown & Lauder, 2006; Sonu, 2012; also see chapter five), this requires them to demonstrate *how* the personal capital they possess (i.e. their behaviours, qualities and competencies) supplements their qualifications, will be compatible with a potential employment situation, and thus be of value to the employer (Cremin, 2003, 2005). This can be seen in the Tertiary Education Strategy 2014-2019 (MoE, 2014) for New Zealand, where “The priority is to ensure that the skills people develop are well matched to labour market needs” (p. 10). As a consequence, what counts as a ‘good education’ in contemporary New Zealand is not only measured by the academic credentials a young person acquires, but also the taking up of the discursive resources embodied in the neoliberal subject position (Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012), which seek to shape who that young person might be/come. Failure to take up this subject position can be regarded as a marker of personal deficiency, by career advisors and students.

The characteristics of the ideal/ised future learner/citizen are clarified in the Foreword to the Career Education Benchmarks (Careers New Zealand, 2014). Here, Keith Marshall, the Chief Executive of Careers New Zealand, extols the view that the development of a student's capabilities through career education *will* enable them to be/come “resilient, confident, connected and actively involved in life-long learning” (Careers New Zealand, 2014, p. 4). Hence, the development of ‘appropriate’ individual behaviours, through career education, was positioned as a key dynamic in the production of an employable and agentic ‘self’.

These discursive messages were articulated by Lara as we discussed her understanding of career education:

I see it as a way of empowering people . . . I think it's important that they start thinking at Year 9 about different things they can be involved in to build up their transferable skills and being aware of transferable skills and being aware of what is out in the market, and being aware of different choices, and how to make those choices, being aware of things they could be doing now at Year 9 and 10 that's going to help them in the future, you know, like joining sports teams, getting involved in community things and cultural things, so it's building up those work skills, life skills really. That's my thing on career education that, yeah I really do think it's about life skills and it's something that can be translated into other areas of life, decision making, and problem solving, and how to use your initiative, things like that.

Hence, Lara saw extra-curricular activities as giving students an opportunity to develop their transferable ‘skills’ and behaviours, thus enabling them to be/come proactive enterprising agents who would be able to offer *extra* credentials to employers. Furthermore, ‘work’ skills and life skills were intertwined, seen as two sides of the same coin, with the student expected to be/come an enterprising agent who used their time productively, and actively shaped their own destiny. There is a fine line between ‘empowerment’ and ‘obligation’, and ‘awareness’ and ‘compliance’. This became more apparent later in our interview, when I asked whether she included alternatives to paid employment or continuing in education in her career education programme:

I really encourage our kids to do voluntary work, I think it’s important because they learn skills, they learn how to be an employee, so we do Gateway programme which is basically voluntary work [in an unpaid industry based placement], you know they go in and they check out, and they’re getting educated out of the [school], they’re getting educated in a real life environment about a career and about what it’s like to go to work. So I think it’s really important.

Within an employability context, ‘voluntary work’ was seen to add an *extra* dimension to a student’s employment credentials by enabling them to acquire work-related skills, and explore, and ‘try out’, different occupations in ‘real-world’ settings. This approach is supported in the CEG guidelines, where an example is given with reference to one of the benefits that can accrue from extra-

curricular learning facilitated through career education. The guidelines suggest that “Engaging in community and extracurricular activities can enhance transferable skills, including the competencies employers look for in potential employees” (MoE, 2009a, p. 34). Hence, the discourse of *extra*-credentialism is implicit in, and regarded as beneficial to, the drive to offer employers ‘something more’ than academic qualifications (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013). It is positioned as a strategy by which young people are able to develop their capabilities, hone their skills, and thus enhance their employability which, concomitantly, should increase their market value. Yet, where such activity occurs uncritically, there is a risk that the lessons learned will reinforce the neoliberal incursion into education through a sterile apolitical reading of the formal and informal ‘realities’ of the workplace. For example, the inscription of particular workplace behaviours and practices can deflect attention away from deeper questions about the complex nature of inequitable power relations within the labour market, and how these might play out at a global and localised level with regards to the provision of ‘decent work’ (Athanasou, 2010). Moreover, as I will show later in this chapter, the inscribing of particular behaviours can also serve to weaken responses to social injustice.

Whereas Lara talked about how extra-credentialism can enhance employability, in my interview with Joanne, it emerged that the taking up of ‘appropriate’ behaviours was *essential* if her students were to access scholarships to help support their studies beyond the age of 16. As shown in the following excerpt, many behaviours, such as competition, resilience and ‘hard work’, cohere

with the productive and enterprising (neoliberal) learner/citizen, who actively demonstrates their individual worth:

Course they have to compete and I think that's healthy, powerful, I would hate them just to have that expectation. We're lucky that [our area is] an unusual area in that it's very parochial, and a lot of our kids they're [local], they marry [locally] and they live [locally], so we have huge support from our local people . . . there's a huge range of scholarships given out *to those who deserve it* [emphasis added] yep. They're very lucky, and we're always looking for more. But *on the whole, yes they do very well* [emphasis added] . . . for those who [don't try], why would you expect a scholarship. And it was quite interesting that I was hearing this same thing in a different interview, meetings, where they'd brought up that if you really worked hard and did your best that you could deserve a reward at the end, and I thought fair enough, and some years you have exceptional years of students and other years it's . . . [this sentence remained unfinished]. (Joanne)

Gaining a scholarship that would help assuage the financial burden of continuing in education beyond the age of 16 was positioned as a 'hard earned' privilege, rather than a right, by Joanne. Hence, those who 'worked hard', showed commitment, and 'did their best' could expect to be rewarded. Rather than being potentially divisive and deleterious, Joanne saw competition *between* students for scholarships as being a "healthy" and "powerful" signifier of 'success', and

helped to determine *which* students were worthy of financial support. When I asked her what criteria was applied to determine who was worthy of support, how the ‘good learner/citizen’ was being constituted became clearer:

Okay, one [criteria] is academic of course, and not always, because it’s not always an academic scholarship. The other one very much is *their participation, in school and out of school* [emphasis added], voluntary work, ‘what do they do in the community’, and we’re pushing that very hard, that at year 12 if this is where they’re wanting to go then they need to be able to validate that. And then of course whatever it’s for, so it [the criteria] really is based on the academic, their social, their involvement in and out of school, and what they’ve given back. (Joanne)

It was apparent that participation in *appropriate* extra-curricular activities at school, and/or *active* engagement within the wider community, was seen to enrich (or atone for) a student’s academic achievements, validate their individual ‘merit’, and enhance their access to future educational opportunities. Those students who took up the norms, behaviours, beliefs and competencies embodied by the school (Garnett, Guppy & Veenstra, 2008), were thus able to occupy a privileged social space.

Reflecting a distributivist social justice discourse<sup>20</sup>, there is an assumption that by encouraging students to ‘work hard’ (both in an academic sense and on

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<sup>20</sup> The concept of distributivist justice was discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

themselves), and conform to the school's expectations, *all* will be free to compete on a level playing field for the scholarships that are available. With regards to 'community engagement', students are positioned as having a *duty* to 'give something back' in a tangible sense, in return for what they have (presumably) already 'received'. Hence, all appears to be fair, on the surface (Olssen, 1997). Consequently, a symmetrical arrangement is constructed through which students learn that they *must* play their part as active learner/citizens if they wish to be materially rewarded for their social, as well as their academic, contribution. Yet this is where the contradictions lie. For example, whilst it would be churlish to suggest that 'doing good' in, and for, the community has no value, Altman (2013) observes that a "new voluntarism" (p. 23) has emerged which operates at the nexus with neoliberalism. Here, 'voluntarism' reinscribes the values of "choice, empowerment and self-help" (p. 23), and is used to 'responsibilise' citizenship by emphasising the obligations and responsibilities of *individuals*, above those of social rights. Moreover, when the 'ideology' of voluntarism (Altman, 2013) is positioned within career/education as an 'everyday common sense' discourse, it may do little to deepen a student's understanding of the systemic nature of structural injustice(s), and how these might be effectively challenged (Altman, 2013; Choules, 2007; Young, 1990).

Conversely, therefore, when the criteria applied to the distribution of scholarships is viewed through a retributive lens, success in the competition for the rewards available is constructed as the product of individual strengths and weaknesses, rather than structural or systemic failings (McMaster, 2013). The



disciplinary gaze is turned upon the actions of *individual* students, within and outside of school, who find themselves subject to the imposition of institutional norms, subject to criteria that they likely had little, if any, input into (Young, 1990). Looking beyond the acquisition of academic qualifications, Lehmann (2012) has noted that “extra-credential experiences can serve powerful social closure functions, while appearing part of a fair and meritocratic process” (p. 215). Therefore, if any students prove to be unwilling to participate in extra-curricular activities which the school recognises as having ‘value’, the ‘losers’ in the competition for *educational* resources are positioned as unworthy learner/citizens who are the authors of their own failure (McMaster, 2013), a view that coalesces with neoliberalism, and a retributive view of social justice. Further, it implies that such students have consciously disengaged from schooling, have little regard for their ‘community’, and have no wish to ‘invest’ in their futures. Thus attention is shifted away from the responsibilities of schools to engage their students in a meaningful career/educational experience. Hence, the inequitable distribution of scholarships is justified by ensuring that the ‘worthy learner’, who displays the desired characteristics of the neoliberal citizen-worker (Cremin, 2005), is appropriately rewarded.

*Developing the enterprising and entrepreneurial ‘self’: a virtuous goal*

As I have already shown, there is an expectation that the responsibilised student will take up the discursive resources made available to them in order to lead a ‘productive’ life. Located within a neoliberal discursive frame, they are required to be/come self-motivated, enterprising *and* entrepreneurial

learner/citizens who are “creative rather than passive; capable of self-initiated action rather than dependant” (Komulainen, 2006, p. 212). Career advisors, meanwhile, are given the responsibility for ensuring that their students are constantly encouraged to aspire to ‘new heights’, pursue their dreams relentlessly, and to make their life their business. Thus, notes Berglund (2013), “The enterprising self can be seen as the invisible role model against whom individuals are judged, and judge themselves, in contemporary society” (p. 730). However, this discursive turn is saturated with contradictions, which underline the inconsistencies in neoliberalism. Within a career education context, for example, the enterprising entrepreneurial student is told that they should make their own opportunities, be creative in their thinking, always strive for success, but also ‘have fun’ (Berglund, 2013), meanwhile, the responsabilised student is instructed that they *must* make an economic contribution, *must not* be/come a burden on the state, and *must* accept individual responsibility for their actions and their own well-being.

Hence the *right* to ‘fail’ which can be regarded as an experience of ‘life’, and the opportunity to try again with appropriate support if so desired, is replaced by an *obligation* to succeed at all costs. Student ‘failure’, however, also needs to be discursively located within a wider social, political, and economic context in which the ‘good student’ can be contrasted with those deemed to be ‘at risk’, thus reinscribing the values which underlie ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, and pay little attention to the effects structural inequalities on educational outcomes (Sinclair, McKendrick & Scott, 2010; Wilkins, (2012). Moreover, schools (and the teachers

within) who fail to achieve high levels of academic success are also 'at risk' being stigmatised within a competitive, neoliberal, educational market place (see Connell, 2013).

A nuanced understanding of how these contradictory, and at times confused, discourses play out in career practice emerged from my discussion with Ken. As we discussed whether he considered social, political and economic events in the development of his programme, Ken related this to his career advisor role, telling me:

I guess the way I spin my job to kids is that they have the goals, I show them the pathways . . . so when I know what they are looking for in life then I'm trying to help them find the pathways to that, and that may be largely a job or it may be a lifestyle thing. I mean . . . you'll get a lot of young boys who are involved in sport and very physical and energetic and so on. So they come and they say that they want a career in sport and, you know, *the reality is* that most, *if they're going to get to representative level* and so on, they might have a career as a professional sports person, *if they're bright* [emphasis added] and they want to be a PE teacher that's all fine, but you know if their aspiration and their ability is such that they're probably going to end up as sort of fitness instructors in a gym . . . and if that's what they want to do that's fine, but for a lot of them that's not what they actually see as the outcome of their sports qualification. So I say to them, 'well what are the things that are actually involved in this for you,

it's the physicality, it's the outdoors, it's the camaraderie, the team, let's look at some other careers that will fill those needs that you have in your life, let's look at ways that the fact that you love playing rugby can still be part of your life, and you can have all that physicality and camaraderie and all those other things, but in the sense in a career, in a job, that's going to be a satisfying part of your career. . . that's part of, I suppose, showing different pathways.

Here, Ken took up the subject position of the 'knowledgeable expert', one who *knows* what is achievable for particular students on the basis of their proven abilities and experiences, based on his (assumed) understanding of 'niche' labour markets. Ken talked of how he sought to increase their vocational imagination (Higgins, Nairn & Sligo, 2010) by engaging them in a discursive exploration of what *might be realistic* in the New Zealand labour market. He hoped that this 'broadening of minds' would assist them to identify suitable pathways, and enable them to transform their interests and aspirations into meaningful realities. Thus, Ken took up a benevolent discourse that runs counter to the neoliberal promise that anything is possible for the enterprising student through 'hard work' and 'determination' (see Čeplak, 2012; Mendick, Allen & Harvey, 2015; Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012). However, by attempting to remove the opportunity to 'fail', Ken may also have (potentially) steered some students away from their goals. Such approaches within career practice can be reductive and result in a form of 'protective channelling', with career advisors acting as, albeit well-

intentioned, gatekeepers, whereby 'reality' is assumed and imposed (Colley, 2000), rather than constructed through experience.

Earlier in this chapter I noted that Ken felt it was important to raise his students' awareness of how a rising wave of credentialism was affecting entry to many occupations. However, when we discussed how he conceptualised the notion of a 'holistic career', Ken explained that his own views had shifted over time regarding the importance of credentialism, and progression into tertiary study:

Yeah I think that [a holistic view] is really important . . . over the years I suppose I've had preconceptions and judgements that I've had sort of changed. I know I went through a phase when I was first involved in careers work where I would regard it as a sort of badge of honour to try and get every student that came through going on to tertiary education, and if I had a bright student who was desperate to be a hairdresser I would do my level best to persuade them not to be a hairdresser, and I'm embarrassed to recall that now because, you know I just, I don't, I no longer do that. I would open their eyes to other options but if their passion was hairdressing I'd say you go for it and be the best damned hairdresser, and end up owning the salon and whatever because, you know, *if you're bright and you've got all of that drive and passion, go for it* [emphasis added].

In the above, Ken highlighted that he no longer judged the quality of his practice by the numbers of students who continued on to tertiary study, or the occupations they chose to pursue. Rather than attempting to (re)direct his students into occupations that match stereotypes, and/or merely meet the demands of the labour market, Ken rejected those neoliberal imperatives associated with credentialism and worked *with* his students' desires. Positioning it as a form of empowerment, in the example he gave, Ken encouraged his students to strive to be 'the best they can be'. Thus, Ken sought to rewrite the notion of the 'enterprising learner/citizen' by locating it within a liberal humanist discursive frame.

Symbolised by the enterprising self, entrepreneurship can be positioned as an "individual virtue" (Komulainen, 2006, p. 213), which coalesces with liberal humanism where the individual tries to actively shape their life. When located within a neoliberal context, the enterprising individual is obliged to engage in a continuous process of 'self-management', to be/come "an entrepreneur of itself" (Rose, 1996, p. 158), in an increasingly uncertain and precarious labour market (Rose, 1999). Paradoxically, and unintentionally perhaps, in the hairdresser example Ken gave, the neoliberal notion of the entrepreneurial self is reinscribed through his encouragement that they should not only strive "to be the best damned hairdresser" possible, but their "drive and passion" must be directed towards 'ownership', reflecting outcomes that are caught up with notions of self-employability, self-improvement, self-regulation and self-management (Bengtsson, 2014). Moreover, when the development of the enterprising and entrepreneurial 'self' is understood as an individual project, the effects of social

structure and the workings of power, which can shape what is possible and ‘who’ is recognised (Down, 2009; Young, 1990), appears ‘in absentia’ in career advisors talk.

### **Structural injustice ‘in absentia’: The in/glorious isolation of career education**

Dei (1999) argues that unless the state is explicit about sites of oppression, and the various forms it takes, this will lead to a sanitisation of social struggles. It would be feasible to assume, therefore, that such issues would be visible within career education as it straddles the divide between school and the ‘adult’ world. Although I asked all of my participants how they understood the concept of social injustice, and whether they engaged with structural inequalities through their career education practices, multiple discourses were brought into play. For some, discussion of structural inequality was not recognised at all, or seen as something to be avoided so as not to dampen the aspirations and motivation of students. For many it was understood to be a *problem for individuals*, and/or was attributed to individual difference. Others, meanwhile, recognised the pervasive nature of structural injustice, but questioned whether they had the knowledge and/or discursive resources available to enable them to engage with such concerns through their career education practice.

When I asked Joanne whether her career education programme introduced her students to the effects of structural disadvantage in relation to culture, gender and socio-economic class, and how this might impact on aspirations, she was a

little reticent as she told me “I don’t think we actually bring it in under those guises”. Drawing on an apolitical discourse of ‘sameness’, she qualified this, stating “because aren’t we all brought up that we can do anything we want in reality”. This philosophy was noticeable in her approach towards career education in which her students were made aware that:

if you want to get from ‘A’ to ‘B’ this is the roadmap and along the way this is what you’ve got to do, and if you get off at the wrong stop, well you’re not going to reach your destination.

Although Joanne also told me that her school had programmes focused on Māori and Pasifika students, and also ‘girls’, in relation to university entrance and/or non-traditional occupations, she saw these as attempts to ‘level the playing field’ by “trying to offer the opportunities to balance things up”. For Joanne, it appeared, the only barrier to ‘career’ realisation, regardless of social location and structural injustice, would be the absence of ‘rational-linear’ planning, and the taking of ‘appropriate’ action.

This perspective was echoed by Bryony, who took up a contradictory subject position when we discussed issues of social injustice. Although she identified that culture/ethnicity and socio-economic class can impact on life plans and choices, she did not perceive gender to be problematic, commenting, “I don’t ever see it as an issue or a barrier . . . maybe if I worked in a single sex school then I might”. Yet, later in our interview when asked whether she felt her programme prepared students to understand how structural inequalities might



impact on life chances and opportunities, Bryony inferred that *all* students were well aware of the pervasive nature of inequality:

the kids get it, they understand that *there is no equality* out there, and I don't think, and what I teach is that, you know, if you have all the *tools* and if you have, you know, all of the *skills*, and if you've got *something extra to offer*, then maybe you will get the opportunity I said, but the thing is that you will also get knocked down, you might not get the job and you might not get the next ten jobs after that, but you've just got to *keep on plodding* . . . (emphasis added)

Thus, Bryony talked of the need to teach her students to acquire 'tools' and develop skills, to be able to offer "something extra", and to be resilient *and* persistent in the face of adversity in an unequal society. By equipping her students with the assumed behavioural characteristics demanded by the contemporary labour market, she anticipated that this would help mediate any disadvantage(s) and lessen feelings of 'failure'. Social injustice was thus positioned as an *individual* problem that required pragmatic solutions. From a broader career education perspective, it remained unclear whether, through her practices, Bryony's students gained a deeper insight into the discursive nature of social injustice, and how this shaped 'inequalities'.

From my interviews with Belinda and Jenna, it became clearer how the intersection of different axes of inequality added to the complexities of social

in/justice. With regards to gender, Belinda noted how the year 8 girls in her school still categorised jobs on the basis of traditional masculine/feminine roles, and that she was “aware of [the need to be] breaking down traditional areas . . . in terms of encouraging girls into non-traditional areas”. Working with a colleague from the local university, she organised talks for year 12 and 13 students taking physics, to make them aware of opportunities in this occupational area. When we discussed whether her programme prepared her students to understand the effects of structural inequalities, Belinda expressed concern that “by raising peoples’ awareness you can actually make it into a negative thing, whereas if you don’t sort of differentiate or don’t dwell on an area then . . . it doesn’t occur to them”. Belinda expressed a degree of discomfort about how issues of structural inequality might be addressed, and drew attention to the overlapping axis of ethnicity:

sometimes I get comments from Pākehā kids that they are being disadvantaged because the Māori children seem to have more opportunities for scholarships . . . and I had one Filipino girl this year . . . seeing that as a reverse sort of racism . . . I actually got in touch with the EEO [Equal Employment Opportunities] people at [named] Uni as I was having trouble sort of explaining to her why certain ethnic groups were offered advantages over [others] and they sent me back some material . . . I don’t think I ever gave it to her in the end . . . [but it] presented the case quite well for why certain ethnic groups were offered what appear to be extra opportunities . . . so usually I get one or two students who, as I say, it sort of works the other way with.

Whilst the information Belinda received helped to raise her own awareness of how positive discrimination measures can seek to redress structural disadvantage for groups such as Māori, this remained invisible to the Filipino student who raised the issue. Not sharing this information in a productive way with *all* of her students, and making connections with the socio-historical and political roots of ‘career’ disadvantage for Māori, could perpetuate an individualised discourse, reflecting a social atomism (Young, 1990) which conflates ‘fairness’ in distribution with ‘equal shares’ for all (Keddie, 2013a). Paradoxically, ‘ethnic others’ who are least advantaged, can then find themselves perceived as ‘privileged’.

Jenna, who worked in a co-educational school, acknowledged that some girls who chose to pursue non-traditional occupations might be confronted by the ‘reality’ of sexism in the workplace as we discussed whether culture or ethnicity impacted on life plans and choices:

I don’t tend to think about it in that way. I suppose I mean, I um, I mean, obviously you know some professions are going to be harder for them based on their gender, you know possibly, for example I might talk to them about the fact that in this workplace you’re going into mechanics, you may see calendars and you’re just going to have to either just take it with a grain of salt, or you know *you can fight it, but probably it’ll make life harder for you*. But, you know, it’s kind of, I suppose there are aspects

that I might talk about like that, but generally it's not really something that I [this sentence remained unfinished].

Jenna talked of how the *girls* would need to be adaptable, resilient, and compliant if they were to succeed in traditional masculine environments, indicating that sexism was something they must learn to live with (if not accept), *unless* they wanted to complicate their lives further. Instead of promoting a collective understanding of, and resistance to, sexual objectification (Calogero & Tylka, 2014), an issue which can affect *all* women (and be objectionable to some men), her students were exposed to a potentially disempowering discourse as the structural nature of gender injustice was reduced to an inconvenient workplace 'reality'.

As we discussed her understanding of social justice, Jenna commented that "we don't always have a level playing field . . . but at the same time there are ways that we can get around the fact that it's not, and it's finding ways to do that". Jenna clarified what she meant by this, and how she might address it through career education, later in our interview. She talked of how:

it's lack of information that makes one player on a higher level than another . . . you can show people avenues . . . some are going to have a harder ride to get there . . . but if you can show them the cracks in the system and how they can get round things . . . or how they play the game to get there it's kind of the skills of life really, how do you please the

teachers enough to get to Uni so that you can get off to where you're supposed to [school bell rings – sentence is left unfinished].

When I asked whether her programme prepared students to understand and engage with the ways in which structural inequalities might impact on her students' occupational and life chances, the 'game' became clearer:

God help us, that's deep . . . Well I think that's the responsibility of education in general not careers, but I mean careers is a part of that. Well hopefully we don't focus on that [structural injustice], hopefully we focus on how can we play the system to get what we need out of it, and that, yes, some roads are going to be harder because of the shit of being born into that family, but I don't really want to focus on that I want to focus on how with that 'disability' as such you can still play the game just as well as anyone else.

In the above excerpt, Jenna acknowledged the problematic nature of structural injustice within a career education context, but felt that raising her students' awareness of this would have negative connotations. Rather than focus on the nature of social injustice, and how the discursive formations that sustain it might be disrupted, Jenna spoke with a 'pragmatic voice of reason', arguing that students could resist social injustice if they learnt how to manipulate the 'rules of the game'. Jenna inferred that by taking this course of action, students would be able to 'rise above' the effects of structural inequality. It is the *individual* who is

thus held responsible for overcoming *their own* disadvantage(s). Mirroring the discursive rhetoric embedded within neoliberalism (Joseph, 2013; Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012), Jenna made her students aware that, as their *own* career manager, they needed to govern their behaviours ‘appropriately’, and to put concerns with inequality to one side, if they were to maximise their opportunities.

Marjorie thought more deeply about the concept of career, and how it related to issues of social in/justice. When asked about the strengths of career education, Marjorie focused on the wider educational benefits that can accrue as she talked about how a “really good career education programme should engage the students and would give meaning and context for their learning at school, and . . . give them confidence for tackling things that are going to happen once they leave school”. Later in our interview she critically reflected on the ways in which ‘meaningful careers’ were judged within contemporary New Zealand society:

of course money is often the measurement for status and value, *I don't know how that can be changed* [emphasis added], but I think that we that should more greatly value other roles people have that's separate from any money that they earn for them, whether it's being a parent at home, or whether it's being a coach, or whether it's being whatever, it's the value of your role and its contribution to society and shouldn't always be measured by, shouldn't always be given status based upon pay. *How can we do that, I don't know how* [emphasis added], that seems a whole mind shift of a whole sea change, whatever the expression is, because *we're so*

*hierarchical in our society, so much is based on status and money, I don't know how to change that, I don't know [emphasis added].*

Advocating for a broader understanding of how career(s) might be conceptualised, and enacted, Marjorie positioned career as a social construction. Marjorie engaged in a critical discursive rewriting of a dominant neo/liberal career discourse in her rhetorical questioning of why status and money were equated with enhanced individual value and attracted higher social prestige. Thus, she challenged the privileging of economic participation and wealth creation within a career context. However, although Marjorie expressed a desire to see social change, in her struggle to find definitive answers, a sense of powerlessness and stasis was evident.

This sense of powerlessness continued when Marjorie talked about the pervasive nature of social injustice within a cultural and socio-economic context. When asked about whether culture or ethnicity might impact on life plans and opportunities, she was emphatic:

Culture and ethnicity, hugely, hugely, and I did my last assignment on that very topic [Marjorie was in the process of completing a Career Guidance qualification at a local tertiary institution] . . . I'm not sure how to bridge that . . . I make assumptions all the time that are found not to be valid, because the students I am dealing with are Tongan and Samoan students and they often see things differently, and they're male, and their 20 or 30

years younger than me . . . *I try very hard not to make assumptions but it's hard not to because we have, our values are so embedded and it's very hard to know your own values* [emphasis added] and to . . . I really have to work hard on that. I think for our students that what I would see as a 'success', and I'm just putting inverted commas around that word, it may not be what they would see as a success, or might be what they say is a success but may not be what they feel is a success, and that's going to dictate they and their families actions, it's a huge area to look into (Marjorie).

With regards to socio-economic class, Marjorie continued:

it's all so fraught isn't it . . . we don't like to think there is such a thing in New Zealand, it's not something that's overt at all, and it's so integral to integrate, it's so tied into race . . . I haven't tackled it yet, I haven't.

Although Marjorie identified intersecting axes of inequality, and was reflexive about her degree of understanding, she did not feel adequately informed, or appropriately qualified, to confidently address issues of cultural and/or socio-economic injustice either personally, or through her career education programmes. Hence, Marjorie revealed her precarious subjectivity as a career advisor that was not only informed by her lack of awareness of the cultural world(s) of the 'other' (Young, 1990), but also by a sense of cultural dissonance in her struggle to uncover her own values, and reconcile these with those of her students. Even



though she was completing a professional qualification, she still appeared to have little access to those discursive resources that would enable her to locate her career education practice within a transformative framework (see Irving, 2010b, 2011a). Consequently, social in/justice remained a troubling ‘absent’ presence for her.

## **Conclusion**

I have shown how the tensions between liberal humanist and neoliberal discourses created some confusion amongst participants about the purpose of career education and whose interests should be privileged. However, what appeared to count for many was informed by market-driven imperatives that are promoted by neoliberalism. The intermingling of neoliberal discourse(s) with those of the knowledge economy was instantiated through a belief that the acquisition of formal and ‘extra’ credentials, would be in the best interests of their students. In addition, the neoliberal appropriation of much liberal humanist discourse, which underpins dominant career theories, was justified by the need to take up particular employability behaviours and conceptions of ‘self’. Little space was afforded in career education to critical and creative exploration of the diverse ways in which career(s) might be constructed and lived, and how these might be influenced.

Whilst it would be socially unjust *not* to prepare students for the uncertainties of life within a fragmenting world, within career/education undue importance was attached to the provision of credentials, the credits attached, and

the extra-curricular activities that would enhance the employability of students. Consequently, the process of career learning (which was deemed to be essential if students were to become lifelong learners), was reduced to a technical rational process where it risked being overshadowed by the authority accorded to credentialed outcomes and their market value. Meanwhile, the content and contextualisation of what was being learnt (which connects career learning more broadly, and critically, to social, economic and political life) was framed by the market, and tended to be utilitarian in nature. The characteristics of the worthy learner/citizen are entwined with the individual's responsibility to self-manage their *own* career, exploit learning opportunities, and be/come an economically productive member of society. Through these discursive processes, "Markets are marketed, are made legitimate by a depoliticizing strategy. They are said to be natural and neutral, and governed by merit. And those opposed to them are by definition, hence, also opposed to effort and merit" (Apple, 2003, p. 7). Thus, the market is normalised, as 'common sense' tells career advisors that to resist would be counterproductive, and not in the best interests of their students.

The problematic, and complex, nature of social injustice was recognised by many of my participants to varying degrees, yet it tended to be understood as a problem for individuals to resolve. Moreover, although there were signs of resistance to the neoliberal drift, 'social' justice was primarily conceptualised in an apolitical way. By focusing on the type of person 'we' are expected to aspire towards, whether located within a liberal humanist or neoliberal frame, attention shifted away from the effects of structural discrimination which permeates all areas of New Zealand life (Butcher, Spoonley & Trlin, 2006). Locating career

education within an individualised discourse rendered invisible *structural and systemic* injustices experienced by particular social groups (Nairn & Higgins, 2007; Nash, 2007), and the collective effects of oppression and domination (Young, 1990). Hence, a deep engagement with social justice concerns remained an ‘absent presence’ in participant talk *about* career education, and appeared to have limited impact on their practices.

The ability to learn, which is validated by formal credentials, is positioned as having a ‘market exchange value’ that will enhance employability, and provide *individuals* with a return on their personal, emotional, and financial investment (Higgins & Nairn, 2006; Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012). Hence, students are taught the ‘new’ rules of the (neoliberal) game where they are positioned as apolitical (lifelong) learners and entrepreneurs of the ‘self’. ‘Successful’ students are deemed to be those who respond positively and proactively to the enhanced credential requirements that are perpetuated through the knowledge economy discourse. With the shifting of the responsibility for social justice from the state and onto individuals, career advisors come to know what is expected of them, their subject area, and their practices. The credentialed and responsabilised (neoliberal) educational climate in New Zealand is thus defining what career education should ultimately be seeking to deliver.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Conclusion: Looking back, looking forwards**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter ten brings my thesis to a close. Here, I return to address my primary research question by considering how social in/justice is discursively constructed and located within career education in New Zealand high schools. A partisan standpoint was adopted (see Gillborn, 1998; Troyna, 1995), where I have viewed career education, and the place of social justice within it, from the position of those least advantaged (Gale & Densmore, 2000; Young, 1990). Looking through a critical-recognitive social justice lens (see Irving, 2010a), which is located within a critical epistemological framework, my concern was to identify whether, through its discursive and material practices, career education contributed to, and/or challenged in some way, the oppression and domination of different social groups. Hence, the findings which emerged represent my own interpretations of the data, which has been informed by critical theory and the work of the political philosopher Iris Marion Young.

In the first part of this chapter, therefore, I summarise my key findings by drawing together the multiple strands that emerged from my research. The social justice implications of these in relation to career education policy and practice are then discussed. Next, I identify critical possibilities for career advisors and their practice with regards to how social justice might be actively progressed within

this curriculum area. Areas for further research are outlined which build on this doctoral study, and I make recommendations which will help to connect career education to social justice concerns. I conclude by arguing that career *education* must be constructed as a critical social practice, and be regarded as a curriculum area in its own right, if it is to actively engage with issues of social in/justice.

### **Challenging career education and changing practice: Confronting and confirming social in/justice**

In my identification of, and critical engagement with, the multiple discourses that flow through the Career Education and Guidance (CEG) policy guidelines, and career advisors talk, I remained cognisant of Harris's (1999) assertion that "Careers education . . . cannot be understood outside the wider context of educational change because how it is constructed is linked to education and the relationship between education, the state and economy, all of which are problematic" (p. 15). For example, the neoliberal drift within New Zealand has impinged on career education, and further complicated the goals of education in general, through its focus on the values of the market. As Carr and Hartnett (1996) identify, educational developments are immersed in an ongoing struggle which reflect the ideological tensions within the wider society as it is continually expected to adapt to changing cultural and economic times.

Hence, I situated my analysis and discussion within this expanded discursive framework as I explored the interplay of ideological influences, disciplinary practices, and dominant discourses within society that shape how

social justice might be conceptualised within education, and inform career education policy and practice. Few references to the actual numbers of participants who commented on particular issues are made in the findings chapters, and I acknowledge that this may be regarded as a limitation when viewed through a post/positivist lens as my research lacks statistical validity. However, I believe that the desire to quantify in pursuit of assumed generalisability and validity (see Forsey, 2012) can have a distorting effect on how qualitative data is interpreted, and findings constructed. Moreover, I do not presume to present neutral and/or incontestable ‘facts’ or ‘evidence’ (see Altheide & Johnson, 2011; Griffiths, 1998) as these may be used to delimit permissible thought, and attempt to mark the boundaries of how the world *is* and *must* remain (Foucault, 1972; Segall, 2013). What I have sought to do in my thesis is engage in a deep critical interrogation of the data to uncover how dominant discourse within career education attempts to shape thinking, and identify how these discourses play out in practice, highlighting the potential for both acceptance *and* resistance.

The findings indicate that the career advisors in my study continue to work in a contested and confused curriculum area that lacks both cogency and direction (Vaughan & Gardiner, 2007), a situation not new, nor unique to New Zealand (Barnes, 2004; Harris, 1999). British academics, Best, Ribbins and Ribbins, observed the problematic nature of this back in 1984 where they noted:

‘careers education’ needs to be distinguished carefully from other, related, activities with which it is sometimes confused. In particular from ‘careers

guidance’ and ‘careers counselling’, because it is (or, at least, should be) concerned with much more than the giving of information, advice and practice in the skills of choosing and procuring an appropriate job. (p. 69)

This lack of clarity has resulted in career education becoming a ‘catch-all’ curriculum term, used to incorporate a range of diverse activities that include career development, career management, employability learning, and career information, advice, guidance and/or counselling. My research indicated that career education practice tended to focus on the discovery of ‘self’, and a preoccupation with educational/occupational preparation. Whilst many career advisors in my study made tenuous links with other curriculum areas, career learning was generally construed as relating academic subjects to employability skills and/or occupations, such as the completion of CVs in English, or how ‘science subjects’ might be used in particular jobs. It was also noticeable that career education was generally dislocated from learning that took place in social studies, where the subject material covered would appear to be particularly pertinent to this curriculum area as it is concerned with the everyday complexities and ‘realities’ of life. As the New Zealand Curriculum Guide states, “Senior social studies is about how societies work and how people can participate in their communities as informed, critical, active, and responsible citizens” (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 2). Yet, the dominance of career psychology and counselling, the focus on ‘employability’, and the competition for curriculum space, appears to have pushed a broader understanding of career *education*, where it might be construed as a critical social practice, to the margins (see Irving 2013a).

With regards to how social justice was located within career education, I found that there was no explicit use of the term ‘social justice’ within the CEG policy guidelines produced by the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2009a) in New Zealand. Career advisors working in Catholic schools had a broad understanding of the concept of social justice, which is enshrined within ‘The Common Good imperative’ of the New Zealand Catholic Education Office (see [http://www.nzceo.org.nz/media/resources/common\\_good.pdf](http://www.nzceo.org.nz/media/resources/common_good.pdf)), but for those working in secular schools the term was often new and relatively unknown. This led a number to seek out definitions before their interview with me. Overall, career advisors found it difficult to articulate how ‘social justice’ fitted with/in career education, and/or how it informed their practices, which were permeated by an ‘equality of opportunity’ discourse. As I highlighted in chapter seven, many career advisors were aware that their schools had social justice-related policies in place to address bullying, Māori and Pasifika disadvantage, and/or discrimination for example. However, there was little general understanding of how these policies, and the issues they sought to address, connected with career education and might inform career advisors’ practices.

In part, this may be explained by the way in which career education in New Zealand was located within an economic context where, currently, ‘social justice’ concerns tended to be discursively associated with the need to develop self-knowledge, promote equality of access to opportunity, address the notion of ‘human wastage’ (Harris, 1999), and foster individual ‘talent’ to meet the demands of a globalised labour market (Arthur, 2014). Here, the focus was on



ensuring that *individual* students had access to the psychological, academic and, where possible, material resources that would enable them to gain credentials, and thus be able to compete effectively within a ‘knowledge driven’ economy. For example, the findings show how many of the concerns voiced by career advisors related to the importance attached to the acquisition of formal qualifications, where it was assumed opportunities for those from non-dominant groups, such as Māori, women, or those labelled as being ‘at risk’ would be enhanced. Conversely, if members of non-dominant groups failed to ‘succeed’, it was often attributed to *individual* deficits. Thus, factors such as family background or ‘culture’, the absence of a ‘known marketable self’, and/or a lack of employability skills or enterprising initiative (see MoE, 2009a), were positioned as the cause of *their* ‘failure’.

Thus, whilst career advisors sought to privilege the interests and well-being of their *individual* students, at the same time, students were exhorted to actively take up an individualised, responsibilised and entrepreneurial worker-citizen identity. There was little evidence to suggest that career advisors engaged their students in collective examination of the complex power relations which inhabit career construction, where ‘acceptable’ career decisions can be socially derived and individually inscribed, accompanied by the threat of economic sanctions for those who resist or transgress (Jackson, 2012). Moreover, little opportunity was provided to enable students to critically interrogate the world ‘as it is’, and envisage alternative futures for themselves, their families and the wider community, all of which impact on how career(s) is formed, forged and enacted.

Such a collective engagement would help to uncover the “insidious, creeping and hidden” (Jackson, 2012, p. 286) workings of power, and illuminate how career discourse can contribute to, and perpetuate, social injustice by, for example, excluding those who do not conform to dominant norms and behaviours. This would take career education beyond narrow concerns with ‘employability’, the development of individual behaviours, and psychological constructs of the ‘self’.

Hence, my findings indicate that contemporary career education practice is ostensibly concerned with preparing *individual* young people to manage their life/career beyond school. This has led career advisors to focus their attention on the development of competencies, skills, attributes, and individual resilience which will assist students to navigate their way in an uncertain labour market. As discussed in chapter eight, this discursive shaping was informed by a liberal humanist belief that each individual has an ‘authentic identity’ which is there to be discovered. Revealing this ‘true self’, it was believed, would help to ensure that students made the ‘right’ educational/occupational choices, and thus ease their entry into the labour market. Yet, as I have shown in chapters five and six, what is occurring within career education is also being shaped by policy guidelines that are located within a neoliberal framework. Thus, an inherent tension is at play between career advisors’ desire to engage with a liberal humanist discourse of ‘self-realisation’, and the expectation that they will respond positively to the demands made by an ‘official’ career education curriculum that is infused with neoliberal rhetoric.

Whilst there is value in career advisors and teachers gaining a broader insight into the labour market, this must run deeper than an enhanced awareness of a ‘person-environment fit’ approach to employment (see chapter two), the development of ‘employability skills’, and knowledge of the (assumed) jobs of tomorrow (see Hooley, Watts & Andrews, 2015). As Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher (2008) have noted, “If employers and corporations are granted the authority to define the character traits of workers, then human difference and political agency are both potentially threatened” (p. 141). Yet, as Cremin (2009) contends, no matter how hard individuals ‘try’, they are never likely to be employable enough given the insecurities and contradictions within the labour market. Thus, there is a need to pay more attention to the complexities of social life that flow into the economic domain, and for greater clarity about how ideological values and privileged interests are bound up with/in the labour market, irrespective of an individual’s ‘skill’ or ‘talent(s)’ (Arthur, 2014; Young, 1990). Hence, if career learning is to lay claim to ‘educational’ credentials, career advisors must ensure that business-oriented viewpoints are balanced with more critical and contrasting, perspectives (Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher, 2008).

As noted earlier in this chapter, it was apparent from my research that many career advisors in my study had little exposure to the concept of social justice, particularly within a career education context and, as a result, found it challenging when asked to locate it within their practices. Furthermore, in its current guise, career *education* appears to have been captured by a discourse of ‘career *development*’. Enveloped by an apparent apolitical preoccupation with

social inclusion/exclusion, which is rooted within an individualised economic context founded on notions of ‘merit’ and ‘hard work’, career *development* tends to be utilitarian in nature. As a result there is an inordinate focus on the preparation of young people for an uncritical engagement with/in the labour market. Thus, there is a risk that those who, for whatever reason, ‘fail’ to take up the expectation that they *will* be economically productive and committed, will be positioned as ‘careerless’, and ‘at risk’ of social exclusion. Furthermore, argues Young (2012), if the concept of social inclusion is to have a meaningful material base there is a need to name those problems that contribute to exclusion, such as racism, cultural intolerance, economic exploitation, sexism, and poverty.

Hence, Slee (2009) raises a pertinent question when he asks “are [the] cultures, policies and practices of schooling . . . enabling or disabling, democratic or undemocratic, inclusive or exclusionary?” (p. 185). Within a career education context, this could be further extended by asking career advisors to consider whether their practices are oppressive and dominating, or transformative and liberating? Arthur and Collins (2011), for example, contend, that if career advisors are to connect career education with issues of social justice it will be necessary for them to “acquire knowledge about the social, economic, and political forces that shape career *development* [emphasis added], including opportunities and barriers for education and employment” (p. 148, emphasis added). From a career *education* perspective, therefore, I would add that career advisors also need to attain an understanding of multiple ways of being, belonging, and enacting career(s), beyond privileging labour market participation (see Richardson, 2009).

Therefore, if social injustice is to be challenged, and social inclusion championed, it will require career advisors to become social justice advocates (Irving & Marris, 2000), who problematise the values that sustain deleterious forms of social injustice (which cohere with oppression and domination), and actively engage in anti-oppressive practice (Mignot, 2001) through their programmes and activities. As the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (2000) note:

action depends on people's interpretation of what is possible and right . . .  
Questioning extreme individualism and the unbridled power of money –  
reasserting the value of equity and social solidarity, and reinstating the  
citizen at the centre of public life – is a major challenge of our time. Only  
human beings with a strong sense of public good can do that. (p. xix)

Yet challenging social injustice wherever, and whenever, it is encountered is no easy task as there is a dearth of conceptual and practical resources that explicitly connect career education with issues of social in/justice. Moreover, as I identified in chapter one, social justice can take many forms, yet there is nothing available that locates the differential meanings within a career education context, nor enables career advisors to position themselves, and their practices, in relation to these.

## **(Re)framing career education for social justice: Where to from here?**

I saw my study as a ‘call to action’ (Brook & Darlington, 2013), *as well as* making a contribution to knowledge. Throughout my research, therefore, I have aimed to stimulate a reflexive discussion amongst academics, practitioners, and other interested parties (such as those who inform policy), about how social justice might be conceptualised and located within a career education context. As Giroux (2008) notes, “dialogue, thoughtfulness and critical exchanges [are fostered when we recognise that education is] more than an investment opportunity, citizenship is more than conspicuous consumption, learning is more than preparing for a job” (p. 65). Consequently, I recognised at an early stage that if I was to engage in a critical change dialogue with academics, practitioners, and policy makers with an interest in career education I needed to make my findings widely accessible and available. Thus, I have drawn on my emerging findings and other aspects of my study to inform articles I have had published in academic and professional journals, and presentations I have given at national and international conferences (see Appendix E). Hence, as my work unfolded during the doctoral process I opened it up to wider scrutiny by a range of audiences, and contributed possibilities for practice.

Therefore, as a critical researcher for social justice (Griffiths, 1998, 2003), my intention in this section is to continue in this vein by identifying areas for further research, and making recommendations for practice, in response to the issues that have emerged from my study. Whilst career advisors, teachers, and

schools alone may not be able compensate for the deeper structural inequalities within society (Anyon, 2011; Roberts, 2005), through their practices they can assist students to gain an understanding of social in/justice, and how this plays out in society (Carpenter, 2014; Young, 1990; 2000). Consequently, if career advisors are to engage productively with issues of social in/justice further research is required, that extends beyond the defined scope of my PhD, to uncover how and where oppression and domination intersects with career education, and shows *why* this is problematic. Moreover, as my research identified, there is need to extend the discursive and practical resources available to career advisors that will help to progress social justice, and show how social *in*justice might be exposed and challenge, in, and through, career education. Supporting this with professional development opportunities that are critically reflexive, intellectually stimulating, *and* meaningfully applied will also assist those engaged in career education to move theory into practice, whilst also facilitating localised responses.

Although I advocate for a critical-recognitive social justice approach within career education which questions dominant worldviews, argues for a fair (re)distribution of resources, respects group difference, and promotes the development of capabilities, I recognise that not everyone shares all of my views. My overall aim, therefore, is to make social justice visible within a career education context, and to give it a materiality that is meaningful *and* purposeful. Thus, what I propose is not intended to provide universal solutions to ‘common’ problems, based on a single definition of social justice. Rather, I suggest ways in which critical research might inform thinking *and* be useful in practice (Apple,

2001; Cary, 2006; Kincheloe, 2008), by extending the conceptual and practical resources currently available to career advisors in New Zealand high schools.

Hence, what I have identified is by no means comprehensive, but reflects my own thinking at this moment in time. I am sure that, as I reflexively look back over my study in the future, there will be other areas of research and development that I have either overlooked, or not yet ‘imagined’.

- *Shifting titles*

The use of the official title ‘career advisor’ in New Zealand schools is problematic in relation to career *education*, as it tends to reflect an individualised role that is ultimately concerned with the giving of advice, guidance and/or information. As my study has demonstrated, career education is much more complex and far reaching, and should be concerned with the development of a student’s critical capacities and collective sense-making of the world. Thus, I would recommend that the title ‘career advisor’ is replaced by that of ‘career educator’. ‘Career educator’ is more inclusive and apposite in an *educational* sense, and connects with a learning facilitator discourse, whilst still encompassing a wider range of roles such as the giving of career advice, guidance and information.

- *(Re)constructing career education*

Given the confusion surrounding the concept of career education which permeated my study, such as the way in which it was conjoined with career development and/or employability, I would recommend that research is



undertaken which disentangles career education from other associated activities, and reconstructs it as a curriculum area in its own right. As the discursive meanings which lie beneath language use are important, there is a need to name practices clearly, articulate what they are seeking to achieve, and identify what is being covered elsewhere. Building on the MoE (2009a) view that we *all* have a career, for example, the reconstruction of career education needs to be set within a broader philosophical context that explores the ‘new’ meaning of career, identifies the socio-political influences on how career(s) might be being formed, forged and enacted, and provides examples of career paths that occur in a range of settings, including those that take place outside of the formal labour market. Productive links could then be made with other aspects of career learning such as career development and/or counselling activities, and closer relationships established with those curriculum areas that are particularly concerned with the social dimensions of life, such as the arts, health and physical education, and social studies.

In addition, whilst my study indicates that some attention had been paid to the (assumed) career needs of Māori and Pasifika students, I found this to be insufficient, and often dislocated from what was happening within career education. More attention needs to be given to the desires and aspirations of Māori and Pasifika communities. Moreover, a deeper, and more nuanced, multicultural insight is required if the career needs of New Zealand’s ‘new’ migrant populations who originate from the Asian region are to be

accommodated within career education practice (an issue I return to later in this chapter).

Thus, there is a need for a clearer understanding of *how* non-dominant cultural values and worldviews are positioned, and *where* they ‘fit’ within mainstream career education curricula. Such research could encompass the intersections of gender, dis/ability, and socio-economic class, providing an opportunity to gain a clearer insight into how those from non-dominant groups understand the term ‘career’, what their perceptions are of career education, and/or whether they see it connecting with their own lives, and they see their futures unfolding.

The findings could be used to evaluate dominant career education discourse, and inform possibilities for career learning. Moreover, it could help to illuminate further the challenges that students from non-dominant backgrounds may be experiencing in the construction of their careers. Additionally, it may deepen understanding of whether New Zealand society is responding positively to the needs of those groups who are least advantaged, thus linking it directly with social justice concerns.

- *Developing professional understanding of social justice*

Further research is required to identify whether the professional training courses made available to those working as career advisors in New Zealand schools introduces them to the concept of ‘social in/justice’, raises their awareness

of the different forms it can take, and enables them to relate their own understanding of social justice to their career education practice. As Marjorie commented in chapter nine, she had engaged with social justice issues related to culture on her professional training course in career development, but did not know how to translate the theory into practice when confronted by the ‘realities’ of cultural difference.

Associated with the above, it would be helpful to gain a clearer insight into how, or whether, those professional organisations that represent career advisors in New Zealand, i.e. Career Development Association of New Zealand (CDANZ) and Careers And Transition Education Association (Aotearoa) Inc. (CATE), and Careers New Zealand who provide support to career advisors in schools, articulate social justice. Furthermore, it would be informative to know whether these organisations make ‘social justice’ visible in their policies, support materials, and professional activities, and relate these to the career education context.

The absence of a social justice dimension within professional development sessions organised for career advisors was noticeable in the talk of many of my participants. Therefore, I would recommend that a series of professional development days are organised by professional bodies such as CATE or CDANZ (and/or Careers Services New Zealand) around the topic of social justice within career practice as part of their social responsibility towards their members and/or clients. A dialogical approach is preferred as this has “the potential to challenge perceptions, inform thinking, intellectualise [careers] work, and at the same time

be political and empowering” (Carpenter, 2015, p. 136). An initial session could be delivered which introduces the concept of social justice, and locates it within a broad career learning context. This would provide career advisors and other interested parties with opportunities to explore the contested nature of this concept, and reflexively position themselves.

Whilst this could be followed by further sessions that focus on the inclusion of a social justice approach within different dimensions of career practice (such as career development, career counselling, workplace learning, and ‘employability skills’) my primary concern is that there should be one (or more) sessions dedicated to career education specifically. These could be focused on the relationship between social in/justice and career education. This would enable those participating to locate their own understanding of social justice within a career education context. It could also facilitate the development of shared resources and approaches for putting social justice theory into practice, thus extending the conceptual resources that are currently available. This may require specialist facilitators who have an understanding of the multiple meanings attached to social justice, and are able to broadly contextualise these in relation to career education. Such professional development sessions could call on a range of modes of delivery, including formal face to face sessions, ‘drop in’ weekend workshops, and/or distance education. There needs to be clarity around what constitutes career *education* as discussed in my earlier recommendation.

- *Building a conceptual and practical resource base*

The current lack of conceptual and practical resources which facilitates the location of social justice concerns within a career education context, identified by my research (and discussed above), might be eased further by establishing career advisors' needs. This would contribute to a clearer insight into how career advisors in New Zealand conceptualise social justice, and how, or whether, they see it 'fitting' with their practice. Those who indicate that they actively engage with social justice issues through career education could be asked to provide examples (including lesson plans where possible) to show how they have achieved this. A range of methods could be employed to gather this data including the use of qualitative interviews, focus groups, professional development days, and large-scale of surveys, dependent of expertise, time and/or funding. Supported by external funding, and/or on an ad hoc basis of willing participants, this initiative could lead to the collaborative development of outline lesson plans and associated learning resources, which should be made freely available to career advisors, where they can be adapted (if need be) to meet the localised needs of their own student cohorts.

There are also possibilities to extend the above activity through the compilation of an edited book which connects social justice theory to career education in practice within an international context. I would recommend that such a book include several initial chapters with extended discussions about how social justice might be conceptualised and understood within a career education context. This would be followed by further chapters where contributors outline

their own understanding of social justice, and provide an example which shows how they have put this into practice, thus extending the knowledge base.

Prospective contributors could be sought through professional bodies and/or networks. There are a range of existing international publishers such as Sense, or Taylor & Francis, which are likely to be interested in publishing such a resource.

- *Facilitating culturally inclusive approaches to career education*

Arthur and Collins (2011) note “cultural influences are inextricably woven into people’s career development” (p. 107), hence career advisors require knowledge of different cultural contexts, and understanding of multiple ways of being and enacting ‘career(s)’ (Young, 1990). Therefore, it would be beneficial if career advisors found ways to work alongside, and collaboratively with, members of their local ethnic and indigenous communities. Working within communities will provide greater accessibility to resources, facilitate the sharing of expertise, and contribute to a lively interplay of ideas, whilst helping to establish relationships that are “culturally respectful and responsive in appropriate ways” (Gleeson & Irving, 2013, p. 2). It also shifts power, to a degree, from the career professional and the discourses that inhabit their world, to those of the community, who may see, and experience life, and career, differently.

Allied to the above, is my recommendation that career education programmes and learning resources are developed collaboratively with representatives from indigenous and ethnic minority communities to help ensure they reflect their lived experiences, cultural values, and aspirations. Whilst there

appears to have been some career education-related activities developed for Māori and Pasifika students (beyond visits to tertiary institutions), my research found that they tend to be somewhat dislocated from the career education curriculum. Therefore, it would be helpful if career advisors had greater knowledge of what went on in these ‘targeted’ activities as it would enable them to build on the learning in their mainstream programmes. For those career advisors who do not have Māori or Pasifika heritage, it may also contribute to a greater understanding of cultural difference.

There is also a need for career advisors to consider their practices in response to a changing migrant population, where the cultures and expectations of the ‘new’ Asian communities may not always fit comfortably within a New Zealand-European worldview. Consequently, there is a need for research into the career needs of these ‘new’ communities, to ascertain how *they* conceptualise ‘career(s)’ and understand the role of career education, and to identify whether they feel that there are gaps and/or omissions in current practices. For example, as my study shows, whilst a liberal humanist approach which privileges the rights of the individual underpins career education, in some cultures the rights, and needs, of families and/or communities take precedence. Ideally, there should be further research into how, or whether, cultural differences are accommodated within career education policy and practice, to inform future developments.

An example of this move away from a dominant career education discourse, which is infused with Western values, was provided by Barker and

Irving (2005), who worked collaboratively with career advisors, community representatives, and a local Imam, in the construction of a career development education pack for Muslim girls. This connects with Ward, Liu, Fairbairn-Dunlop and Henderson's (2010) view that what is important for Muslim young people to feel 'at home' is "New Zealanders' acceptance of diversity and the 'social permission' for the expression of Muslim identity and practices" (p. 42). It is important to add a caveat here, however, which acknowledges that ethnic communities themselves are diverse, and not all members share the same cultural values and viewpoints. Moreover, there can be differences *between* families and/or *within* local communities due to such factors as socio-economic class, attitudes to gender, politics, religious belief, and such like. Therefore, rather than be prescriptive, such resources should be adaptable and responsive to local needs, and be used in ways which respect cultural difference and family desires. Thus there is a need to tread carefully when navigating the tensions between multicultural approaches, group rights, and western values (Keddie, 2013b).

- *Making sense of social justice for/in practice*

Gale (2000) asks how teachers will know social justice when they see it, a question that is equally apposite for career advisors. As my study identified, social justice is a term that career advisors are not particularly familiar with, particularly within a career education context. Moreover, because of its inherently political nature, Metz and Guichard (2009) have reported that there is some resistance within the broad career field to the introduction of a social justice framework to guide practice. Yet, there is a need to acknowledge that career education and



guidance *is* a political activity (see Watts, 1996b), the issue, therefore, is how social justice is interpolated by career advisors, and related to their own localised situations.

As a contested concept, that is often vague and loosely conceptualised, there is a need to make the competing forms of social justice visible and accessible if they are to be of use for/in practice, and resonate with the everyday lives of career advisors and their students. Gale (2000, p. 268) has already gone some way down this path, mapping three different perspectives on social justice, i.e. the retributive, recognitive and distributive, onto a generalised matrix. I recommend that this is extended to include a fourth critical-recognitive perspective, incorporating the diverse approaches to career. The development of a social justice matrix lay outside of the scope of this study. However I feel that my findings will contribute to the development of a robust matrix that relates four different aspects of social justice to career practice, and is thus useful in, and for, career education practice.

The development of a 'social justice matrix' will present career advisors with an opportunity to construct a framework to guide, and evaluate, their own localised career education practice. This could be developed as a critical participatory action research project (see Kemmis, 2012b; Sandretto, 2007), by engaging career advisors in a critically reflexive moral and political process through which they examine their personal and professional views of what it means to be 'socially just'. If such a matrix were constructed it could be used to inform a 'social justice' statement (or statements) which locates their own

understanding within a career education context, and shows how this connects with their own localised practices. The framework could also be employed as an evaluative tool, against which they can assess their current career education practices. The findings from this can help to highlight strengths and expose potential gaps/weaknesses which can be used to inform any re/construction of their teaching/programmes/activities. As a part of this process it would also be of value for them to reflect on, and document, what they feel inhibits, and enables, their scope to locate career education within a social justice context. This could also be used to inform future professional development opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

By providing a concerted examination and substantive critique of career education in relation to issues of social in/justice, my research contributes to a neglected area of study, whilst adding to the somewhat confused debate about the future direction of this curriculum area. Influenced by critical educators such as Jean Anyon, Michael Apple, Bronwyn Davies, Paolo Freire, Henry Giroux, Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, and inspired by the political philosophy of Iris Marion Young, it is my contention that career education should be able to assist young people to construct meaningful futures that are not subject to liberal humanist benevolence, nor constrained by pervasive neoliberal economic rationalities. Thus, I feel, by engaging positively with a social justice discourse career advisors “can make a difference by assisting students to develop their critical capabilities as creative, dynamic and socially concerned citizens . . . [and allowing] them to envisage possible alternative futures” (Irving, 2010b, p. 21).

If career education was positioned as a critical transformative practice, with a concern for the progression of social justice at its heart, it would have the potential to engage students in a critical reading of the world, and the word (Comber, 2015; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Moreover, it would contribute to a deeper understanding of the multiple ways in which meaningful careers might be constructed and enacted. Hence, in my recommendations I have sought to extend the conceptual resources made available to career advisors by identifying strategies and materials that (I hope) will stimulate a “new imaginary [amongst career advisors] which . . . emphasizes collective well-being that is sutured across local, national and global dimensions” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 201-202). This will require career advisors (and teachers) to think differently about their work by making transparent links between career education, social justice and democratic life (Hyttén, 2006). Yet, as Cochran-Smith (1995) comments, “to alter a system that is deeply dysfunctional, the system needs teachers who regard teaching as a political activity and embrace social change as part of the job” (p. 494). However, I acknowledge that this is no easy task for career advisors in the current socio-political and educational climate they work within.

It would appear that, in the future, career advisors may need to be more creative if they are to find space(s) for the development and delivery of career education activities that are socially just (Irving, 2005), engage students in a social and political critique of ‘career’ (Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher, 2008), and move their practices from a (disconnected) language of critique to an engaged language of possibility (Giroux, 1989). What is required, therefore, is the political

commitment of career advisors, and support from their professional bodies, to turn these goals into a 'new', and meaningful, reality. This does not necessarily entail revolutionary change, but a commitment on the part of career advisors to locate their career education practices within a clearly articulated social justice frame. Hence, I believe that my findings and recommendations offer a deeper, and more sophisticated, understanding of social in/justice within a career education context, along with an appreciation of how social justice concerns can translate into career education practice.

In closing, it is important to add that my commitment to the promotion of social justice within a career education context does not end with the completion of this thesis, but will continue into the future. As I grapple with the thorny question of how social injustice might be exposed and challenged within this curriculum area, progressing the interests of those least advantaged and/or marginalised within society remains my priority.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A

### Information sheet for participants

#### How is social justice understood within career education in New Zealand schools?

##### INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

###### **Why have I been invited to participate?**

My name is Barrie Irving and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Otago College of Education. I am exploring how social justice is understood in career education in secondary schools, and would like to talk to careers teachers/advisors with responsibility for the development and delivery of career education for students in years 9 to 11. Further information about my study is outlined below, however if further clarification of any aspects is required I am happy to discuss these in person (if practicable), via email or telephone. My contact details are included at the end of the information sheet.

###### **What is the project about?**

This project is being undertaken as part of my Ph.D. study at the University of Otago College of Education. I am exploring how careers teachers/advisors in secondary schools understand issues of social justice in relation to career education, and locate these in their practice. From an educational perspective, I see social justice as being concerned with how the diverse needs of individuals *and* groups of students are supported. In relation to career education more specifically it is concerned with the interconnectedness of socio-economic class, race, ethnicity, gender, and (dis)ability in the distribution of opportunities, exploration of multiple concepts of career, questions about why discrimination occurs, and how issues of inequity and injustice might be questioned and/or challenged.

###### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate, I will ask you to provide some brief details about yourself, copies of your school's policies that relate to social justice, equity/equality, and career education, and details of your career education programmes.

I will then arrange a face to face interview with you at a mutually agreed time and place, which will last for approximately one hour. Approximately one week in advance of the interview I will send you a copy of the broad questions I would like our discussion to cover. With your permission, the interview will be recorded to ensure that it accurately reflects our discussion and, once transcribed, I will supply you with a written copy for checking and approval.

Once I have completed my fieldwork and produced my initial findings I will send a copy of the findings to you as I would welcome your feedback on how I have understood, and presented, the data. I am particularly interested in how it reflects your own experiences and understanding. Any comments or contributions you wish to make as a result will be used to inform my thinking as I refine my findings, and play a part in the final report.



At a later stage in the research, you will have the opportunity to comment on, contribute to, and participate in, the development of a social justice framework for secondary school career educators (if you are interested and have the time available).

### **What data or information will be collected and how will it be used?**

The brief personal information you provide will be used to profile the characteristics of the careers teachers in the study with reference to ethnicity, age, gender, and experience. The policy documents will help me to identify how equity/equality/social justice is positioned within the participant schools in general, and career education in particular. Information about the career education programmes will give an overview of the activities covered with year 9 to 11 students. The interview data provides an insight into how careers teachers/advisors themselves understand social justice and relate it to career education. Collectively this data will be used to inform the draft and final reports of my study. It will also contribute to the co-construction of the social justice framework mentioned earlier.

The only people who will have direct access to the specific information provided by you and your school will be my supervisors (Dr. Karen Nairn & Dr. Bronwyn Boon) and myself. This information will be incorporated into my Ph.D. study, and a code name used for yourself and your school to help preserve anonymity. The recording and transcript of the interview will be kept in a secure location, and erased/destroyed once it is no longer required. On completion of my thesis, I will be happy to send you/your school Principal a final summary of my findings which will include a copy of the social justice framework. If you are interested I will also make you aware of further publications of the findings which result from the research.

### **Can I withdraw from the project?**

If you are unhappy with any aspect of this project you may withdraw at any time.

### **Who do I contact if I have any questions?**

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please contact myself, Barrie Irving, at the University of Otago College of Education, Dunedin. Phone: (03) 479 5975 email [irvba060@student.otago.ac.nz](mailto:irvba060@student.otago.ac.nz). You can also contact my Primary Supervisor, Dr. Karen Nairn, University of Otago College of Education, Dunedin. Phone: (03) 479 8619. Email: [karen.nairn@otago.ac.nz](mailto:karen.nairn@otago.ac.nz)

**This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Otago  
College of Education**

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## Appendix B

### Information sheet for school principals



Dear

I am currently undertaking Ph.D. research at the University of Otago College of Education where I am exploring the question: 'how is social justice understood within career education?' I am writing to invite your school's careers teacher/advisor, with responsibility for the development and delivery of career education programmes for year 9 to 11 students, to participate in my research. I have attached an Information Sheets which provides further details about the general focus of my study, and the level of commitment required.

I am intending to interview a number of careers teachers/advisors in rural and urban schools with diverse student populations in both the North and South Islands to gain a comprehensive picture of how social justice issues are understood within career education, and how they play out in practice. Involving participants from a large geographical area will also help to preserve the anonymity of those involved.

If you feel that your school's careers teacher/advisor might be interested in participating could you please pass a copy of the Information Sheet on to them for their consideration. I am planning to carry out my interviews in Auckland during the week of Monday, 30 November, therefore if your careers teacher/advisor would like to participate I would appreciate it if they could email me as soon as possible. If I do not hear anything by the middle of November I will contact you again as it may be that you wish to discuss my request in more detail.

If you, or your careers teacher/advisor, have any questions about my study, or require any further information, then please do not hesitate to get in touch. My contact details are included in this letter, and can also be found on the information sheet.

Wish best wishes

Barrie A. Irving  
Ph.D. Candidate  
University of Otago College of Education  
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Dunedin 9054  
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Phone: 03 479 5975

## Appendix C

### Career education as an inclusive practice: locating social justice

#### CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All the questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request more information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage.
3. All efforts will be made to protect my anonymity, and that of the school.
4. The interview transcript and tape recording will be retained in secure storage and will only be viewed by yourself or your PhD Supervisors (Dr. Karen Narin & Dr. Bronwyn Boon).
5. After a maximum of 5 years the transcript and tape will be destroyed/erased.
6. I will not have to answer any questions that I am uncomfortable with during the interview.
7. I will receive a copy of the transcript for checking.
8. If any publication occurs as a result of this interview I will be made aware of the details.

I agree to take part in this project.

Signature .....

Name .....

Date .....

**The University of Otago Human Ethics Committee has approved this project**



*Te Whare Wānanga o Ōtago*

## Appendix D

### Research schedule

#### How is social justice conceptualised and located within career education in New Zealand high schools?

This research is concerned with how concerns with social justice are understood and positioned within career education policy, incorporated into programmes, and inform the practice(s) of career advisors.

#### **Questions:**

1. What is the cultural make up of your school?
2. How did you get involved with career education?
3. What do you understand the main purpose of career education to be?
4. Do you see any differences between the following terms: career education; career development; and career counselling?
5. Are you aware of the 2009 Ministry of Education document, 'Career Education and Guidance in New Zealand Schools' (or the 2003 document?)
6. In the above document 'career' is presented in a holistic way. What do you understand 'holistic' to mean in relation to career education?
7. How would you view the inclusion of alternative activities or pathways to paid employment or continuing in education fitting into career education programmes?
8. Looking more closely at the development of your own career education programme, what do you feel have been the key influences?
9. What theory, or theories, would you say have influenced your approach to career education?
10. What do you feel are the main career education needs of students in their final years of compulsory schooling?
11. What do you understand the term social justice to mean?

12. Does your school have equal opportunities or social justice policies?  
If so, where do you see them fitting in to career education?
13. Where do you see social justice concerns fitting within career education in general, and in your own programme more specifically?
14. Have you received any education or training related to social justice issues?
15. What do you feel are the major challenges facing career education in the future?
16. Is there anything further you would like to add?

## Appendix E

### Peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, conference presentations, proceedings and seminars drawn from, or informed by, this thesis.

#### *Peer-reviewed Journal Articles*

- Irving, B. A.** (2013). Discourses of delusion in demanding times: A critical analysis of the career education policy guidelines for New Zealand secondary schools. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 13(2), 187-195. doi: 10.1108/QRJ-03-2013-0019.
- Irving, B. A.** (2012). Access, opportunity and career: supporting the aspirations of disabled students with high-end needs in New Zealand. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 17(10), 1040-1052. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2012.728634
- Irving, B. A.** (2011) Choice, chance or compulsion: the recruitment of career advisers into New Zealand secondary schools. *Revista Espanola De Orientacion Y Psicopedagogia* (Spanish Journal of Career Guidance and Counselling), 22(2), 109-119.
- Irving, B. A.** (2011). Career education as a site of oppression and domination: an engaging myth or a critical reality? *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 20(3), 24-30.
- Irving, B. A.** (2010). Making a difference? Developing career education as a socially just practice. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 19(3), 15-23
- Irving, B. A.** (2010). Connecting career education with social justice: relating theory to practice in New Zealand secondary schools. *Career Research and Development*, 24, 19-22
- Irving, B. A.** (2010). Shifting careers: (re)constructing career education as a socially just practice. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 10(1), 49-63. doi: 10.1007/s10775-009-9172-1
- Irving, B. A.** (2009). Locating social justice in career education: what can a small-scale study from New Zealand tell us? *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 18(2), 13-23.

## ***Book Chapters***

**Irving, B. A.,** Sanderson, L. J. & Sanderson, D. (2011). Challenging perceptions of (dis)ability in New Zealand: enhancing opportunities for disabled students with high-end needs through school-supported work experience. In L. Barham & B. A. Irving (Eds.) *Constructing the Future VI: Diversity, Inclusion and Social Justice* (pp. 117-129). Stourbridge, UK: Institute of Career Guidance

## ***Peer-reviewed Conference Presentations***

- B. A. Irving** (2014) Giving meaning to social justice: Enacting a critical-recognitive approach within career development. Paper in Symposium: *International Perspectives on Social Justice*. At the intersection of personal, community and worklife realities. International Conference of the IAEVG, Quebec, Canada (June).
- B. A. Irving** (2014) Towards a green future: Challenging times for career practice. Paper in Symposium: *Green Guidance – action for a sustainable future*. At the intersection of personal, community and worklife realities. International Conference of the IAEVG, Quebec, Canada (June).
- B. A. Irving** (2013). ‘It’s not easy being green’: re/thinking the ethics and practice of career development. Paper in Symposium: *Green guidance: time for action*. Career guidance; a human or a citizen's Right? International Conference of the IAEVG, Montpellier, France (September).  
doi: 10.13140/2.1.3415.7764
- B. A. Irving** (2013). Re/constructing career education as a critical social practice: Pushing the discursive boundaries of possibility. Paper in Symposium: *Positioning social justice at the heart of career practice: A critical priority*. Career guidance; a human or a citizen's Right? International Conference of the IAEVG, Montpellier, France (September).  
doi: 10.13140/2.1.4726.4969
- J. Gleeson & **B. A. Irving** (2013). *Re/constructing meaningful futures for Aboriginal communities in rural Australia: Should the white career practitioner stay at home?* Career guidance; a human or a citizen's Right? International Conference of the IAEVG, Montpellier, France (September).  
doi: 10.13140/RG.2.1.4268.2401
- J. Gleeson & **B. A. Irving** (2013). *Talking the talk: effective communication with the Indigenous ‘other’*. Career guidance; a human or a citizen's Right? International Conference of the IAEVG, Montpellier, France (September).  
doi: 10.13140/RG.2.1.2171.0880

- B. A. Irving** (2012). *Beyond the great divide: Positioning parents, families and communities in New Zealand career education*. Regional and global cooperation in educational research. Joint international Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education and the Asia Pacific Educational Research Association, Sydney, Australia (December).
- B. A. Irving** (2012). *Discourses of delusion: a critical analysis of career education policy in New Zealand*. Embodying good research: What counts and who decides? Conference of the Association for Qualitative Research, Darwin, Australia, (August).
- B. A. Irving** (2011). *Preparing secondary students for transition into the 'real world': what role does career education play in the promotion of social justice?* Paper in Symposium. Transitioning through life: Choices and challenges in changing times. Transitions. 17th Biennial Conference of the Australasian Human Development Association, Dunedin, New Zealand (July).
- B. A. Irving** (2011). *Career education as a site of oppression and domination: an engaging myth or a critical reality?* What's it all about? Career development: Retrospective and prospective. International Conference of the IAEVG, Cairns, Australia, April.
- B. A. Irving** (2010). *Making a difference? Developing career education as a socially just practice*. Making a difference. Conference of the Career Development Association of Australia. Adelaide, Australia (April).
- B. A. Irving** (2009). *Developing socially just career programmes: From theory to practice*. Transforming Careers: Unleashing Potential. International Conference of the IAEVG, Wellington, New Zealand (November).
- B. A. Irving** (2009). *Putting social justice into practice: a New Zealand insight into career education*. Coherence, Co-operation and Quality in Guidance and Counselling. International Conference of the IAEVG. Jyväskylä, Finland (June).
- B. A. Irving** (2009). *Careering down the wrong path? (Re)positioning career education as a socially just practice*. When theory and practice are combined, the fruit of this convergence is enlightenment. Career Practitioners Association of New Zealand & Otago Polytechnic 2<sup>nd</sup> Career Research Symposium, Dunedin, New Zealand (March).



## *Seminars*

- B. A. Irving** (2012). Staff Seminar. *Is there a place for social justice within career education in New Zealand secondary schools?* Charles Sturt University, Faculty of Education, Wagga Wagga, Australia (September).
- B. A. Irving** (2011). Invited Presentation. *Where does social justice 'fit' within career education? An examination through the lens of Iris Marion Young.* Pacific Postgraduate Reference Group seminar, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand (July).
- B. A. Irving** (2010). Invited Presentation. *Challenging career education: A critical connection with social justice.* Otago Branch of the Career Development Association of New Zealand. Dunedin, New Zealand (March).