

Models, Muddles and Memories

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My collaboration with John in conducting research into career guidance spanned 14 years. Our first project together was a review of research into the learning outcomes of guidance, funded by the then Employment Commission (Killeen & Kidd, 1991; 1992). This work demanded some tenacity in the search for published US and UK studies evaluating guidance, and John's qualities in this respect, as well as his attention to detail, were soon apparent. The report of this project remains a useful guide to evaluation instruments, as progress in this area has slowed over the last decade.

Work on the role of theory in career guidance interviewing followed, with Julie Jarvis and Marcus Offer. The Department of Employment was preparing to introduce a competency-based approach to training for local authority careers officers. We and others were concerned that training in the future would be reduced to lists of skills and techniques, with scant attention being given to the ways in which occupational choices are made and the ways careers develop over time. The research was an opportunity to find out whether careers officers saw theory as relevant to their interviewing, how they used it, and how theory was taught on training courses.

Out of all the work I did with John, this was the most enjoyable. Using a questionnaire survey, interviews and group discussions, we showed that careers officers were familiar with quite a wide range of theories, although in their interviewing they tended to apply broad principles of theory, rather than more specific aspects. As John so aptly put it, theories which explain 'how the world works' had little influence on interviewing practice: the theories which were most influential were guidance theories, rather than career theories. Careers officers seemed on the whole to favour an eclectic style, adapting their approach to clients' needs and to the constraints of the interview situation. We suggested that there was scope for in-service training programmes to include more theoretical input, so that more experienced practitioners could have opportunities to consider how theory might be applied in a more sophisticated way. This work was published in the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* (Kidd, Killeen, Jarvis & Offer, 1994; 1997), and John and I discussed our findings with practitioners and trainers in a number of workshops over the next few years. He enjoyed thinking of pithy titles for our papers. I remember the original title for the 1994 paper was 'Models or muddles', but eventually I managed to persuade him that this might not go

down well with the careers officers whom we hoped would read our work.

Our next project was a review of measures of the learning outcomes of guidance, in collaboration with Ruth Hawthorn, Jim Sampson and Michael White (Killeen *et al.*, 1994). John and I spent much time complaining to each other in the course of working on this project, as the task of reviewing several dozen instruments was fairly tedious, to say the least. But John got a vast amount of work done in a very short time, again with meticulous attention to detail. Around the same period, we began a historical review of the development of the Careers Service (Killeen & Kidd, 1996), and this was published in *Rethinking Careers Education and Guidance* (Watts *et al.*, 1996). Our last project together, in the summer of 2003, was a small section of his contribution to a review of the research base of career guidance, which Ruth Hawthorn was co-ordinating (Hawthorn, Killeen, Kidd & Watts, 2003).

Working with John was, in the best sense, a challenging experience. I learned a huge amount from his critical approach to the social sciences, and he had no truck with my lack of precision and occasional over-expedient approach. We approached our work in very different ways. I liked to get something done, and then forget about it for a while, while he relished returning again and again to what we had written, tweaking language and extending arguments. This was sometimes immensely frustrating: something I thought we had finished the day before, just within the word limit, would reappear the next day half as long again, with lengthy footnotes. Happily, he usually grudgingly accepted my suggestions for cuts, but our work was always much better after his revisions.

Because we lived some distance from each other, we did not actually meet very often to discuss our work together. Instead we talked over the phone. As those who knew him will remember, it was impossible to have a brief conversation with John, and I had to choose carefully the times I phoned him, making sure I had nothing urgent to do in the next hour or so. One had to allow time for tangential discussions on things like sampling techniques, the vagaries of SPSS, and the difficulties of dealing with research sponsors; and I learned to welcome these. I always learned something as a result. I miss John's friendship, humour and wisdom.