

## Professional Identity: A Storied Lens

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### **Biography:**

*Now based in Auckland, Val's career story so far includes longstanding experience in the NZ education sector as a curriculum subject teacher and school career practitioner. More recently she has provided career consultancy in schools, tertiary institutions and the private sector. Executive leadership roles and a term as President of the Career Development Association of NZ were opportunities for Val to contribute to professionalising the career field in NZ. She has been actively promoting the work of career professionals in working groups convened by the Ministry of Education and the Tertiary Education Commission. On reflection, Val sees there were important turning points in the ongoing development of her professional identity as a career professional. Initial qualifications and training and work as an English teacher progressed to a combined English teaching and school career practitioner role. She subsequently worked as a full time school career practitioner. Later, Masters study in career development and observing the continuing marginalisation of the career role in New Zealand schools further piqued her interest in how the school role was perceived and how individuals constructed a sense of professional self in the role. These concerns ultimately led to the doctoral research framing this conference presentation.*

In this presentation I will discuss findings from my PhD research, which explored differences in how school career practitioners in Australia and New Zealand view their professional identity. Schools are one of the main locations of career development services (Patton & McMahon, 2014). To provide comprehensive and integrated career services that support students to manage their lives, learning and work, school career practitioners need specialised as well as broad-based knowledge and skills. Furthermore, development of required competencies should not be left to chance if career practitioners are to meet the complex demands facing individuals in changing social and economic climates (McMahon, 2016). However, to date there is no requirement in Australia or New Zealand for training or qualifications explicitly in career development to enter employment in the field. Consequently, although career practitioners in schools engage in support and guidance of young people for careers that typically involve training and qualifications, some school career development positions are filled by individuals without training or qualifications specific to the field.

The acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills is fundamental in the process of constructing a professional identity, yet the career development field is still largely unregulated. An explanation may be that despite recognition from within the industry about the importance of higher education and training for the competence of career practitioners (Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe [NICE], 2012), there is a lack of understanding by policy makers of the knowledge and skills required for professional practice in career development. Compared with regulated professions such as teaching and psychology, an unregulated environment limits the ability of individuals and the career development field to construct a distinct professional identity.

The participants' stories underpinning this presentation offer important insights about the influence of professional standards on professional identity understanding.