

Key Stage 3

English Career Resources

(Career Education Guidance Objective 14)

Managing change and transition

Manage change and transition giving consideration to the longer-term implications and the potential progression opportunities.

- Reviewing case studies
- Identifying the benefits and drawbacks of different opportunities
- Discussing the difference between the outcome of chance and planned events.

Lesson

Equipment needed: 5/6 dice (enough for 5/6 groups of six students)

1 Discussion

Consider the important decisions to be made about careers; a process by which to make them; and the affect of those decisions.

2 Brainstorm

Consider possible questions aiming to collect the following information or something similar:

- i. Should I go to college or university?
- ii. Should I try for an apprenticeship?
- iii. Should I find the job my parents tell me to do?
- iv. Should I choose my favourite subject for GCSE? (identify what it is)

3 Discussion

How to choose? Use example of the '*Dice Man*' by Luke Reinhart in which the central character uses roll of die to make his decisions. *The attached review of Dice Man gives a brief account of the genesis of the novel and its provocative content.* Include reference to advantages/disadvantages and emphasise the following:

- i. If there is no pressure to make decision, quite often there is no responsibility for the outcome,
- ii. Having no responsibility for the outcome could be a disadvantage and lead to disappointment

How might it work? Look at everyday choices (listed below) and experiment in groups. Each student is given a number 1 – 6. Each question is posed and in each group the dice is rolled. If **their** number comes up, the decision is 'yes'. After each question the student chosen should discuss any positive/negative feelings they have, which should be recorded.

- You've fancied someone for ages, should you ask them on a date?
- Should you walk to school or take the bus/car?

- Should you revise for an upcoming exam or test?
- Should you get a takeaway for lunch or eat some fruit?
- Should you buy the latest trainers or hoodie?
- Should you go to a concert or movie at the weekend or stay at home?

4. **Plenary**

Feelings. Is there a difference between responses to emotional, intellectual, health, fashion, leisure questions? Could they live with the outcomes?

Return to the initial questions:

- 1 Should I go to college or university?
- 2 Should I try for an apprenticeship?
- 3 Should I find the job my parents tell me to do?
- 4 Should I choose my favourite subject for GCSE? (identify what it is)

Student chooses 'odd' or 'even' number for 'yes' 'no', teacher/students in groups roll die. Check and record results.

5. **Plenary**

Outcomes. Are students prepared to stick or do they want to roll again to get the answer they want? Could they live with the consequence of these decisions? Is this a good way to do it?

How have other people made decisions about their future? What sort of questions would they want to ask?

Imagine you are older and looking back on your life. How do you think you might answer the following questions? Do you think they are questions that are important to you now in relation to the decisions you have to make about the future?

(Teachers could reflect on their own career development as the questionnaire develops)

- 1 When you were at school, did you know for certain what you wanted to do when you were 14? When you were 16? When you were 18?
- 2 What useful advice did you get from:
Your parents
Your teachers
Your peers
Other people
- 3 What training did you have for your job? (Both formal and informal)
- 4 What else did you have to do, to develop skills, knowledge and understanding?
- 5 What makes you get out of bed in the morning (in a career's sense, not social!)
- 6 Did you plan your future? DO you plan your future?
- 7 What are the unsung parts of your job? (in teaching, for example, everyone perceives it as long summer holidays and finish at 3.30 p.m. the reality is very different: planning, meetings, marking, developing schemes of work, running trips, meeting parents, exam revision classes etc.)
- 8 Is your success down to luck or to planning or a bit of both?
- 9 Do you have any regrets?
- 10 What advice would you give to a young person who wants to work in this profession?

Plenary

What responses might the students make to some of these questions.

Task

All the students in one group of 5/6 read one of the case studies.

The group works together to summarise all the responses in the case study to present to the rest of the class.

Plenary

Consider the place of 'luck' or 'planning' in the case studies. Focus on preparedness to respond to challenges that are encountered. Carpe Diem.

Writing Task

In groups of 5/6, provide advice to a year 9 student considering option choices in the form of 5 easy to remember bullet points, to be printed on card, distributed at Options Evening.

Review of Dice Man by Budge Burgess, on Amazon.co.uk

"The Dice Man" was first published in 1971; written by George Cockcroft under the guise of his alter ego, Luke Rhinehart, the book attracted a cult following and has remained a popular - and controversial - work, seen by many as subversive and permissive.

Cockcroft had worked in the mental health field in the USA, obtaining his doctorate in psychology from Columbia, then taught English and psychology before becoming a full-time writer with the success of "The Dice Man". Marketed with the subheading, 'This book can change your life', it poses as a work of non-fiction, apparently written as an autobiographical insight by successful New York psychoanalyst, Luke Rhinehart.

Inspired by an intriguing happenstance, Rhinehart one day makes a decision. He lists half a dozen options then rolls the die to decide which one he should follow. The result pushes his boundaries and opens up a new set of experiences. Bit by bit, he hands his life over to decisions made by roll of the die. Rhinehart pushes the boundaries to extremes and beyond. It contrasts with Cockcroft's own dicing lifestyle - he says he started rolling dice to break down his shyness and stuffiness as an academically inclined teenager. He saw rolling a die as a means to break away from habit and reformulate himself.

Cockcroft says he feels that use of dice is a means of challenging the ego, of allowing experimentation with self. People are desperate for change, are never satisfied with what they've got or who they are. Life too easily becomes a set of habits, a pattern of routines. Cockcroft insists that life is too precious to just allow it to drift, to allow habit to dictate, making the same decision again and again. Though the hero of the book is male, and some of the female characters appear only to serve male fantasies and needs, Cockcroft insists that women are more subservient to roles than are males - there is greater social pressure on them to conform to more limited roles, to fill specific stereotypes. They therefore have a greater need, and greater opportunity to break the mold - though doing so may provoke greater criticism.

Reading "The Dice Man" may not change your life, but its ribald, explicit amorality should make you laugh ... and will hopefully make you think. This is not a bland novel, one which can be treated with indifference. It will outrage some, it will intrigue others, it might inspire ... you might even find yourself looking in the toy cupboard for a set of dice. A very funny book, very 70's, but with the ability to reach down the years and still amuse, it remains a passionate indictment of psychoanalysis and the therapy culture, and should be compulsory reading for anyone following a psychology, social work, or medical course.

Ben

Trained at E15 Drama School. Stage work includes understudy on National Theatre tour of 'The History Boys' and a UK tour of 'Noises Off'.

When you were at school, did you know for certain what you wanted to do when you were 14? When you were 16? When you were 18?

I knew from about 12 or 13 that I wanted to become an actor. I had a brief period at the beginning of my AS Levels, when I was about 16, when I had doubts about this and thought I might go into something else. After discussion with my drama teacher and my parents I realised that it was what I really wanted to do above anything else so I opted for a career in acting.

What useful advice did you get from:

Your parents

Just to do what I thought I would be happiest doing.

Your teachers

My drama teacher warned me of the difficulty of my chosen profession but really made me question whether I would be happy doing anything else. The headteacher of my primary school also told me about her daughter, who had always wanted to go into acting but opted for something "safer" and had always regretted it.

What training did you have for your job? (Both formal and informal)

Many years of amateur dramatics, GCSE Drama, A Level Theatre Studies and a three year BA in Acting at East 15 Acting School. I still attend workshops now, as the training is continuous.

What else did you have to do, to develop skills, knowledge and understanding?

Entering into the professional world of acting makes one learn a lot. I suppose the biggest thing I had to learn was to be more resilient and thick skinned, due to the sheer volume of rejection one encounters. Through meeting other actors, directors, casting directors etc, you also learn new ways of working and dealing with the hardship associated with the profession.

What makes you get out of bed in the morning?

When I have an acting job, the getting out of bed is easy because I love the work so much. When I'm not in acting work and I have to do something just to get me by, it is harder but I'm spurred on by the fact that the other jobs are just a means to an end; I know I won't be doing these jobs forever so it's easier to cope with.

Did you plan your future? DO you plan your future?

Not really. It's very difficult to make long term plans at the moment as I'm never sure what my income is going to be, or where work might take me. There are certain things I want, both in my career and personal life and I suppose I let those goals lead me.

What are the unsung parts of your job? (in teaching, for example, everyone perceives it as long summer holidays and finish at 3.30. the reality is very different: planning, meetings, marking, developing schemes of work, running trips, meeting parents, exam revision classes etc..)

I don't think they are really unsung because most people know, but definitely the time between jobs, when you have to work in dull jobs for meagre pay. Working over 45 hours a week, getting a pay check for the month and knowing that you got that in a week for doing a fraction of the hours AND doing something you love is really tough.

It's also really hard not being able to do things like take a holiday without the worry that you might be missing out on something. I also couldn't do something like go travelling for a year, without risking all of what I've built up in my career so far.

As for when you are acting, technical rehearsals are usually really tedious and can be extremely long days (over 12 hours usually). Also the waiting around on film and television sets can be excruciating.

Is your success down to luck or to planning or a bit of both?

Mostly luck, but there is a certain amount of planning. I'm lucky to have met certain people both during my training and afterwards, who have helped me to get certain jobs, but I have had to make the most of these contacts myself i.e. to contact them, invite them to shows, organise meetings etc.

Do you have any regrets?

Not really any major ones. Sometimes I wish I had been a bit more proactive inviting industry people to productions I have been in, but that's about it. I sometimes think it would be nice to have another profession to fall back on when I'm out of work, but had I have studied something else prior to acting I would have had a very different journey and may not have ended up acting. There is still the potential for me to train in another profession alongside acting anyway, so this doesn't really bother me.

What advice would you give to a young person who wants to work in this profession?

Think very carefully about what you want to do. If there is anything else that you are really interested in doing or have a passion for, then I would do that. It's extremely difficult, more so than most careers I can think of. Having said that, I think that when you are lucky enough to have a good career, it is one of the most satisfying jobs in the world.

Be very selective about your training and go to the best drama school for you. Do your research. Find out which schools are turning out actors who are going into good work. When you graduate you will be graduating alongside hundreds of other actors in exactly the same position as you (not to mention the thousands of already existing unemployed actors), so you want to gain as great an advantage as possible Remember that it is a career and a business, rather than something you do just for pleasure. Finally, this is a good piece of advice that Colin Sell had up in his room at East 15 Drama School:

“It’s not fair and don’t be late”

That sums it up quite well I think.

Duncan

Stage work includes Begbie in Trainspotting, TV includes Liam Mackay in Dream Team and Linden Cullen in Holby City.

When you were at school, did you know for certain what you wanted to do when you were 14? When you were 16? When you were 18?

When I was 14 all I ever wanted to do was play football, when I was 16 I was playing youth team football for Swindon. It never worked out so when I was 18 I decided to study Maths because I was good at it. I later dropped out of my Maths course to study Media Technology at the age of 21. It was the first time I had an idea I wanted to be involved in the media. It wasn't until I was 26 that I knew I wanted to be an actor. I don't think anyone can be sure what they want to do when they're 14, 16 or 18 as we're still developing, you want to do something you love. Sometimes that can be taken away from you by society/parents/teachers etc. I think that too often, what we dream about is difficult for anyone in a position of authority to understand.

What useful advice did you get from:

Your parents

My Mum always told me to follow my heart, great advice. My Dad, on the other hand, pressured me into studying Maths. He believed a degree was all important. Not so.

Your teachers

In the greater scheme of things I think it is difficult for teachers to give advice.

Your peers

None at all

What training did you have for your job? (Both formal and informal)

None at all, though I believe that what I now do for a living, I have been training for with every conversation and event that ever occurred in my life. I just never realised till now.

What else did you have to do, to develop skills, knowledge and understanding?

Be on time. Listen to others. Keep your mouth shut, and your eyes and ears open. Sadly traits that I never possessed from 14 to 26.

What makes you get out of bed in the morning?

The hope that the work I am putting in today will help me towards where I want to be.

Did you plan your future? DO you plan your future?

Never. And I still don't. If I have learned anything it is that if you really want something and are prepared to do whatever it takes to get it. Eventually, you'll get a chance. I've never been afraid to take risks and I try to live under my motto that, 'fortune favours the brave'. I try not to plan the future because I work in a profession where that just isn't possible. I have faith that I will get where I want to be and in the

meantime I try not to worry too much about how it is going to happen. I just feel that it will.

What are the unsung parts of your job? (in teaching, for example, everyone perceives it as long summer holidays and finish at 3.30. the reality is very different: planning, meetings, marking, developing schemes of work, running trips, meeting parents, exam revision classes etc..)

I get up every morning at 6.30. I get home at night at 8pm. I then have to spend an hour or so learning lines for the following day. I go to bed around 10pm. Added to this I'm training for the marathon so have to find an hour to run every day. I do this for five days a week. By Friday I am shattered. Saturday is spent recovering and then on Sunday I'm reading scripts and learning lines for the week. If being an actor is glamorous, I am yet to see that side of the job, to be honest it's not something I've ever been attracted to. I love the work. It is long, arduous hours and I have no social life, but I love the job. If someone pays you for something you love, then your life is a happy one. The way I see it, all the time spent learning lines, sitting around waiting for shots to be set up and the long hours is what they pay me for, the acting I do for free.

Is your success down to luck or to planning or a bit of both?

I strongly believe that in this life you make your own luck. I believe any success I might have had is the result of years of working for nothing, pleading with people for jobs and generally praying that one day you will be given a chance to prove yourself. If you do that, then one day you'll get your chance. You just need to be prepared to take it when it comes along. Fail to prepare, prepare to fail.

Do you have any regrets?

I wish I had known when I was 14 that this was what I wanted to do with my life. However, I also believe that had I done so I might not be where I am today. So probably not, no.

What advice would you give to a young person who wants to work in this profession?

Believe in yourself. Know why you are doing what you are doing. Don't let people tell you that what you are doing is wrong because if you believe it and I believe it, then you are acting. Also, be prepared for rejection, in fact, constant rejection. You either choose this as a profession for life, or don't bother with acting as a profession. There are too many actors out there who will give everything it takes to work, if you're not prepared to match their dedication then you will find it very difficult to work.

Guy. Director of Tag Theatre and Citizen's Theatre, Glasgow

When you were at school, did you know for certain what you wanted to do when you were 14? When you were 16? When you were 18?

I hadn't a clue what I wanted to do – certainly at 14 and 16. I'm not sure that I knew the kind of job I'm doing now even existed – I knew so little about the professional arts sector.

By 18 I had been more exposed to theatre/acting by my experience of school shows and had auditioned (unsuccessfully) for National Youth Theatre and begun to read plays for the pleasure of it.

When I arrived at University, pretty much the first thing I did was join the student drama company and volunteer to direct a show (the arrogance of youth), so I clearly had a strong urge to be involved in the performing arts but I don't think that even then I was necessarily harbouring a wish to pursue a career in the performing arts.

In the following four years or so I acted, directed, designed lights, stage managed, promoted shows, wrote music for shows, before dropping out of my studies in order to go to London for what I thought would be a career as an arts administrator. Which is what I am now – at least in part – tho I do have a great deal more room for creative expression than I had ever envisaged having at age 21.

So the short answer is no, I never had any certainty about what I wanted to do. Still don't.

What useful advice did you get from

Your parents

None really. Neither of them have any experience of the performing arts sector and neither had had the benefit of further education. They encouraged me to do whatever would bring me most fulfilment but had no idea how to help me decide what that might be.

Your teachers

Again, none really. I remember feeling abandoned and totally in the dark about choice of course and university, let alone career path. I'm sure things have improved immensely in recent years. The only guidance I recall was from a Drama teacher who gave me an opportunity to develop an interest in practical theatre-making. Wisely, he didn't attempt to push me into an acting training, as far as I can recall.

What training did you have for your job? (Both formal and informal)

No formal training.

Huge amount of informal/on-the-job training. Largely self-taught.

Theatre directing is very much a role one assumes (out of arrogance or desperation, maybe a bit of both) rather than earns. I created opportunities for myself to assist other directors and raised small budgets to mount my own shows and little by little gained a respectable enough reputation to be offered freelance project work.

In my recent f/t employment I have again had to learn fast on the job in order to fulfil my managerial and financial responsibilities.

What else did you have to do, to develop skills, knowledge and understanding?

Jump in at the deep end. Bluff it out. Watch others – especially the good ones. Steal astutely.

What makes you get out of bed in the morning?

Unfinished work – I mean that as a positive motivation!

The knowledge that the day ahead will always be full of variety.

My love of my job.

The knowledge that other people rely on me being there.

The knowledge that a good deal of what I do – or motivate others to do – is worthwhile and can make a difference in other people's lives – I'm thinking particularly about our work with children, young and vulnerable people.

The precarious nature of my job – it could end rather swiftly and I need to do everything I can to remain in post and to ensure that there are the resources to continue it. ie. the precarious nature of working in the professional arts industry is a motivating if distracting factor in itself.

The mortgage.

Did you plan your future? DO you plan your future?

No. I have had enormous good fortune over the past 20 years. I have the knack of being in the right place at the right time. My personality seems to motivate others to trust me and that goes a long way. Now I have arrived in as elevated a position as I could ever have hoped to occupy, I do give more thought to my future work. I am currently assessing options for a career change if and when I should need to make one. I would like to find a new work area outside the performing arts if possible but as yet have no real sense of what it might be. If thinking about the future counts as planning it, then yes.

What are the unsung parts of your job? (in teaching, for example, everyone perceives it as long summer holidays and finish at 3.30. the reality is very different: planning, meetings, marking, developing schemes of work, running trips, meeting parents, exam revision classes etc..

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Managing staff. Mediation. Support. Giving praise.

Endless meetings.

Report-writing.

Form-filling.

Coping with chronic underfunding – the constant need to compromise vision and to find creative (ie.cheaper) solutions.

A strange ill-defined sense of loneliness – the boss is rarely praised.

Guilt for being paid more than anyone else in the company.

Having to say ‘no’ too often – and often to good ideas which we can’t afford or are not practical.

Battling innate conservatism – people naturally fear change and innovation.

Is your success down to luck or to planning or a bit of both?

A lot of luck, hard work, some creative talent, trusting my instincts, sticking to my guns, treating others with respect. Precious little planning.

Do you have any regrets?

Yes, for every mistake I’ve made, no matter how big or small.

Not being perfect – sounds daft, but I hate falling short of my own or others’ expectations.

I regret the amount of time I have had to devote to my work and the pressure that has put on my family. I

regret the time I haven’t spent with my children as a result.

I regret not being more bold in my position.

What advice would you give to a young person who wants to work in this profession?

Never turn down any work, no matter how seemingly insignificant, unless you have a very good reason.

Because you never know what it might (and probably will) lead to.

It really is about who you know – contacts are everything, so learn how the art of sensitive networking.

Be enthusiastic.

Get a training if you can – everyone can benefit from some time to just explore and experiment.

Read as much as you can.

Have an opinion.

Learn from others – go to any live performing arts events as often as you can.

Offer to assist, ask to observe, make yourself available for free and then try to make yourself indispensable .

Have realistic expectations – understand that for 99.9% of the profession it’s not about financial reward or fame.

Have another string to your bow. There will be times when there isn't work and it's ideal to have something to fall back on which you are happy to do, rather than ending up temping or doing work you can't stand or which makes you think less of yourself.

Make your own work – just do it, on whatever scale you can muster; don't wait for the phone to ring because it won't.

Develop a hard shell – everyone's a critic and there's rejection aplenty, so learn to not let it get to you. Learn to take the knocks with a smile and remember that this is no meritocracy.

Martin

Trained at Goldsmith's, writing website content, satirical news show sketches and children's stories.

When you were at school, did you know for certain what you wanted to do when you were 14? When you were 16? When you were 18?

I had no idea about the intermediate steps, but I knew I wanted to write comedy when I was about seven. I used to pick up £5 prizes writing jokey letters to kids' comics such as Monster Fun. At secondary school, I got involved with school plays and then I was clearer that I wanted to write scripts. I wrote sketches with my mate Andy for a couple of years and we performed them in empty classrooms in the lunch break. I got my first paid short story published in a national magazine when I was seventeen. After that, my ambitions were pretty well fixed.

What useful advice did you get from:

Your parents

They were always very much against me writing. They wanted me to get a job in a bank, just like my sister had, they didn't want me to go to university and they tried hard to stop me. They weren't authoritarians, they just thought I'd be happier and more financially secure with a 'proper job' – and they thought that me going to college would break up the family.

Your teachers

I had two terrific English teachers at secondary, who were rigorous about the nuts-and-bolts of writing and about good style. I don't think I realised at the time what a big favour they were doing me. Most of my other teachers tended to be either amused or dismissive if I ever said I wanted to be a writer. I remember one general studies lesson where we did a number-crunching activity to show just how unlikely it was that you could make enough to live on from being a writer. That made a big impression on me.

Things changed in the sixth form. I had an inspirational drama teacher who encouraged me to follow my dreams. I probably wouldn't have gone to university without that push. It wasn't so much the specifics of 'This is how you achieve your career goals', the thing that made the difference was being taken seriously. Up until then I tried to avoid telling adults what I wanted to be, because the standard response was, 'Oh, you'll never make money doing that.' My drama teacher gave me encouragement, took me seriously and gave me opportunities to try out my ideas. I'd never had that response from an adult before. So in short, I'd say that the most important thing a teacher ever did for me was to foster some self-esteem.

Your peers

My writing buddy Andy was very business-like. He wanted to be a journalist and started his own literary and music magazine when we were fifteen. He was a very independent-minded person and had read up on the traditional routes for breaking into print, so I absorbed a lot of that way of thinking from him. He read and edited my first story (which I then treacherously sold to another, bigger magazine), so peer advice really worked for me.

Other people

The people behind The Writers' and Artists' Year Book. It's still the best source of advice for anyone with writing ambitions, even in the internet age.

What training did you have for your job? (Both formal and informal)

Formal training? None.

Informal training? Lots. Particularly after I'd got to university, through writers' workshops such as the one at the Theatre Royal Stratford East. Now I go along to writers' meetings at the Canal Café Theatre in London and the Komedia in Brighton. It's writers' self-help sessions, or on-the-job feedback from directors and performers. The BBC Writers' Room has given me a number of opportunities that have developed into paid gigs. And it's got loads of advice to offer on all aspects of writing comedy. What else did you have to do, to develop skills, knowledge and understanding? I've had to temper my early ambitions quite a bit. I've ended up with a full-time career as a writer, but I still haven't made the breakthrough I dreamed about when I was a kid. So maybe all those sceptical teachers and parents had some sort of point after all.

I mostly write educational resources (books, web animations, games, etc) with a comic or narrative theme, so the PGCE and the 10 years I spent as a teacher have helped me to find a niche in the market I can exploit. I write satire regularly for two stage shows (and get occasional gags and sketches on radio), but that stuff doesn't pay much. It's the educational resources that make the money.

Apart from the PGCE, the most important thing I've had to do to further my career is to develop good networking skills. Every commission I've had has been the result of personal recommendation. As far as I know, there's no other career structure to being a hack like me. I wish they'd taught networking in my careers lessons!

What makes you get out of bed in the morning?

Deadlines, an idea for a sketch, or an exciting new commission.

Did you plan your future? DO you plan your future?

I didn't plan for the future really, I just knew I'd taken a wrong turn into teaching and wanted to get out of it.

Now, my goals tend to be short-term: get the next commission, survive until the upturn comes, etc. I do search the press and outlets like the BBC Writers' Room for opportunities and I stay in touch with my contacts (see 'networking' above) as much as I can.

As well as my daily run of work, I always try to have at least one more speculative project on the go, which might catch the eye of an agent, publisher or producer. Because freelance writing is so precarious, when I started it as a career, I did take out mortgage protection, critical illness cover and earnings protection insurance, to safeguard against periods of unemployment. So far I've never been out of work, but it's good to have a plan.

What are the unsung parts of your job? (in teaching, for example, everyone perceives it as long summer holidays and finish at 3.30. the reality is very different: planning, meetings, marking, developing schemes of work, running trips, meeting parents, exam revision classes etc..)

The good bits: being your own boss; working flexible hours and working from home; challenging yourself; writing something you're proud of and that's solved some technical problem so neatly that no-one else has even noticed the technical problem was there; getting to work with creative and interesting people (designers, illustrators, animators, actors, directors, other writers) with a huge range of fascinating professional skills. Being able to follow an interest or idea wherever it takes you. Getting paid to write jokes – and getting paid to sit and read, two things that really should be luxuries. Sitting in the back row of the audience and hearing them laugh at your stuff.

The bad bits: dealing with clients who really don't know what they want and wouldn't recognise quality if it bit 'em in the backside; uncertainty and worry; dull and uninspiring commissions; not being at the decision-taking centre and always being the last to know what's going on with a project; miserable fees; having to hustle for every contract; endless dreary rewrites. Worst of all – sitting in the back row of the audience and not hearing them laugh at your stuff.

Is your success down to luck or to planning or a bit of both?

I'm not sure how much 'success' I've really had, I think it'd be better termed 'survival'. But whatever it's called, I'd say very little of it (maybe 5 per cent?) is planned and maybe another 5 per cent luck. Then it's 45 per cent networking and 45 per cent persistence.

Do you have any regrets?

Yep. I regret wasting 10 years on a teaching job I didn't want, but thought I ought to have to be financially secure and to fit in with other people's ideas of a good career. In that time, I lost track of what I really wanted out of life. I didn't realise it when I was in my teens and twenties, but I'd made a good start to being the writer I wanted to be and I let that slip. I allowed myself to be discouraged, discounted the successes and magnified the failures. Now, after 8 years' freelancing, I'm glad I've got my chance back and I'm working hard to make up for lost time.

What advice would you give to a young person who wants to work in this profession?

Look for opportunities for paid writing (even if it's twenty-five quid for the star letter in *The Daily Mirror*) and start at once. You don't need anyone else's permission to be a writer and there's no qualification. You don't have to wait until you leave school or college, you can submit your material right away. If they take it and pay you, you've started your career.

Check online sources such as the BBC Writers' Room for opportunities, find them in the press, or in publications like *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook*. Send speculative stuff you've written to anyone you think might like it, e.g. a performer at a local comedy club, or an editor of a website or magazine you like. Try lots of avenues and write short stuff to begin with, leave the three-volume novel till you're a big name.

Don't let people discourage you. It's perfectly possible to have the career you want.

Simon

Art Director for Lara Croft: Tomb Raider, Agent Cody Banks 2. As Production Designer, films include Dogs of War, Descent, Straightheads and Doomsday

When you were at school, did you know for certain what you wanted to do when you were 14? When you were 16? When you were 18?

At 14 I didn't really think about my future vocation, just about the subjects I enjoyed at school.

At 16 I was reducing my options to key subjects but still thinking about what subject I could go on to use all 3 of the A Levels I was going to take.

At 18 I was aiming for theatre school to study Stage Management. I applied for two schools and got accepted at both. I saw the interviews as competition and played them to win.

What useful advice did you get from:

Your parents

To be honest, care for others, question authority in a non-aggressive way.

Your teachers

To see that they are human with families and fears, to respect hierarchy.

Don't rely on anyone to help when you may crucially need it the most.

You feel really good if you get good grades!

Your peers

We should all have fun. Duck when you see a punch coming.

Other people

Watch out for those that think you should stab before you're stabbed.

What training did you have for your job? (Both formal and informal)

Working on wonderful school plays both in front and behind the scenes.

Working back stage at local amateur-dramatic theatre.

Working in local cinema as projectionist.

Studied Stage Management at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.

What else did you have to do, to develop skills, knowledge and understanding?

By accident I worked in other departments in the industry early on (camera, sound, special effects & continuity) which meant I found out what they do, what's important to them and how they interact with the Art Department.

What makes you get out of bed in the morning?

Excitement of what's ahead in the day, it's literally different EVERY day!

Did you plan your future? DO you plan your future

I cannot plan my future, I try to but it has a life of it's own. I can try and present my future with as many options as possible but it may choose none of these and goes off merrily on a different journey. I've been lucky that my journey is considered successful.

What are the unsung parts of your job? (in teaching, for example, everyone perceives it as long summer holidays and finish at 3.30. the reality is very different: planning, meetings, marking, developing schemes of work, running trips, meeting parents, exam revision classes etc..)

I am at the beck and call of the industry. Next week I may have a call offering me a job in the USA or Morocco or Cape Town. If I take the job I'll need to travel there a few days later and return in 8 months time. Luckily I have understanding friends and family with whom I can switch off and on my contact. Now I have a wife and child this is more complex and frustrating!

Is your success down to luck or to planning or a bit of both?

Luck, planning, luck..... luck.

Do you have any regrets?

When I'm presented with a career choice I have to gather all the information to hand from all parties and make a choice. I listen to advice from my agents, accountant, wife, family and friends then choose. I've been lucky to side-step some really bad jobs. I do of course regret some decisions, but don't beat myself up to much, just learn from them.

What advice would you give to a young person who wants to work in this profession?

Learn from the ground up, take your time going up the ladder. When I started out there were people in their 40's and 50's who were professional assistants, now an assistant is considered a menial position on a rung up to the top.

Study, listen, observe, practice and stay cool.

Practically; learn film technical drawing (Pinewood school), study film or theatre design, work in all other departments to find out what they do and how they interact with the Art Department, work loads as an assistant for free. Make mistakes at this time while they're still small mistakes.

Phone people to try and get work rather than email, they get to hear the enthusiasm in your voice.