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## Professionalizing Teachers in Career Dialogue: Effect Study

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### Abstract

As a result of the changing notions of work schools are increasingly acknowledging that they have a strong responsibility to guide students not only in their academic growth, but also in their career development. This paper presents the result of a study about effects of teachers training on career dialogue promoting career competency development in students. For the quantitative part of the study, a quasi experimental research design is used to measure effects among 2500 students. Video-recordings of conversations are used for qualitative research. The results show only when the off-the-job training is followed by on-the-job coaching, the professionalizing proves to be effective on student level: students notice that the guidance conversations are more appreciative, reflective and activating and are about self image development, work and career actions. Also the observation on guidance conversations show that the conversations are more career related.

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### 1. Introduction

Since the 1980s the range of possible occupational and educational choices has increased dramatically in Western societies (OECD, 2004). As a result, individuals are faced with a growing pressure to make choices, while at the same time due to flexibil of employment relationships (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005) and individualisation within society (Beck, 1994) less and less direction is provided. The individual is expected to demonstrate more self-directedness on the labour market (Savickas et al, 2010). Schools are increasingly acknowledging that they have a strong responsibility to guide students not only in their academic growth, but also in their career development (Gysbers and Henderson, 2005; Jarvis and Keeley, 2003). Therefore, schools for vocational education in the European Union invest increasingly in career guidance (Company, 2009).

Research shows that the focus on careers education and guidance in schools is mainly focused on helping students with their academic achievement and not on helping students to plan and prepare for their work roles afterwards (Parsad, et al., 2003). Kuijpers, Meijers & Gundy (2011) show that a strong career learning environment

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(i.e. an environment that enables students to develop and to use career competencies) allows for experiential learning in combination with a dialogue about what can be learned from the concrete experiences which are aimed at the (development of) a vocational calling and in relation to that a career. A career dialogue is needed to (re)formulate dreams and goals regarding a career (Pizzolato, 2007) and to create ‘vocational hope’: the feeling that a career is possible (Diemer & Blustein, 2007).

It proves to be extremely difficult, however, to achieve a career dialogue in schools; schools rarely offer room for students’ narratives to be developed or expressed (Winters et al., 2009, 2011, 2012). Educational culture is monological and focused on control by means of tests (Nichols & Berliner, 2007) – as a result most teachers are very uncertain about their abilities to help students in developing a career narrative which is a result of a career dialogue. Therefore, teachers explicitly ask to be trained in initiating a career dialogue with their students (Sangers, 2011). It is important to acknowledge that teachers feel uncertain in this area because the effectiveness of a dialogical career approach largely depends – as in all forms of counselling (Wampold, 2001; Cooper, 2008) – on the trust the counsellor has in the chosen approach.

This study aims to contribute to the knowledge on the effects of a training for teachers with regard to career dialogues. The research question is: *What is the effect of the training on the form and the content of the career dialogue between teacher and student?*

## 2. Design

A total of 230 teachers from twenty schools for primary vocational education in the Netherlands participated in the training on career conversations and in the research connected to the training. A little bit more than half of the research group (59%) is female; one third has less than four years, one third four to ten years, and one third has more than ten years of working experience. Most teachers teach third year students, a third teaches fourth year students and only 10% teaches second year students.

The research has a quantitative and a qualitative component. Before and after the training questionnaires were administered to students in an experimental (students of 191 teachers, who participated in the training) and a control group (students of colleague-teachers, who did not participate). The questionnaires were completed by 2291 students before and after the training. The group of students was equally divided among gender lines and the average age was 15 with 20% being from the immigrant population. The students were mainly in the third and fourth year and came from all four sectors in primary vocational education (i.e. health care, economics, technics, agriculture and the so-called multi-sectorial education).

For the qualitative part of the study, teachers, who participated in the training made video recordings of their career conversations with students before and after the training. Thirty two of these recordings are used for the qualitative research.

The training consisted of an off-the-job and an on-the-job part. In the off-the-job part the emphasis is on theory and on exercising career conversations in a safe environment. In the off-the-job part the emphasis is on the transfer to school practice. To measure the effect of training, there are two variants of the experimental/control group:

1-students of the teachers’ group that participated in the two-day off-the-job training with a control group of teachers who had no training at all.

2- students of teachers who participated in the full training process consisting of the off-the-job as well at least two individual coaching’s sessions and two team coaching sessions on-the-job, and a control group of teachers who had no (full) training program.

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