



Effects of two types of career interventions on students with different career coping styles



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ABSTRACT

Research on the efficacy of career interventions often lacks comparative analysis of the effects of different types of interventions. Additionally, little is known about the effects of interventions on diverse clients. Previous studies showed that students display different career coping styles and that these styles are relatively consistent across samples. The present study analyzes the effect of two types of career interventions (a single career information session and a six-week career intervention) on the career adaptability of students with different career coping styles. The study involved 319 students from grade 9 and grade 12 of three Portuguese public schools. Results show that although the interventions were effective for most of the students, the single informative session improved the career curiosity and confidence of only one group of students, whereas the six week career intervention revealed a more robust effect in students with insecure, pessimistic or superficial career coping styles. The theoretical and practical implications of the study are also discussed.

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1. Introduction

Rapid technological growth and globalization have changed the nature of work and careers. In view of the complexity of the current social context, vocational psychology theories are increasingly emphasizing the importance of promoting attitudes and strategies that enable individuals to respond effectively to the challenges of the new world of work (Savickas, 2013; Savickas et al., 2009; Super, 1990). As Savickas (2013) and Savickas et al. (2009) argue, career adaptability is now a key component of an individual's repertoire for dealing successfully with the world of work and accordingly, its promotion should be one of the main goals of life-long career interventions.

In the school context, career interventions are recognized by policy-makers worldwide as a fundamental service to be provided to all individuals and groups, as recent guidelines from different countries demonstrate (c.f. Amudson, 2006; Watts, 2011; Vuorinen & Watts, 2012). Research on the outcomes of career interventions is generally supportive of the effectiveness of school counseling activities (Whiston & Quinby, 2009). However, career interventions have different formats (e.g., group interventions or individual counseling; single format session or long programs) and their evaluation often lacks an analysis of the discriminative efficacy of the various formats of career interventions (Perry, Dauwalder, & Bonnett, 2009). Additionally, few studies have been conducted on the outcome of interventions in different groups of participants, according to characteristics such as, subtype membership and other critical client attributes (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). As several authors (e.g., Brown & Krane, 2000; Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Whiston, 2011) have noted, in order to stimulate career counseling process research it is important that research on the efficacy of interventions focuses more on the differences in the career counseling process and

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outcomes by exploring how, why and for whom they work (Brown & Krane, 2000, p. 740). The main objective of this study is to analyze the discriminative effects of two types of career intervention on the career adaptability of students with different career coping styles.

1.1. Career attitudes and adaptability

The concepts of career planning and career exploration are associated with the construct of career maturity introduced by Super (1957) early in his theory of vocational development. The construct, first defined as the “behavior manifested in coping with the developmental tasks of a given life stage” (p. 186), was later conceived as having a multidimensional nature, involving both attitudinal (career planning and exploration) as well as cognitive dimensions (knowledge of career decision process and information about the world of work) (Super, 1990). To explain the factors involved in the formation and development of career attitudes, Super (1990) presented the person–environment interactive model about the bases of career maturity. According to this model (1990), dimensions such as time perspective, attributional beliefs and self-esteem, among others, are considered fundamental for the development of career attitudes. Several empirical studies have confirmed the importance of these dimensions for career development, for instance, future time perspective has been found to be a key factor for the development of career maturity (e.g., Janeiro, 2010; Marko & Savickas, 1998; Taber, 2013); and control beliefs and self-esteem have been found to be significant correlates of career maturity/adaptability (e.g., Duffy, 2010; Janeiro, 2010; Luzzo & Jenkins-Smith, 1998; Powell & Luzzo, 1998; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2007).

In addition to the clarification of the processes of career attitudes' development, this model also establishes a framework to understand problems associated with the development of career coping attitudes. In other words, uncommitted attitudes toward career development may be conceived as being associated with difficulties related to, for example, time perspective, attributional beliefs or self-esteem (Janeiro & Marques, 2010).

More recently, Savickas (2005, 2013) Savickas (1997) proposed the broader concept of career adaptability to replace the former notion of career maturity. Defined as the “individual's psychosocial resources for coping with current and anticipated vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas” (Savickas, 2013, p.157), career adaptability has, according to Savickas (1997), several advantages in relation to the notion of career maturity, namely the fact that it captures more precisely the individual/context interaction in the process of career construction throughout the individual's life. Within the career construction model (Savickas, 2005, 2013), career adaptability is conceptualized as integrating dimensions such as career concern, control, curiosity and confidence. The adaptive individual is seen by Savickas (2013, p.159) “as (a) becoming *concerned* about the vocational future, (b) increasing personal *control* over one's vocational future, (c) displaying *curiosity* by exploring his possible selves and future scenarios, and (d) strengthening the *confidence* to pursue one's aspirations”.

1.2. The concept of career coping styles

The concept of psychological styles has stimulated a variety of studies in different areas of psychology. In vocational psychology the research on this topic has been circumscribed to particular domains, such as the study of career decision process or career indecision (e.g., Brown et al., 2012; Gadassi, Gati, & Dayan, 2012; Gati & Levin, 2012; Ginevra, Nota, Soresi, & Gati, 2012; Jones, 1989). Thus, themes like the individual styles of coping with vocational tasks, specifically those related with career planning and exploration are still little investigated in vocational research (Janeiro & Marques, 2010).

Based on Super's (1990) model of the development of career maturity, Janeiro and Marques (2010) tested the hypothesis of different types of career coping difficulties. Using a cluster analysis, they analyzed the results of a sample of 620 students from grades 9 and 12 on time perspective, attributional beliefs, self-esteem and on career planning and exploration attitudes. The cluster analysis allowed the identification of four main styles of coping with career tasks: (1) the first cluster, labeled the adaptive style, grouped students who were future oriented, had high or moderate beliefs of success based on internal causes, had high or moderate levels of self-esteem, and had high scores on career maturity; (2) the second cluster, labeled the superficial style, grouped students that although had moderate levels of career attitudes, were mostly present and past oriented, they also had high beliefs of success based on external causes and had moderate levels of self-esteem; (3) the third cluster, labeled the insecure style, grouped students who were present oriented, had low beliefs in internal causes of success, moderate self-esteem, and scored low on career attitudes; and (4) the fourth cluster labeled the pessimistic style grouped students who scored low on career maturity, seemed to have a highly negative vision of the future and had extremely low scores on self-esteem.

These styles showed to be particularly consistent across samples (both in grade 9 and grade 12), and to have similarities with the coping styles observed in other domains, namely those suggested by the attributional theory (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Gillham, Shatte, Reivich, & Seligman, 2001; Weiner & Graham, 1999), and those found in research on time perspective (Bonniwell & Zimbardo, 2004; Boyd & Zimbardo, 2005). Furthermore, the relations of these variables (time perspective, attributional beliefs and self-esteem) with career attitudes, seem to indicate the existence of complex strategies for coping with tasks that encompass several spheres of psychological functioning (Janeiro & Marques, 2010).

1.3. Career interventions in the school context

Career theories are increasingly advocating the need for career interventions to adopt a comprehensive, holistic, and lifelong approach (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Richardson, 2012; Savickas et al., 2009) and guidelines for best practices in different

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