Quality of career dialogues in higher vocational education
A case study

Dorinde D. van Loopik (3231658), Utrecht University

Supervisor: Dr. F.J. Prins

June 2010

Abstract

Principles of competence based education in the Netherlands show the significance of good career counseling, especially the importance of career dialogues. To date, there is little insight into such conversations between student and career counsellor. The aim of this case study was to gain insight into the quality of career dialogues in higher vocational education, at the study for Cesar therapy. Therefore, the career oriented attitude, reflection and self regulation (of students) in career dialogues was measured among fourth year students and their counselors, and compared to second year students. Furthermore the relationship between student and counsellor was investigated. Results show that counsellors mainly regulated conversations, that there were just a few reflections and that little attention was paid to career oriented topics. Furthermore, it is suggested that there exist a discrepancy between what are good career dialogues according to students and counsellors and which is qualitatively good according to the literature. Finally, no clear difference between second year students and fourth year students has been found.

Keywords: career dialogues, career counsellors, higher vocational education, self regulation, reflection, interpersonal supervisor behaviour

Introduction

In the Netherlands, it is regulated by law that institutes of vocational education have to provide opportunities for career guidance and counselling (Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs, 2010). Based on the principles of competence based education, career guidance and counselling will ideally ensures that students give meaning to all parts of their study and that they increasingly regulate their own learning (De Bie & De Kleijn, 2001). According to Kuijpers and Meijers (2008) the fundamental instrument to achieve this is a dialogue between student and supervisor. Such career dialogues are the central topic of interest in this study.

Quality of career conversations

To date, there is little insight into the career conversations between teacher and student. As noted before, career guidance and counselling is regulated by law, but the interpretation and practice of these vary per institute (Mittendorff, 2010; Kuijpers & Meijers, 2008). In some cases these conversations only take place if a student has doubts about his/her choice of study or has other problems related to his/her study (Meijers, Kuijpers & Bakker, 2006). The researchers state that in such cases students do not develop career competences like career reflection, career shaping and networking. However, the more a career conversation is career oriented, the less attention is paid to concrete study progress and therefore, students develop more of these career competences (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2008). According to Kuijpers and Meijers (2008) such a 'career oriented attitude' makes the learning environment more question driven and gives students more responsibility to shape their own study career. Therefore, *a career oriented attitude* will be seen as indicator for a qualitative good career dialogue in this study.

Two other quality indicators were derived from De Bie and De Kleijn (2001), who believe that career counseling provides *self-regulated* and *reflective* students. However, the problem is that it is not clear what is exactly meant by self regulation and reflection. There are many articles published about both of those concepts, including different definitions and categorizations. Therefore, some relevant studies about, respectively, self regulation and reflection will be discussed and the definitions for the present study will be stated.

According to Van Velzen (2002), *self regulation* is a metacognitive skill, which makes students aware of their own knowledge, beliefs, and cognitive processing. However, Zimmerman (1995) argues that self regulation involves more than metacognition: "it involves a sense of personal agency to regulate other sources of personal influence, such as emotional processes, as well as behavioural and social-environmental sources of influence". This means that self regulation not only consists of a metacognitive component, but also of motivational and behavioural components (Zimmerman, 1995).

In theory, the definition of self regulation is somewhat clearer, but in practice it is still unclear when one can define a student as being self-regulating. According to Nota, Soresi and Zimmerman (2004) self-regulated students are characterized by proactive participation in their learning process. In their article, Nota and colleagues (2004) used the 14 self-regulated learning strategies from Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986, 1988) as a basis for measuring self-regulated learning. These categories of strategies are very thorough and therefore too specific for the present study, where only self regulation in a career conversation is measured. Zimmerman (1995) rightly argues that social-contextual variables, for example the setting condition in the present study, affect self regulated learning. In the present study, a

student simply cannot make use of all the self-regulated learning strategies in just the one investigated career dialogue. Therefore students' self regulation in this study will be defined as: proactively participating in their career conversation, as opposed to passively reacting on their counselor's comments and questions. Proactively participating can be recognized by, for example, the student who takes the initiative to discuss something.

The next quality indicator is *reflection*. In general, reflection is a way of systematically thinking about experiences (Hatton & Smith, 1995). However, the operationalization of the concept reflection is very diverse. There are many different mental activities that are attributed to the concept and because of the broad description, the specific characteristics are not clear (Mansvelder-Longayroux, Beijaard & Verloop, 2007). Hatton and Smith (1995) reviewed literature on reflection and ended up with three types of reflection, named: (1) technical rationality, (2) reflection-on-action, and (3) reflection-in-action. With (1) as the most basic level of reflection and (3) as the most conceptual level of reflection. In the present study, with only verbal career conversations to investigate, the highest level of reflection cannot be investigated, because the student is not working at the moment of reflection. For this reason, the attention is on the first and second type of reflection, where the former is self and task concerned and the latter task and impact concerned (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Thus, in the present study, reflection takes place when a student systematically thinks about him/herself, his/her task and the impact of his/her actions during a career dialogue.

Besides these three quality indicators, *career oriented attitude*, *self regulation* and *reflection*, the hypothesis is that the more affective side of a career conversation also influences the quality of a career dialogue. That is why *the relationship between student and counsellor* is the final quality indicator in this study.

Kuijpers (2009) describes this affective component of career counselling as "building a good relationship based on mutual trust" and state that this good relationship is important for the effectiveness of career counselling. Also Mittendorf (2010) argues that the interpersonal relationship between student and teacher is important because this affect the learning process of students. Furthermore, Den Brok, Brekelmans and Wubbels (2004) make a distinction between affective and cognitive outcomes of the learning process, considering the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student. They conclude, based on their research in secondary education, that "students` perceptions of the cooperativeness of their teachers are very important for their own motivation" (p. 435). This is an concrete example of an affective outcome of a good interpersonal relationship between teacher en student.

Research questions

Taking the discussed quality indicators together, two general research questions can be stated. The first general research question examines the quality of career dialogues, namely:

What is the quality of career dialogues between counsellors and fourth year students, in terms of self regulation, reflection, a career oriented attitude and the relationship between student and counsellor, from the perspective of both students and counsellors?

In addition to the first research question the following sub-questions will be investigated:

1. To what extent is the student's perspective of his/her self regulation, reflection and career oriented attitude in line with the counsellor's perspective?

2. To what extent is the student's perspective of the relationship with the counsellor in line with the counsellor's perspective?

3. To what extent are the subjective perspectives (from both students and counsellors) in line with the 'objective' quality, based on the quality indicators and measured by the researcher?

Because the first research question cannot explain whether students have grown in self regulation, reflection and a career oriented attitude (during period of research), a second question was stated, namely:

What are the differences in the quality of career dialogues between second year students and fourth year students, in terms of self regulation, reflection, a career oriented attitude and the relationship between student and counsellor?

The hypothesis is that students grow, over the course of their study, in self regulation, reflection, a career oriented attitude and in their relationship with their supervisor. Because students –hopefully- learn through their career dialogues to become, for example, more self regulated. Thus, in other words, it is likely that the quality of career dialogues will be enhanced when students are further in their study.

Second year students will be compared to final year students (fourth year), because second year students are in the 'main phase' of their study and are already graduated for their first year (*propedeuse*). First year students, on the other hand, are in not yet graduated for their first year and do not have had many career dialogues. Therefore, they probably not have a representative picture of career dialogues and it might be difficult for them to answer questions about such career dialogues. By comparing second year students with fourth year students those problems do not exist.

Relevance of This Study

According to Mittendorff (2010), there is research about career counseling and guidance, but this research focuses on professional counsellors. In the Netherlands, and at the school where this research was performed, career counseling is carried out by teachers. As such, this situation asks for different research on the quality of such career counseling. It is especially important to study the quality of career dialogues, because – as stated before – these conversations have a lot of potential to stimulate students` self regulation and reflection. This study offers more insight into the quality of career dialogues.

Besides the scientific relevance, this study will hopefully also be relevant for practitioners in the field of career counselling. Mainly, for the educational institute where this research was performed. The results of this study could give them insight into the quality of their career counselling programme and recommendations for the improvement of career dialogues.

Furthermore, the results of this study could also be relevant for other educational institutes, they can learn from the described practices and outcomes. Because the study for Cesar therapy has already an extended career counselling programme, hopefully this study can serve as good practice for other studies. Meijers, Kuijpers and Bakker (2006) found that, in general, institutes for health care education (on vocational level) have the best learning environment and system for career counselling. So, this finding gives hope that the study for Cesar therapy (part of health care education) will be a good practice too.

Method

Participants

All the participants in this study were students and counsellors from the School for Higher vocational education of Utrecht (*Hogeschool Utrecht*) at the study Cesar therapy (*Oefentherapie Cesar*).

For the first research question, two counsellors (both female) and their fifteen fourth year students (4 male, 11 female) participated. These students were in their final year and their average age was 23 years and 7 months. These students had their last conversation about their portfolio.

For the second research question also second year students were asked to participate. Sixteen students (1 male, 15 female), with an average age of 20 years and 6 months, took part. These students had a performance appraisal with their counsellor during the period of data collection. The participating students received career guidance from two counsellors (both female). One of them was also a participating counsellor of the fourth year students.

Hence, there were three participating counsellors in this study. These counsellors were working for six to eight years as a career counselor at the study for Cesar therapy and were between 52 to 60 years old at the moment of data collection.

Setting

In this section a case description will be presented. As mentioned before, this research was carried out at the study for Cesar therapy (from the *Hogeschool Utrecht*). Utrecht is the only place in the Netherlands where Cesar therapy can be studied and therefore this is not a very well known study. Physiotherapy is better known and is like Cesar therapy. However, Cesar therapy differs from physiotherapy, because it puts more emphasis on the posture of patients. Both studies belong to the faculty of health studies and form together the centre of movement studies (*bewegingsstudies*).

Because Cesar therapy attaches great importance to career counselling, an extensive programme of career guidance and counseling has been made. It is intended to support students in their learning process and study choice throughout their study (Zelfevaluatierapport OTC, 2010). Especially for first year students, it also aims to check if a student made the right study choice. That is why the curriculum is most extensive in the first year. Furthermore, the underlying idea is that students should become more self-employed when they are further in their studies. Therefore, first year students have lots of career counselling activities and final year students are expected to do more things by themselves (but still have career counselling activities).

Examples of career counselling-activities are group lessons about social skills, making a portfolio and super- or intervision in a group (accompanied by a career counsellor). Moreover, the career dialogues that students individually have with their own counsellor - which are central in this study - are also part of the career counselling programme. Students have around two to three of these individual career dialogues each year. Besides these required conversations, students may ask for additional talks if they want to discuss something with their counsellor.

If possible, students keep the same counsellor over the years. So, after four years counsellor and student know each other well. Especially since students also meet their career counsellors besides these individual conversations. For example, in lessons that are taught by their counsellor or if the counsellor is also a supervisor for students` internships. Namely, career counsellors are usually teachers who have chosen to be career counsellor in addition to their teaching activities. A teacher could become a career counsellor if he/she wants to do this and is capable to do so. Career counsellors at the *Hogeschool Utrecht* have followed a training and are certified.

Because of the extensive curriculum on career guidance described above, Cesar therapy has already won a prize for their guidance on internships. Furthermore, the accreditation commission was very enthusiastic about their extensive curriculum on career guidance (source: personal communication, the report of the commission is not yet available). Therefore, hopefully, this study will be a good example for other institutes of vocational education.

Instruments

To investigate the quality of the career dialogues three different instruments will be used: the Questionnaire Career Dialogues (QCD), the Questionnaire Supervisor Interaction (QSI), and audio taped conversations. These instruments will be respectively discussed in this section.

Questionnaire Career Dialogues (QCD). The first questionnaire for both students and supervisors was developed by the researcher. Students and supervisors were asked to fill in this self-report questionnaire directly after the conversation. The aim of the questionnaire is to measure the quality of the conversation from the perspective of the student and from the perspective of the supervisor (to answer the first research question). Therefore, the four quality indicators – stated earlier – have formed the basis of this questionnaire. The scales, number of items per scale, reliability coefficients and examples are presented in table 1. Note that the quality indicator *a career-oriented attitude* is measured by the scale *topics*. This is because Meijers, Kuipers and Bakker (2006) state that there are three main topics which could be discussed in career dialogues, namely study progress, career-oriented and personal topics. Therefore, these three possible topic categories were included in the questionnaire. In this way, it can be studied to what extend attention is paid to career oriented topic compared to other possible topics in career dialogues.

All the items were answered on a seven-point Likert scale, varying from 'a few times' to 'many times' for the category *topics* and from 'I totally disagree' to 'I totally agree' for the other categories.

To investigate the reliability and construct validity of this developed questionnaire, respectively reliability and factor analysis (using SPSS) were done after data collection. The resulting reliability coefficients (Cronbach`s Alpha) per scale are showed in table 1. Factor analysis (principal component analysis) was done for each category (Topics, Self regulation, Reflection and Relationship). Because it was expected that the factors are not independent of each other, an oblique rotation was chosen. Based on Field`s (2005) recommendation, the method *direct oblimin* was used for the rotation. The factor analysis showed that the different scales - in these categories - are really different factors (i.e. had a

Eigenvalue larger then 1). And, in general, the items loaded high (> .4) on the factors to which they belong.

    Because of the sufficient to good quality of the scales, showed by reliability and factor analysis, no items were deleted from the original questionnaire.

Table 1

Scales, number of items, reliability coefficients and examples of the QCD-items

Scale	#	α	Item example
Topics			
Study progress	4	.77	In a dialogue we talk about my marks
Career-oriented	4	.86	In a dialogue we talk about my future dream
Personal	5	.68	In a dialogue we talk about my private life
Self regulation			
...stimulated by the counsellor	3	.70	My counselor encourages me to take initiative to discuss things
..stimulated by the student	3	.86	I make sure that we talk about all the topics I wanted to discuss
Reflection			
Reflection	6	.69	A dialogue helps me to reflect on myself as student, for example my study skills
Relationship			
Appreciation counsellor	4	.86	I trust my counselor
Appreciation dialogue	2	.76	I think this was a useful dialogue

    All these questions were asked for the portfolio conversation they just had, and also for the other individual conversations they had earlier that year (from now on referred to as 'other conversations'). The version for supervisors was the same as for students, except that the way of questioning was modified. Thus, if the item for students is: "In a conversation I take initiative to discuss certain things" (belongs to the scale *self regulation*), the same item for the supervisor is: "In a conversation the student takes initiative to discuss certain things".

    Unfortunately, not every participant was willing to participate completely. 14 fourth year students filled in the QCD, including two students that filled in a pilot version of the QCD. Therefore, 12 questionnaires were used in the final analysis.

    A customized version of this questionnaire was used for the second year students and their counsellors (to answer the second research question). Because these students just had a performance appraisal, the questions were about that conversation instead of a portfolio

conversation. Furthermore, they were also asked about other individual conversations earlier that year (from now on referred to as 'other conversations'). All the sixteen participants completed the questionnaire.

Finally, for all the students and counsellors, the QCD ended with a couple of general questions, like gender and age.

Questionnaire Supervisor Interaction (QSI). After filling in the QCD, students were asked to fill in the Questionnaire Supervisor Interaction about their current career counsellor. This is a questionnaire developed by van der Rijst, Mainhard, van Tartwijk and Wubbels (2008) based on the model for interpersonal teacher behavior (Wubbels, Brekelmans, den Brok, & van Tartwijk, 2006), see figure 1.
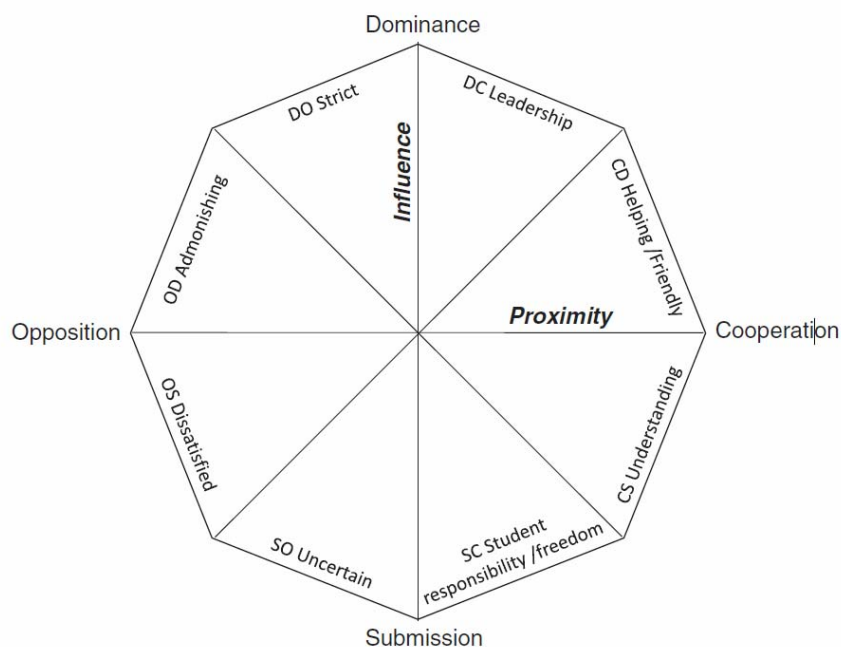

Figure 1. The model for interpersonal supervisor behaviour, adopted from Mainhard, van der Rijst, van Tartwijk and Wubbels (2009).

This questionnaire measures the interpersonal-style of a supervisor in communication with a student. The questionnaire consists of 64 items, for each of the eight subscales (for example the subscale 'Leadership', see figure 1) eight items. By using the averaged score on the subscales, the scores on the two dimensions influence and proximity can be derived. These scores were calculated using a formula from Mainhard (personal communication).

Several studies conducted the reliability and validity of this instrument (den Brok, Brekenmans & Wubbels, 2004), for example Mainhard, van der Rijst, van Tartwijk and Wubbels (2009) who presents that both reliability and validity are satisfying.

Three versions of this questionnaire were used. Firstly, students were asked to fill in the QSI for their current career counselor, as stated above. A couple of weeks later students were asked to fill in the QSI again, but this time about their ideal career counselor. Finally, the counsellors themselves were asked to fill in the QSI for themselves, in other words: how they think the students see them.

This resulted in three profiles: students` perception of their career counselor, the perception of the career counselors about themselves and students` ideal perception of a career counselor.

Fifteen fourth year students filled in the QSI student perception and thirteen of them also filled in the QSI ideal perception. Sixteen second year students filled in both versions of the QSI.

There were 10 missing values in total (taking all the versions of the completed QSI together). These missing values were imputed by taking the mode of the other seven scores of the respondent on the same scale.

Audio taped conversations. With the consent of the respondents, eight career dialogues between counsellors and fourth grade students about their portfolio were recorded on audiotape. When the data collection was completed, two dialogues were chosen to analyze. Unfortunately not all dialogues could be analyzed, because of limited time. About the chosen conversations was most information available (i.e. these respondents filled in all the questionnaires).

The next step after selection two conversations was to transcribe those conversations. After that, the transcribed conversations were segmented with 'a reasoning chain' as unit of analysis. According to Chi (2007) a reasoning chain 'usually involves a grain size of several sentences'. To do this as precisely as possible, noncontent features, like the use of connecting words or pauses, were used to segment the transcribed conversations (Chi, 2007).

In the meantime, the coding frame was developed (see table 2). The codes were top-down derived from the quality indicators (which are stated in this study). This resulted in three main groups of codes, namely: *Topics*, *Regulation* and *Reflection*. Therefore, each segment was coded three times, once for each quality indicator. Some codes were added based on the real conversations (bottom-up), for example the differentiation of *study progress* in *study progress – portfolio*, *study progress – internships* and *study progress – other*.

Table 2

Used codes - with description and examples - for the qualitative analysis of career dialogues

Code	Description of code	Example
Topics		
Study progress		
Portfolio	Quality/completeness portfolio etc.	C: "I think you made your portfolio very carefully"
Internship	Talking about internships	C: "Let`s see, you just finished your second internship?"
Other	Marks, development of competences etc.	C: "How is your minor? Is it completely finished?"
Career oriented	Talking about (near) future	C: "What are you going to do next year?"
Personal	How are you? Or personality etc.	C: "Do you feel busy? Or do you still enjoy it?"
Process	Process of the conversation	C: "Well, I`ll start with looking in your portfolio"
Other	Things that do not fit in codes above	C: "When I studied, this don`t exist"
Regulation		
Teacher controls	C takes initiative to discuss something	C: "So, you already have a future dream, isn`t it?!"
Teacher asks	C gives S room	C: "Do you have any questions left?"
Student controls	S takes initiative to discuss something	S: "This is my presentation.."
Student asks	S asks teacher something	S: "Do you receive my e-mail?"
Reflection		
No reflection	S is just telling facts etc.	"Yes, I also have the group lessons described over there"
Level 1	S reflect on 'what'*	"Yes, while writing this down, I realized all the things I passed though during my study"
Level 2	S reflection-on-action: 'how' and 'why'*	"Yes, that`s what happened at my internships all the times. Because, at the beginning of an internship, I always felt unsecure. However, when time passes, I became more confident and therefore I became more myself."

Note. C = Counsellor, S = Student; * Based on the categorization of Hatton & Smith, 1995

After stating the coding frame, it was discussed with a second researcher. To ensure the inter-rater reliability, this second researcher and the author both coded a same little part of the segments. With these coded segments, Cohen`s Kappa was measured for *Topics* and showed an inter-rater reliability of .50. Because *Regulation* and *Reflection* did not consist of enough codes to measure a representative Cohen`s Kappa, the percent of agreement was used. For both groups of codes the percent of agreement was .79.

To improve the inter-rater reliability of *Topics*, the researchers discussed the coding frame again and the segments that were coded differently. Refinements in the *Topic*-codes were made. After that, the researchers coded some other segments individually. This led to an inter-rater reliability of .80.

Finally, all the segments were coded by the first researcher.

Design and Procedure

A multiple case study design was used by caring out this study (Yin, 2003). Yin argues for using multiple sources of evidence. Therefore the three instruments above were used.

The procedure was as follow: the first two career dialogues were used as a pretest of the conducted QCD (the conversations were also audio taped with the consent of the respondents). Based on the suggestions of the respondents and the experiences of the researcher, the questionnaire was improved.

After revising that questionnaire, the other cases were audio taped too (with the consent of the respondents) and immediately after their portfolio conversation, fourth year students and counsellors were asked to fill in the QCD and the QSI.

Second year students were asked to fill in the customized version of the QCD and the QSI immediately after their performance appraisal.

Results

First research question

In this section the results for answering the first research question – concerning the quality of career dialogues of fourth year students– will be presented. Firstly, the 'subjective quality', i.e. the perspective of both student and counsellor, will be taken into account. Secondly, the 'objective quality', based on the analysis of audio taped conversations, will be discussed.

Subjective quality. The subjective quality of the career dialogues was measured by the QCD and the QSI. To measure the differences between students and counsellors on the different scales, independent samples t-test were carried out. Effect sizes (Cohen`s d) were calculated if results were significant ($\alpha = .05$), using the pooled standard deviation. Below, these results will be discussed by quality indicator. Finally, the results of the QSI will be presented.

Topics. The mean scores and standard deviations of this scale are shown in table 3. There are significant differences between the perspective of the students and the counsellors on attention paid to study progress ($t(12.93) = -4.43$, $p < .01$) and career oriented topics ($t(23) = -2.26$, $p = .03$) in portfolio conversations, whereby counsellors report that they pay more attention to these topics compared to the students. The effect sizes for these significant differences were large (Cohen`s d was respectively 1.89 and 1.00).

Furthermore, counsellors report significant more on career oriented topic in other conversations, than students did ($t(19) = -2.32$, $p = .03$). Also this difference results in a large effect size of 1.02.

Table 3

Mean scores and standard deviations of Counsellors and students on the topic scales

Topics	Counsellors			Students		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Study Progres P **	13	6,63	0,28	12	5,42	0,91
Study Progres O	10	4,65	1,74	11	4,30	0,97
Career Oriented P *	13	5,48	1,01	12	4,44	1,29
Career Oriented O *	10	4,40	1,31	11	3,25	0,94
Personal P	13	4,45	1,17	12	4,17	0,89
Personal O	10	5,36	1,37	11	4,31	1,23

Note. P = Portfolio conversation, O = Other conversations; Theoretical minimum = 1 and theoretical maximum = 7; * $p < .05$, two tailed, ** $p < .01$, two tailed.

Furthermore, the answers on the question "list three topics that are most important for you to discuss during a portfolio conversation and during other conversations", show the same pattern. In a portfolio conversation, students want to talk, on average, firstly about their development as Cesar therapy student, secondly about the quality of their portfolio, and thirdly, about their strengths and weaknesses. Whereas the counsellors, on average, report the following list: 1) the development as Cesar therapy student, 2) the marks of a student, and 3)

the future dream of a student. In other conversations, students prefer to discuss 1) their development as Cesar therapy student, 2) their marks, and 3) how they are doing/feeling (in private life also). According to the counsellors it is important to talk about 1) the strengths and weaknesses of a student, 2) their development as Cesar therapy student, and 3) the future dream of a student, in other conversations.

It is striking that students are mainly focused on discussing topics related to study progress (for example the quality of their portfolio or their marks). No career oriented topics were given in their list of the three most important topics to discuss. While counsellors also report that they want to discuss topics related to a career oriented attitude (for example, the future dream of a student).

Regulation. The extent to which self regulation was stimulated by the counsellor in the portfolio conversation differs significant between the perspectives of the students and the counsellors ($t(23) = 2.94$, $p = .01$). By this, counsellors underestimate themselves when looking at the report of the students. Students, namely, report that counsellors did encourage them significantly more than the counsellors report. However, it is striking that it is the other way around in other conversations, where counsellors report significantly more on this scale ($t(19) = -2.71$, $p = .01$), compared to the students. See table 4. Cohen`s *d* shows that these differences are large effects, since both effect sizes are 1.24.

Table 4

Mean scores and standard deviations of counsellors and students on the regulation scales

Regulation	Counsellors			Students		
	n	M	SD	*n*	M	SD
Stimulated by the counsellor P **	13	3,59	0,88	12	4,56	0,74
Stimulated by the counsellor O **	10	5,77	0,63	11	4,94	0,76
Stimulated by the student P	13	4,31	1,20	12	4,86	1,65
Stimulated by the student O	13	5,92	1,49	11	5,52	1,18

Note. P = Portfolio conversation, O = Other conversations; Theoretical minimum = 1 and theoretical maximum = 7; * *p* <.05, two tailed, ** *p* < .01, two tailed.

Reflection. No significant differences were found on this scale. Counsellors and students report (almost) the same scores for reflection in portfolio conversations and in other conversations (see table 5).

Table 5

Mean scores and standard deviations of counsellors and students on the reflection scales

	Counsellors			Students		
Reflection	*n*	M	SD	*n*	M	SD
Reflection P	13	4,74	0,74	12	4,93	1,02
Reflection O	10	5,07	0,90	11	5,06	0,71

Note. P = Portfolio conversation, O = Other conversations; Theoretical minimum = 1 and theoretical maximum = 7.

Relationship. The mean scores and standard deviations on the last quality indicator -measured with the QCD- are shown in table 6. On this scale there are also no significant differences between the scores of counsellors and students.

Table 6

Mean scores and standard deviations of counsellors and students on the relationship scales

	Counsellors			Students		
Relationship	*n*	M	SD	*n*	M	SD
Appreciation counsellor P	11	6,27	0,79	12	6,44	0,60
Appreciation counsellor O	8	6,56	0,73	11	6,34	0,67
Appreciation conversation P	11	6,27	0,68	12	5,79	1,37
Appreciation conversation O	8	6,38	0,79	10	5,85	1,06

Note. P = Portfolio conversation, O = Other conversations; Theoretical minimum = 1 and theoretical maximum = 7.

In addition to the items of the relationship scale, students were asked to grade their counsellors. On a scale from 1 to 10, fourth year student ($n = 12$) grade their counsellors with 8.00 (averaged, SD = 0,95).

General quality of the conversation. Finally, students and counsellors were asked to grade the portfolio conversation they just had and to grade the other conversations. Resulting in the averaged marks showed in table 7 (again on a scale from 1 to 10).

Table 7

Mean grades of students and counsellors on the quality of the conversation

	Counsellors			Students		
	n	M	SD	*n*	M	SD
Portfolio conversation *	13	8,31	0,63	12	7,04	1,76
Other conversations	13	7,89	0,62	12	7,33	0,98

Note. Theoretical minimum = 1 and theoretical maximum = 10; * $p <.05$, two tailed, ** $p < .01$, two tailed.

Counsellors judged the portfolio conversation significantly higher than students did ($t(23) = -2.43, p = .02$). The effect size for this difference is 1.02, which is a large effect.

QSI. Relationship was, besides the QCD, also measured with the QSI. In table 8 can be seen to what extent the students` perspective of the relationship is in line with the counsellors` perspective. Recapitulating, the eight subscales of the model for interpersonal supervisor behaviour were used to calculate the scores on the dimensions *proximity* and *influence*. In the table, counsellors` self perspective, students` perception and students' ideal perception of a counsellor are shown.

Table 8

Mean scores and standard deviations of students and counsellors on the two dimensions

	Counsellors			Students		
Dimensions	*n*	M	SD	*n*	M	SD
Influence current	2	0,41	0,27	15	0,25	0,21
Proximity current	2	1,64	0,29	15	1,67	0,38
Influence ideal				13	0,40	0,21
Proximity ideal				13	1,60	0,30

Note. Theoretical minimum = -2,6, Theoretical maximum = 2,6; * $p <.05$, two tailed, ** $p < .01$, two tailed.

Because of the small *n*, a Mann Withney U-test was carried out to test if there where any significant differences. However, there were no significant differences found between students` perspective (about current counsellor) and the counsellors self perspective and between students` perception of an ideal counsellor and the counsellors self perspective.

Also no significant differences were found between students` perception of their current counsellor and students` perception of an ideal counsellor (tested by using a independent samples t-test).

Objective quality. To measure the 'objective' quality of the career dialogues, two conversations were analysed. Table 7 presents how many times a segment received a particular code (frequency). Also the percentage of the segments which received that code is shown. Recap from the method section that each segment was allocated three codes, for each category (topics, regulation and reflection) one.

Table 9

Frequencies and percentages of the analysed conversations

	Dialogue A3		Dialogue A5	
Code	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Topics				
Study progress	39	69,6	32	65,3
Career oriented	7	12,5	9	18,4
Personal	1	1,8	1	2,0
Process	5	8,9	3	6,1
Other	4	7,1	4	8,2
Regulation				
Teacher controls	40	71,4	34	69,4
Teacher asks	4	7,1	1	2,0
Student controls	11	19,6	14	28,6
Student asks	1	1,8	0	0
Reflection				
No reflection	49	87,5	36	73,5
Level 1	5	8,9	7	14,3
Level 2	2	3,6	6	12,2

Note. Total segments of A3: 56 (conversation of 26 minutes); Total segments of A5: 49 (conversation of 17 minutes).

These results show that in both analysed conversations counsellor and student mainly talked about study progress (in total 69,7% in A3, 65,3% in A5). Much less attention was paid to career oriented topics, which is important for 'good' career guidance – as stated in the literature.

Furthermore, it is notable that the teacher mainly leads the conversation (around 70% of the conversation), instead of the student. This does not improve the self regulation of the student. Finally, there were just a few reflective moments in the conversations. In one conversation, of almost 30 minutes, a student reflected only seven times.

Second research question

In this section, the difference between second year students and fourth year students in career dialogues (second research question) will be discussed. Therefore, the results of both groups were compared using independent samples t-tests.

       Questionnaire Career Dialogues (QCD). Table 10 shows the means and standard deviations of second year and fourth year students on the different scales of the QCD.

Table 10

Mean scores and standard deviation of second year and fourth year students on quality indicators

Category	Scale	Second year students			Fourth year students		
		n	M	SD	*n*	M	SD
Topics							
	Study progress P	16	6,00	0,72	12	5,42	0,91
	Study progress O	14	4,27	1,43	11	4,30	0,97
	Career oriented P	16	3,53	1,49	12	4,44	1,29
	Career oriented O	13	3,21	1,40	11	3,25	0,94
	Personal P	16	4,24	1,07	12	4,17	0,89
	Personal O	14	3,83	0,94	11	4,31	1,23
Regulation							
	Stimulated by counsellor P **	16	5,25	0,61	12	4,56	0,74
	Stimulated by counsellor O	14	4,90	0,65	11	4,94	0,76
	Stimulated by student P *	16	6,06	0,85	12	4,86	1,65
	Stimulated by student O	14	5,69	0,84	11	5,52	1,18
Reflection							
	Reflection P	16	5,02	0,88	12	4,93	1,02
	Reflection O	14	4,58	0,75	11	5,06	0,71
Appreciation							
	Appreciation counsellor P	16	5,97	0,76	12	6,44	0,60
	Appreciation counsellor O	14	6,04	0,73	11	6,34	0,67
	Appreciation conversation P	16	5,91	0,82	12	5,79	1,37
	Appreciation conversation O	14	5,93	0,85	10	5,85	1,06

Note. P = portfolio conversation/performance appraisal, O = other conversations; Theoretical minimum = 1, Theoretical maximum = 7; * $p <.05$, two tailed, ** $p < .01$, two tailed.

       Significant differences between both groups were found on the regulation scales. Second year students report that they are significantly more self-regulated in performance appraisals, compared to fourth year students in portfolio conversations ($t(26) = 2.52$, $p = .02$).

Second year students also report that their counsellors stimulate them to be more self regulated ($t(26) = 2.71$, $p = .01$). The effect sizes of these differences were large, respectively 0.99 and 1,07. No other significant differences were found between second and fourth year students.

However, it is notable that on the question "list three topics that are most important for you to discuss during a portfolio conversation/performance appraisal and during other conversations", second year students also answer that, firstly, their development as Cesar therapy student is most important to discuss (during performance appraisals, as well as during other conversations). This is similar to what fourth year students reported (see above). On the contrary, second year students found it more important to discuss 'how they are doing/feeling' in other conversations. They put this topic on the second place, instead of the third place as the fourth year students did.

Second year students ($n = 16$) grade the performance appraisal with 7.44 on average (SD = 0,81) and the other conversations with 7.36 (SD = 0,74). Their counsellor was graded with 7.81 (SD = 0,66). No significant differences were found, compared to the marks of fourth year students.

Questionnaire Supervisor Interaction (QSI). The means and standard deviations of second year students and fourth year students on the QSI dimensions are shown in table 11.

Table 11

Mean scores and standard deviations of second year and fourth year students on influence and proximity

	Second year students			Fourth year students		
Dimensions	*n*	M	SD	*n*	M	SD
Influence current	16	0,41	0,27	15	0,25	0,21
Proximity current **	16	1,36	0,46	15	1,67	0,38
Influence ideal **	16	0,58	0,15	13	0,40	0,21
Proximity ideal *	16	1,88	0,19	13	1,60	0,30

Note. Theoretical minimum = -2,6, Theoretical maximum = 2,6; * $p <.05$, two tailed, ** $p < .01$, two tailed.

Second year students experience significantly less proximity from their current counsellor compared to the perspective of fourth year students ($t(29) = -2,06$, $p = .049$). This difference is a large negative effect (Cohen`s d is -0,77). However, they (second year students) report

that their ideal counsellor is significant more 'near' than fourth year students ideally would like (t(27) = 3.09, p = 0.01). Resulting in a Cohen`s $d$ of 1,18, which indicates a large positive effect. Furthermore, second year students like a counsellor who has significantly more influence, compared with fourth year student ($t$(27) = 2,63, $p$ = .01). Again, this effect size is large (Cohen`s d is 1,04).

Conclusion and Discussion

First research question

In this study, the quality of career dialogues at the study for Cesar Therapy has been examined. Based on the literature, four quality indicators were stated and included in this case study, namely self regulation, reflection, a career oriented attitude and relationship. The first general research question considers the quality of career dialogues between counsellor and fourth year students, measured by the four quality indicators.

Results show that students and counsellors mainly spoke about things related to study progress during career dialogues. On the scale *topics* of the QCD, *study progress* receives the highest score, compared to the other topics (as was seen in table 3). Furthermore, qualitative analysis indicates that almost 70% of the time was spent on study progress. Time spent on and attention paid to career oriented topics (like the near future for a student) was somewhat disappointing. While literature, as discussed in the introduction, states that discussing career oriented topics during career dialogues is beneficial for students. Kuipers and Meijers (2008) argue that this makes a learning environment more question driven and gives students more responsibility to shape their own study career. However, it is striking that according to the counsellors, more attention is paid to career oriented topics than students reported. A possible explanation is that counsellors are more focused on career oriented topics. The results of the QCD supports this idea: discussing the future dream of a student is important for counsellors. Students, in contrast, were mainly focused on discussing study progress and personal topics.

Furthermore, qualitative analysis of two career dialogues shows that the counsellor controls/regulates the conversation most of the time, although the quantitative data do not clearly show the similar pattern. Scores on self regulation stimulated by the counsellor were not remarkable higher than scores on self regulation stimulated by the student. It could be that students feel free to self regulate the conversation (and therefore they may give a relatively high score on items from the self regulation scale), but that in fact the counsellor regulates the conversation mainly.

Considering the third quality indicator *reflection*, students and counselors again report a relative high average score on this scale (around 5 on a scale from 1 to 7), when it is

compared to what was observed in the two recorded conversations. In these conversation were just a few reflective moments. However, it is possible that in the other, not observed conversations, more reflective moments took place. Unfortunately, not all the recorded conversations could be analysed, because of time limitations. It should be interesting to analyse more conversations in future research, since the coding frame is yet available.

Nevertheless, it is also possible that the portfolio conversation was not the most suitable career dialogue to discuss career oriented topics or to self regulate or reflect. It might be that the fourth year students mainly reflected in their portfolio, instead of in the dialogue, because they had already reflected in their portfolio. The same may apply to career oriented topics: if a student, for example, already discussed his/her planning for the near future in the portfolio, it is possible that this will not be discussed extensively during the conversation.

The final quality indicator was the relationship between counsellor and student. The results of the QCD present high scores on the associated scales (around the 6,3 for 'appreciation of the counsellor', on a scale from 1 to 7). Moreover, students judge their counsellor with an 8 (mean) on a scale from 1 to 10. Ultimately, the finding that the interpersonal behaviour of counsellors was close to ideal counsellor behaviour (i.e. no significant differences were found), suggests that students are very satisfied with their counsellor. It should be noted that the scores on the two dimensions, influence (around 0.35 on a scale from -2,6 to 2,6) and proximity (around 1,65 on the same scale, see table 8), are relatively high. This indicates that students prefer a counsellor who takes the lead. It may well be that this interferes with the self regulation of students. If so, it should be that the counsellor stimulates the student to actively participate in the dialogue, because students presumably would not do this by themselves. When counsellors stimulate students, the self regulation of students will hopefully be enhanced.

In conclusion, a discrepancy could be seen between the 'subjective quality' and the 'objective quality' based on these investigated career dialogues. The results of the QCD indicated that students and counsellors are satisfied with the career dialogues, specifically they grade those conversations with the mark seven or higher (on a scale from 1 to 10). However, the objective quality, the qualitatively analysed conversations, shows a much more disappointing picture of the dialogues. This could be seen as a discrepancy between what students and counsellors think is 'good' and what the literature states. For example, as mentioned above, results indicates that students prefer a counsellor who takes the lead and mainly want to talk about study progress. However, according to the literature, learning to self regulate is beneficial, just as the importance of discussing career oriented topics rather than study progress. Hence, it could be questioned which judgment of quality should be followed: the guidelines stated in the literature or the experienced quality of students and counsellors. In this case it is, in my view, important to pay attention to both. Because, on one hand, it is

important to stimulate students to reflect, to self regulate and to think and talk about career oriented topics, because I believe that the literature states well that this is beneficial for the learning process of the students (see introduction). But on the other hand, students must have the opportunity to discuss their study progress, because this is very important for them. Yet, the challenge for a counsellor is to give students this opportunity, but to take care not to stuck on this level during the entire conversation.

Second research question

The second research question examined the quality differences in career dialogues between second year students and fourth year students. However, based on the results of the QCD, just a few differences were found between both groups. For example, the finding that second year students scored significantly higher on the self regulation scale. Unfortunately, this finding does not confirm the hypothesis that students will grow in self regulation over the course of their study. However, second year students also reported that the counsellor regulates the conversation significantly more than fourth year students reported.

At this point, it is important to note that the QCD is a self report questionnaire. It may be questioned if students (and also counsellors) can really state, by themselves, to what extent they were self regulated. Moreover, it is possible that second year students judge the same, hypothetical conversation different than fourth year students do. In other words, standards for what is 'little' and what is 'much', may vary per student or counsellor. Finally, also social desirability may have had influence on the reported answers of students and counsellors.

The results on the QSI show that, according to the judgments of students, counsellors become more cooperative (the dimension *proximity*) when students are further in their study. Also the ideal type of counsellor changes over the course of their study, becoming less influential and cooperative. This may indicate that final year students become more self regulating and therefore do not, or to a lesser extent, need a counsellor who is strongly guiding.

In summary, the results of this study do not confirm with certainty the hypothesis that students will grow in self regulation, reflection and a career oriented attitude, over the course of their study. It could be argued that the relationship between student and counsellor differs over the years. First of all, this seems plausible because of the fact that student and counsellor knew each other for a longer time, but also the results of the QSI indicates this.

Methodological issues

Having said this, it is important to discuss some methodological issues considering this study.

Firstly, because of the case study design, the sample was very small (total $n = 31$). As a consequence, some interesting tests, like a regression analysis, could not be carried out. It would, for example, be interesting to adopt *gender* as a control variable. In this study, unfortunately, just a few men participated. However, Rowland (2004) report that there are many studies that show a significant difference between male and female. For example, Mittendorff (2010) concludes, based on research in vocational education, that females reflect more than males. Therefore, it would be interesting to carry out a similar study with a bigger sample in the future and adopt, for example, *gender* as control variable.

Besides the small sample, the sample was not randomly chosen because of practical limitations. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize these results to other studies in higher vocational education. However, also with a large, random sample it is still difficult to generalize to other studies, because each institute for vocation education may form their own curriculum on career guidance and therefore there could consist huge differences between such curricula.

Other limitations of this study were already mentioned above, for example the fact that most of the data were collected trough self report questionnaires. Or the possibility that the portfolio conversation was not the most suitable conversation to reflect or discuss career oriented topics. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that second and fourth year students had not the same conversation before filling in the questionnaire. Second year students filled in the QCD for their performance appraisal and fourth year students for their portfolio conversation. It is possible that in one of the conversations more attention is paid to reflection, self regulation and/or career oriented topics. Or maybe one conversation is more suitable for a student to reflect, self regulate or discuss career oriented topics. To overcome this problem, both groups were also asked about general conversations they have had, the 'other conversations'. Unfortunately, it appeared that this was very different per student and it seemed as if most of the students did not remember those other conversations well.

Finally, notice that only career dialogues were investigated in this study and that these dialogues are just a little part of the total career guidance programme of Cesar therapy. For that reason, one must be careful in drawing conclusions about the quality of the complete career guidance curriculum of Cesar therapy.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study offers lots of information about career dialogues that take place in a particular institute for higher vocational education. It indicates where the quality of career dialogues could be improved. Namely, based on the findings in this study, too little attention

is paid to career oriented topics during the conversations. Furthermore, findings suggest that career dialogues are still mainly regulated by the counsellor, instead of the student, and consist of few reflections. However, it is suggested that there exist a discrepancy between what are good career dialogues according to students and counsellors and which is qualitatively good according to the literature. Finally, a clear difference between second year students and fourth year students, on the quality of the career dialogues, cannot be established based on the results of this study.

References

Bie, D. de, & Kleijn, J. de (2001). *Wat gaan we doen? Het construeren en beoordelen van opdrachten.* Houten/Diemen: Bohn Stafleu van Loghum.

Brok, P. den, Brekelmans, M. & Wubbels, T. (2004). Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour and Student Outcomes. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 15,* 407-442.

Chi, M.T.H. (2007). Quantifying Qualitative Analyses of Verbal Data: A Practical Guide. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 6(3), 271-315.

Field, A. (2005). *Discovering statistics using SPSS.* London: Sage.

Hatton, N. & Smith, D. (1995). Reflection in teacher education: towards definition and implementation. *Teaching and Teacher education, 11 (1),* 33-49.

Kuijpers, M. (2009). Career dialogue: about learning to talk (and) about learning to choose. In M. Kuijpers & F. Meijers (Eds.). *Career learning. Research and practice in education* (pp. 175-191). `s Hertogenbosch: Euroguidance The Netherlands.

Kuipers, M. & Meijers, F. (2008). *Loopbaanleren en –begeleiden in het HBO.* Den Haag: Platform Bèta   Techniek.

Mainhard, T., van der Rijst, R., van Tartwijk, J. & Wubbels, T. (2009). A model for the supervisor–doctoral student relationship. *Higher Education, 58,* 359–373.

Mansvelder-Longayroux, D.D., Beijaard, D. & Verloop, N. (2007). The portfolio as a tool for stimulating reflection by student teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23,* 47–62.

Meijers, F., Kuipers, M., & Bakker, J. (2006). *Over leerloopbanen en loopbaanleren. Loopbaancompetenties in het (v)mbo.* Het platform beroepsonderwijs.

Nota, L., Soresi, S. & Zimmerman, B.J. (2004). Self-regulation and academic achievement and resilience: A longitudinal study. *International Journal of Educational Research, 41,* 198–215.

Oefentherapie Cesar (2010). *Zelfevaluatierapport OTC.*

Rijst, van der R., Mainhard, T., Tartwijk, van J. & Wubbels, T. (2008). *Questionnaire Supervisor Interaction.* Universiteit Utrecht – Universiteit Leiden.

Rowland, K. D. (2004). Career decision-making skills of high school students in the Bahamas. *Journal of Career Development, 31,* 1-13.

Velzen, van J.H. (2002). *Instruction and self-regulated learning. Promoting students` (self-) reflective thinking.* Leiden: Leiden University.

Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs, (2010). Gevonden op 18 februari 2010, op http://www.st-ab.nl/wetten/0467_Wet_educatie_en_beroepsonderwijs_WEB.htm

Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research, design and methods.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Wubbels, T., Brekelmans, M., den Brok, P., & van Tartwijk, J. (2006). An interpersonal

perspective on classroom management in secondary classrooms in the Netherlands. In C. Evertson & C. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues* (pp. 1161–1191). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Zimmerman, B.J. (1995). Self Regulation involves more than metacognition: A social cognitive perspective. *Educational Psychologist, 30 (4),* 217-221.