Career writing as a dialogue about work experience: A recipe for luck readiness?

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Abstract In this article, we examined whether career writing—creative, expressive, and reflective writing—can increase luck readiness, which is the ability to respond and make use of (career) opportunities. Two 2-day writing courses were taught to third-year bachelor students, one before and one after work placements. In this exploratory study, results showed that luck readiness and work competence increased when students engaged in career writing. Specifically, flexibility, risk, and persistence increased among students in the experimental group. They also made jumps in optimism and efficacy, though no statistically significant differences were found in these domains.

Résumé. **Ecrire sur son expérience professionnelle : Une recette pour se préparer à saisir les opportunités de carrière?** Dans cet article, nous examinons de quelle manière écrire au sujet de la carrière - des écrits créatifs, expressifs, et réflexifs - peut

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augmenter la promptitude à saisir sa chance, qui se réfère à la capacité de réagir et de saisir les opportunités de carrière. Deux cours d'écriture de deux jours ont été proposés à des étudiants en troisième année de Bachelor, l'un avant et l'autre après l'insertion professionnelle. Dans cette étude exploratoire, les résultats ont montré que la préparation à saisir sa chance et les compétences professionnelles augmentaient quand les étudiants s'étaient engagés dans une activité d'écriture. Spécifiquement, la flexibilité, le risque et la persévérance ont augmenté parmi les étudiants du groupe expérimental. Ils ont également amélioré leur optimisme et leur efficacité, bien qu'aucune différence statistiquement significative n'ait été trouvée dans ces domaines.

Zusammenfassung. **Schreiben über die berufliche Laufbahn als Dialog über Berufserfahrung: Ein Rezept für Glück-Bereitschaft?** In diesem Artikel untersuchten wir, ob das Schreiben über die eigene Laufbahn - kreativ, ausdrucksstark und reflektierendes Schreiben - die Glücks-Bereitschaft erhöhen kann, welche die Fähigkeit darstellt, Laufbahn-Chancen zu nutzen und darauf zu reagieren. Im dritten Bachelor Jahr wurden den Studenten 2-Tages Schreibkurse, einer vor und einer nach Praktika, unterrichtet. In dieser explorativen Studie zeigten die Ergebnisse, dass die Glücks-Bereitschaft und die Arbeitskompetenz sich erhöht, wenn die Studenten sich im Schreiben über die berufliche Laufbahn engagierten. Insbesondere Flexibilität, Risiko und Ausdauer steigerten sich bei den Studenten in der Versuchsgruppe. Sie machten auch Anstiege in Optimismus und Wirksamkeit, wenn auch keine statistisch signifikanten Unterschiede in diesen Bereichen gefunden wurden.

Resumen. **Escritura profesional como un diálogo sobre la experiencia laboral: ¿Una receta para disponer de éxito?** En este artículo, hemos examinado si la escritura profesional – escritura creativa, expresiva y reflexiva - puede incrementar la disponibilidad de éxito, que es la capacidad de responder y hacer uso de las oportunidades (de carrera). Se llevaron a cabo dos cursos de escritura de 2 días con estudiantes de tercer curso de carrera, uno antes y otro después del período de prácticas. En este estudio exploratorio, los resultados mostraron que la disponibilidad de éxito y la competencia laboral aumentaron cuando los estudiantes participan en los cursos de escritura. En concreto, la flexibilidad, el riesgo y la persistencia aumentaron entre los estudiantes del grupo experimental. También se incrementó el optimismo y la eficacia, aunque no se encontraron diferencias estadísticamente significativas en estos dominios.

Uncertainty and frequent change are realities for those working or seeking work on the labour market of the twenty-first century, and educators must take this into account when preparing their students. The rise of contingent labour at universities forms a case in point: Although the number of those considered permanent or full-time was upwards of 78 % in the 1970s, more than 70 % of positions are now *off* of the tenure track (Goldstene, 2013). To foster employability in students, policy makers and higher education teachers must support individuals in their ability to "both create and benefit from unplanned events" (Krumboltz, Foley, & Cotter, 2013, p. 15). Additionally, researchers and educators are realizing that career-learning approaches are required that go beyond the "rational-cognitive conceptions

of knowledge and cumulative- linear models of learning" (Briton, 2012, p. 48) and take into consideration issues of time and cost without compromising quality and access (Watts & Sultana, 2004).

Future employees face a world in which they must learn how to navigate a "boundaryless" career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) which entails being "luck ready." Succinctly put, luck readiness is the ability to see and make use of opportunities within the reality of complexity, change, and uncertainty. It includes "recognizing, creating, utilizing, and adapting to opportunities and outcomes occasioned by chance" (Pryor & Bright, 2011, p. 119). To measure whether a person is indeed luck ready, Pryor and Bright (2011) developed the luck readiness index (LRI).

In this study we looked at whether "career writing"—creative, expressive, and reflective writing—would enhance the luck readiness of students in higher education and increase their workplace competence as well. This creative approach is a career guidance method within the broader field of narrative career guidance (Cochran, 1997; McIlveen & Patton, 2007; Reid, 2005; Reid & West, 2011; Savickas, 2005). Narrative approaches acknowledge and underscore the complexity of the learning journey that would have individuals live a protean, or frequently changing, career (Hall, 1976). These approaches are intended to help individuals develop a career story, which will serve as a personal but flexible identity and allow for career adaptability (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012; Savickas, 2005). Such a narrative should be a structured, flexible, workable, and emotionally salient account that concretely allows a person to expand and develop his or her chances on the labour market—a story, in other words, that supports the development of luck readiness.

Career writing

Career writing can be defined as creative, expressive, and reflective writing aimed at helping people to construct a career narrative or identity (Lengelle & Meijers, 2014). The approach is rooted in the field of writing for personal and professional development, and is now being used in career guidance activities (Bolton, 1994, 2010; Hunt & Sampson, 2002). There are several key reasons why it might support career learning. First, writing is, by nature, a narrative and dialogical process in the same way that narrative career counselling is. One who writes is always addressing a real or imaginary audience. In this way, the writer is always constructing meaning in a storied way for the reader and is, therefore, in conversation. Such an internal and external dialogue has been shown to be essential in getting the most out of work experiences (Meijers, Kuijpers, & Gundy, 2013).

Second, under particular circumstances, writing can be helpful and even therapeutic in processing life experiences (i.e., traumas and transitions) and in constructing personal meaning (Pennebaker, 1996). The process allows detachment from drama and pain, engagement and recognition of feelings associated with life challenges, and provides an opportunity to order one's life material (Lengelle & Meijers, 2009). Lieberman et al. (2007) showed that affect labelling (e.g., writing about feelings) reduced the activity of the amygdala and other limbic regions when

negative emotional images arose, as compared with other forms of encoding. Third, writing has proven to be one of several effective "instructional strategies that require students to build up their prior knowledge and find direct relevance of new knowledge" (Balgopal, Wallace, & Dahlberg, 2012, p. 70); and writing to learn has been found to enhance "meta-cognitive and self-reflective skills" (p. 71).

A review of the literature shows initial promise that career writing may be a viable alternative to the predominantly cognitive career guidance approaches that still dominate in schools. Lengelle, Meijers, Poell, and Post (2013, 2014) conducted a study on using career writing as a dialogue in career learning. They found that writing promotes career-identity formation. Westergaard (2013) concluded that structured group work within a safe environment is effective in guidance work. Career writing can be facilitated successfully with a skilled leader and in the useful company of peers (Lengelle & Meijers, 2014). Facilitating career writing in groups offers realistic and economically promising options for schools and universities, which is a distinct advantage over the one-on-one approach to career writing found in various forms of narrative guidance.

However, research into narrative careers guidance has only recently begun in earnest (Bimrose & Hearne, 2012; Reid & West, 2011; Vilhjalmsdottir & Tulinius, 2009) and research on career writing is sparse. Spera, Buhrfeind, and Pennebaker, (1994) explored the uses of therapeutic writing in the face of lay-offs and labour market re-entry rates. Barclay and Skarlicki (2009) explored its use in remedying workplace injustice, and, most recently, Kirk, Schutte, and Hine (2011) examined expressive writing's effect on self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, affect, and workplace civility. The use of writing aimed at personal and professional development is a relatively new contribution to the field and warrants further research.

Three types of writing

It is possible to distinguish three types of career writing: creative, expressive, and reflective/reflexive writing (Lengelle & Meijers, 2014). Creative writing (Bolton 1999; Hunt & Sampson, 2002) for personal development refers to the writing of fiction or (fictional) autobiography for therapeutic purposes or to gain self-insight. Winnicott (1971) summarized the use of "art" in personal development when he observed that, "In the creation of artwork the creative artist opens up the possibility of being transformed" (p. 13). Academics and practitioners of writing for personal development have found that "fiction is a way of exploring a professional problem that is inaccessible or problematic by any other means" (Bolton, 1994, p. 54).

Expressive writing in the context of career writing refers to the use of written expression to explore emotional pain, stress, and trauma. Research has shown that putting both the events and the emotions surroundings those events on the page is therapeutic (cf. Pennebaker, 2011). Theories as to why writing helps have grown out of these studies and from ideas about how to identify healthy writing from writing that has little or no effect (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005; Pennebaker, 2011).

Reflective/reflexive writing refers to writing practices that are intended to "take us out of our own narrow range of experience and help us to perceive experiences from a range of viewpoints and potential scenarios" (Bolton, 2010, p. 10). These may include, but are not limited to, journal writing, poetry, or non-fiction writing aimed at "reliving and re-rendering." The explicit use and value of using metaphors is also recognised in reflective writing. *Reflexive writing* is not the same as *reflective writing,* although it can be seen as an extension of the latter. Reflective writing involves the contemplation or examination of our perspectives wherein we evoke the inner observer. The former involves "*doubling* the self" (Hunt & Sampson, 2006, p. 4) and experiencing the perspectives of our multi-voiced self in a more embodied way, according to Bolton (2010):

> So that we are both 'inside' and 'outside' ourselves simultaneously and able to switch back and forth fluidly and playfully from one position to the other, giving ourselves up to the experience of "self as other" whilst also retaining a grounding in our familiar sense of self. (p. 4)

In this study, we proposed that two 2-day career-writing courses—one before and one after a 5-month work placement—would increase the luck readiness of third-year bachelor students in applied sciences. We also looked at whether participating in creative, expressive, and reflective writing activities would reflect positively on students' performance during work placements as determined by their employers.

Method

Participants

We recruited third-year bachelor students from a Dutch university of applied sciences. Several of the authors are part of a research group there and have done prior research into vocational education and career guidance. All students were recruited on a voluntary basis from various departments (e.g. communication studies, facility management, and European studies). Intakes were performed to record basic information, such as course of study, age, and gender. Students were all third year bachelors' students, 21–26 years of age ($M = 23$, $SD = 2.3$). In the experimental group, there were 2 males and 14 females in the first course and 1 male and 8 females who completed both courses. In the final control group there were 4 males and 12 females. The students came from various ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Turkish, Dutch, Moroccan, Surinamese-Indian, Polish, etc.).

Originally there were 20 students enrolled in the experimental group; 16 of those participated in the first course and nine completed both the course before and after work placements (including the Luck Readiness Index), though two of those nine did bachelor's thesis writing in the period scheduled for work placements. The control group originally also was comprised of 20 third-year bachelor students from the same Dutch university. All students volunteered to participate, were asked for permission to report results, and signed to commit to participation as per research protocol in the Netherlands.

The course

The career-writing course is an experiential, interactive, and creative course, which engages students in a variety of creative, expressive, and reflective writing exercises. These include fiction, non-fiction, poetry, journal writing, and a method of written inquiry, among others. Stories are developed in steps where students explore childhood themes, archetypal identifications, and question the validity of entrenched or stressful narratives. Although there is no focus on a final product (e.g., life portrait) insights are captured near the end in refined texts (e.g., haiku poetry). The exercises build one upon another with the aim of students gaining more self-insight.

The writing prompts given are geared towards the deepening and broadening of horizons. A deepening exercise might be where students finish the sentence, "What I can't stand or couldn't stand as a child is…," where explorations are done into what currently drives them and whether there are life themes from childhood that connect with that. As Savickas (2005) said, they may discover that they are indeed actively trying to master what they once passively suffered. A broadening exercise might entail writing a list of professions they may do later, rather than a single answer (e.g., poet, researcher, organiser, publisher, and teacher).

The course is intended to help students engage in an internal as well as an external dialogue about their lives, academic studies, and work experiences. An internal dialogue refers to a conversation with one's self and the myriad of "selves" or positions within an individual (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). This might include becoming more in tune with conflicting aspects of one's self, allowing more awareness of one's wishes and hunches, and/or tapping into one's intuition. An external dialogue refers to a conversation with others, which influences the internal dialogue and vice versa. The internal and external dialogue is the "engine" that fosters the creation of a work-life narrative (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012). These forms of dialogue helps people identify and articulate career themes and construct a career story that is both meaningful and offers direction (Wijers & Meijers, 1996). As such, the career-writing course was intended to lead to beginning career narratives that reflected students' wishes and plans.

The two 2-day courses were taught by one of the researchers and attended by another, who assisted and recorded observations of the process. In both courses, the same exercises and materials were used, though the second course applied the writing approaches and exercises to reflect on work experiences students had just had. All the participants received a course booklet with various exercises, and each exercise was thoroughly explained and completed onsite in a classroom setting. Variations and adjustments were made to the exercises, but the core of the program was the same in both 2-day sessions. Before introducing themselves or embarking on the activities, students were asked to write a response to the following prompt: "Please write for 20 minutes about the work placement you are about to do and the significance of that work placement for your career and course of study." The course started at 9 o'clock in the morning and ended around 4 o'clock in the afternoon each day. The control group was given the same prompt and wrote once before work placement and once after.

Instruments

The main instrument used in this study was the Luck Readiness Index (LRI; Pryor & Bright, 2011), a questionnaire comprised of 52 statements intended to measure flexibility, optimism, risk (i.e., risk-taking), curiosity, persistence, strategy, efficacy, and luckiness. We chose to use the LRI because this instrument measures so-called "21st-century skills" in the field of career development. According to several researchers, these skills are essential nowadays for leading a successful career (e.g., Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009).

The instrument was subject to psychometric analyses and items were tested for homogeneity and reliability (Pryor & Bright, 2011). The test was not translated, and the original English version was administered because Dutch university students have an excellent understanding of English. The only instructions we provided were, "Please fill in the questions as you are now and not as you would like to be." This was intended to prevent any skewing of the results due to wishful thinking. A sample item from the test is: "Having to take very important decisions about my career would keep me awake at night." Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert-type scale (*1 = completely agree, 5 = completely disagree*). Of the 52 questions, there are between 4 and 8 items that measure a particular quality (e.g., there are 5 questions that relate to flexibility) and the ranges for scores are shared in "Analysis" section below.

In addition to the LRI, a 16-item statement-style questionnaire was sent to employers so they could evaluate the student who had worked for them. The 16 statements represent core qualifications of Dutch secondary vocational education (Nijhof & Streumer, 1998). Sample statements included, "The student can do the work expected of him/her independently"; "The student listens to explanations given"; "The student enjoys the work"; and "The student can work with others." Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert-type scale (*1 = excellent, 5 = unsatisfactory.*) The questionnaire was not shared with students. Additionally, it was not used to evaluate their academic performance or to grade them.

Analyses

Students in the experimental group agreed to participate in two 2-day courses, which included handing in a total of six writing samples, submitting their work placement reports, and completing the LRI. Where possible, researchers obtained reviews from employers at the workplace sites. The control group also completed the LRI before and after the placement, handed in two writing samples—one from before and one from after the work placement—and researchers collected work placement reports and employer reviews. Although the LRI would have been a more suitable inventory to use with a larger group, the idea was to use it in addition to several other data analysis methods to determine if, together, they developed a coherent profile.

The results of the LRI can be delivered in a numerical or a descriptive report; the numerical report was chosen so groups could be compared more readily. We report mean scores and standard deviations of the eight trait indices. Non-parametric tests

(Mann Witney U) were conducted to look for significant differences between the mean scores for each trait between the experimental and control groups. Moreover, we used non-parametric testing to determine the significance of the change between the first and second measures. We used Cohen's d to calculate the effect size for the changes between the first and second measure, which is the difference between the average scores in the experimental and control groups divided by the pooled standard deviation (with following criteria: .2 small effect, .5 medium effect, .8 large effect) (Cohen, 1988).

Given the small sample in the study, it was questionable from the start whether significant changes could be established by testing. Given the exploratory aims of our study, we also decided to look for patterns in the students' scores. To do so, we looked at "jumps": a change of level, for instance if a student had a score in the average range and this score ended in the high range, a "jump" would be noted. In Table 1, the ranges of scores are shown; the categories (i.e., low, average, or high) were provided by Pryor and Bright (personal communication), the authors of this inventory. For each group of students the number of jumps were calculated, and a comparison was made between the two groups.

Results

In this section, we first present the results of the quantitative analyses (Table 2). We then switch to an exploratory qualitative interpretation of the results focusing on decreases and increases in the data and the jumps that student made in their scores (Table 3).

Luck readiness

In Table 2, we present an overview of the average scores of both groups of students for each of the eight different luck readiness traits. The mean scores show that most students initially score average on most scales, although curiosity and strategy and to a lesser degree optimism, were in the high range for students overall. Put differently: Out of the 25 students in our study, the first LRI showed that 20 students scored high in curiosity, 18 in strategy, and 12 in optimism.

Table 1 Range of scores of luck readiness attributes

Trait	Low score	Average score	High score
Flexibility	1–10	11–18	>18
Optimism	1–10	11–26	>27
Risk	1–10	11–28	>29
Curiosity	1–7	8–17	>18
Persistence	1–12	13–28	>28
Strategy	1–10	11–24	>24
Efficacy	1–11	12–27	>28
Luckiness	1–6	6–13	>13

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for traits of luck readiness* for the two groups of students before (T1) and after (T2) their placement, significance of differences in distribution of scores (Mann–Whitney *U*) and effect sizes (total N = 25)

Trait	Experimental group (E) (*n* = 9)		Control group (C) (*n* = 16)	
	T1 Mean (SD)	T2 Mean (SD)	T1 Mean (SD)	T2 Mean (SD)
Flexibility	16.33 (.37)	17.11 (.35)	15.13 (.43)	14.75 (.42)
Optimism	25.22 (1.36)	27.22 (1.00)	25.50 (.94)	25.81 (.79)
Risk	24.56 (1.30)	27.33 (73)	25.31 (1.15)	25.31 (1.00)
Curiosity	19.78 (.62)	19.67 (.73)	19.06 (.67)	19.81 (.47)
Persistence	26.00 (1.51)	25.11 (1.50)	26.94 (.65)	26.44 (.71)
Strategy	26.11 (1.00)	26.00 (.80)	24.31 (.76)	25.94 (.67)
Efficacy	24.44 (.94)	26.11 (1.10)	24.25 (.78)	25.19 (.83)
Luckiness	11.90 (1.08)	12.00 (1.03)	12.50 (.44)	12.69 (.45)

* Five-point Likert-type scale (*1 = agree, 5 = disagree*)

** $p < .003$ (.05/16 tests)

*** $p < .0006$ (.05/8 tests; 1-tailed significance)

Table 3 Students showing luck readiness increases (N = 25)

Trait	Experimental group (*n* = 9)		Control group (*n* = 16)	
	Increase	Decrease	Increase	Decrease
Flexibility	++	0	0	++
Optimism	++	+	++	+
Risk	++	0	+	+
Curiosity	++	0	++	0
Persistence	+	+	0	++
Strategy	+	+	++	+
Efficacy	++	+	++	+
Luckiness	++	+	++	+

0 = a quarter or fewer respondents within each group changed; + = a quarter to half of respondents within each group changed; ++ = more than half of respondents within each group changed

Despite the small number of participants, we performed a test for statistical significance. First, the differences between the experimental and control group were examined on the first (E/C on T1) and second (E/C on T2) measures. Only one of these tests showed a significant difference between the two groups: The average score for flexibility on the second measure appeared to be higher in the experimental group than in the control group ($p < .001$). Then, a *z*-score of change between the two measures (T2–T1) was calculated and tested for significance; however, none of the differences in distribution appeared to be significant. Effect sizes showed small to medium positive effects for optimism, efficacy, flexibility, and risk and negative effects for strategy and curiosity, indicating corresponding differences in the

average increase and decrease of scores for the experimental versus the control group. However, these effects were not significant, given the small samples. In most cases, it is not useful to report non-significant effect sizes. However, in this case, the reason for not finding significance is clearly related to a small sample size. However, the effect sizes do seem to show a trend. For exploratory reasons, we chose to report these.

As a basis for further research, patterns in the scores were also examined by assessing score movements—increases or decreases. We counted and calculated the increase in scores of all nine experimental and 16 control-group students. Jumps referred to a change of level, where a student initially had a score in the average range and this score ended in the high range. If more than half of the students in the experimental or control group had a higher LRI score on a particular trait the second time, that trait was marked with a double plus sign. In actual numbers, this meant that if more than five students (in the experimental group) and more than eight (in the control group) showed such progress, it was marked "++."

Results showed that both groups increased in luck readiness overall, but that more students who took part in the 2 two-day career-writing courses increased their scores in more areas and that their jumps were higher than control participants'. This was particularly evident in the areas of flexibility, risk, and persistence. Table 3 shows that more than half the students in the control group, who did the work placement but did not take part in the career-writing course, showed decreased flexibility and persistence. Optimism, curiosity, efficacy, and luckiness seemed to increase as a result of work placements alone, and control participants' scores also increased most in the "strategy" quality (i.e., actively seeking out opportunities). It is important to note as well that most score changes were slight, (e.g., a score of 27 or higher, which is the start of the high range in optimism, shifted up or down by only three or four points).

Table 4 Students showing luck readiness jumps from average to high (N = 25)

Trait	Experimental group ($n = 9$)		Control group ($n = 16$)	
	Increase	Decrease	Increase	Decrease
Flexibility	+	0	0	0
Optimism	+	0	0	0
Risk	0	0	0	0
Curiosity	0	0	+	0
Persistence	0	+	0	0
Strategy	0	0	0	0
Efficacy	+	0	0	0
Luckiness	0	0	0	0

0 = a quarter or fewer respondents within each group changed; + = a quarter to half of respondents within each group changed; ++ = more than half of respondents within each group changed

Several other observations about the changes in scores are worth noting. For instance, we looked at whether students made a jump from the average to the high range or vice versa. Based on the overview of ranges provided to us by the authors of the LRI (see Table 1), we determined that a quarter to half of the students in the experimental group made such a jump in the areas of flexibility, optimism, and efficacy. Table 4 shows that the control group only made such a jump in the area of curiosity. And although persistence increased overall in the experimental group (see Table 2, i.e., no significance) some students in the latter group also jumped downward in persistence.

In the experimental group, not a single participant score in optimism went from high to average and one of the student's scores increased by 10 points. There was also an increase in risk-taking among participants in the experimental group; three students had scores go up between 5 and 7 points. There was also a jump in persistence for a student who reported that she had benefitted a lot from her work placement and that she had been working in an area most suited to her interests. The two students whose persistence levels dropped significantly (by 7 and 11 points, respectively) were the two who had spent their work-placement period completing final thesis projects instead of being in employment contexts. As previously mentioned, most students in both groups scored in the high range with regards to strategy initially, and participants in the control group seemed to have the most increase in this area. Efficacy scores increased slightly for three students in the experimental group ($n = 9$), two in the control group ($n = 16$) and no one dropped into a lower range. Luckiness hardly fluctuated, nor was it particularly high to begin with; this was perhaps affected by cultural perceptions of "luck"—something that might not have struck a chord with the sober mentality of the Dutch.

Employers' work-place evaluations

Work-place mentors' (i.e., employers) evaluations showed that students who completed the writing course were evaluated more positively overall. We do not claim to draw statistical conclusions from these results; the small number of participants in our research makes it impossible to do so with any statistical merit. What we aimed to do by using such a questionnaire was to see whether there were initial indications that students were benefitting from the career writing courses. Table 5 shows the responses to the 16 statements for the experimental ($n = 5$) and

Table 5 Workplace evaluations for experimental and control groups		
Evaluation	Experimental group ($n = 5$)	Control group ($n = 13$)
Excellent	67	73
Very satisfactory	4	84
Satisfactory	9	40
Almost satisfactory	0	7
Not satisfactory	0	2
Total	80	206

control groups ($n = 13$). Note that 208 responses would have been expected from the control group (13 employers responding to 16 questions each = 208), but two work placement mentors each neglected (likely forgot) to answer one statement. Therefore, the final score total was 206. The experimental group scored "excellent" (the highest category) and had no scores in either the "almost" or the "not satisfactory" categories. And although the control group also scored "satisfactory" or above on most workplace tasks, their scores showed fewer than half in the "excellent" category and a wider spread over "very satisfactory" and "satisfactory" categories. It is important to note that work-placement mentors were not aware of the career writing intervention, though we cannot rule out the possibility that students may have mentioned it informally in their exchanges with their employers.

Discussion

There are several possible reasons why career writing may be promising in the context of career guidance as indicated by these preliminary results. First, writing is a dialogical form of learning that allows students to explore, express, and reflect on their lived experiences in relation to work. Earlier research on youths and career competencies showed that this is a winning combination—to gain work experience and to have a meaningful conversation about it (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2012; Kuijpers, Meijers, & Gundy, 2011).

A particular strength of career writing is that it is a structured approach and does not simply advocate writing down whatever comes to mind. What those teaching writing for personal or therapeutic purposes have found is that writing in given forms "paradoxically frees the writer. As he or she focuses on technicalities such as metre or end-rhyme, the unconscious is simultaneously finding the appropriate image or metaphor" (Field, 2006, p. 124).

The explicit invitation to explore emotions, past pain, and connect those to life themes and drives is another reason this type of writing might be an effective, embodied form of learning. The approach may also be successful in part because it is a form of group work, which has the added advantage of peer support that, by its nature, helps individuals see that they are rarely unique or alone in their struggle and that various solutions exist (Westergaard, 2013). Career writing may also foster luck readiness and workplace success because it assists individuals in becoming aware of their prior knowledge and integrating the new learning they are doing in a relevant way (Balgopal et al., 2012). Many writers have highlighted that fact that we actually write to learn, which was so eloquently expressed in the words of novelist Forster (2013): "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?"

Limitations

Our group was small and therefore no strong conclusions based on statistical significance can be drawn, nor generalizations made about the effectiveness of career writing. Additionally, our attrition rate cannot be ignored. We began with 16 students in the experimental group, but with other commitments interfering with

their participation, two deliberately dropping out, and one of our male participants finding it challenging on an emotional level, we finished with nine completing the course. Furthermore, two students from this group were not able to do work placements; they had to use the time originally scheduled for work experience to complete final bachelor's projects, and a third participant used the time to study and prepare for a work placement she hoped to secure.

This research was done in a Western context with the accompanying cultural assumptions, even though various students came from non-Western backgrounds. The Western premise underlying the intervention is that disclosure is a key feature of personal development and will bring about positive change. However, it could be argued that this does not apply in all cultures. For instance, in many non-Western cultures disclosure is frequently frowned upon and discouraged and may lead to feelings of shame (Wellenkamp, 1995).

Finally, although researchers did not reveal what types of responses they hoped to see, two of the authors of this article were also researchers in the study and they anticipated positive results, which could have influenced the observations recorded or the way in which students responded to the Luck Readiness Index questions.

Further research and considerations for practice

In order to verify or refute the potential of career writing as a method in the field of career counselling, it is important to do further research and examine how writing works and for whom it is most helpful (e.g., culture, gender). The authors recommend that research is undertaken on a larger scale and that other research tools are used to measure students' progress.

We also caution career practitioners to not merely add several writing exercises to their repertoire in working with students or clients. Those already using narrative approaches will likely be able to incorporate it readily, but those who are using more traditional methods should obtain some training in career writing, either online or face-to-face. The approach should not merely be adopted as another teaching "trick" or introduced in instrumental ways.

Career learning through creative, expressive, and reflective writing may provide teachers, career mentors, and counsellors with a route towards deeper and more meaningful career conversations. Its potential as a cost and time-efficient method may make it a viable option for colleges and universities as they prepare their students for an uncertain and dynamic future on the labour market.

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