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## Students' perceptions of career conversations with their teachers

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### ABSTRACT

Internationally, schools acknowledge their responsibility in guiding students not only in their academic growth, but also in their lifelong career development. In relation to this development, vocational schools in the Netherlands are implementing integral career guidance in which teachers receive a new task in guiding students in developing their own learning and career paths. A questionnaire was developed to investigate students' perceptions of career guidance by teachers during career conversations, and data involving 28 teachers were collected from 579 students. The study identified four different teacher guidance profiles. Remarkable is that teachers spoke very little about career issues, and school issues were mostly on the agenda. The results indicate that teachers struggle with the transition towards becoming a career guide of students, and aspects influencing the transition into this new role need to be considered.

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### 1. Introduction

In today's society it is required that learners acquire advanced learning skills and self-management competencies at school, and that people working in the professions are active in developing their own career and in learning throughout their lifetime (Gysbers & Henderson, 2005; Jarvis & Keeley, 2003). Although academic and technical qualifications open doors for employment, career competencies and lifelong learning skills largely determine selection, success and advancement in individual careers (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999; Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). General consensus exists that these competencies or skills should be taught in schools, since many students leave education without the necessary skills to succeed in the adult work world (e.g., Jarvis & Keeley, 2003; Zinser, 2003). Schools are seen as 'career centres' in which students are able to acquire career competencies, such as being able to reflect on personal ambitions and motives, and to undertake actions and initiatives to direct their own career development (Geurts, 2003; Kuijpers & Meijers, 2009).

Against this background, many schools in the Netherlands are implementing a system of *integral career guidance* (Mittendorff, Jochems, Meijers, & den Brok, 2008; Meijers, 2008). An integral career guidance system is composed of a series of interconnected instruments and accompanying activities for teachers and students,

such as assessment methods, personal development plans, portfolios, and career conversations (Meijers, 2008) and is interwoven in everyday educational practice. This form of career guidance is comparable to efforts such as personal development planning (PDP) in the UK (Bullock & Jamieson, 1998) or programs for career development and employability skills in the USA (Zinser, 2003). The PDP initiative from the UK, for example, is also build around a set of activities (often guidance from tutors or teachers) and instruments such as portfolios or personal development plans aimed at helping students to direct and reflect on their own learning, performance and ambitions (Bullock & Jamieson, 1998; Croot & Gedy, 2006).

The overarching goal of integral career guidance is to help students develop a vocational identity and to stimulate them to self-direct their own learning and career development. A vocational identity is a "structure or network of meanings in which an individual connects his or her motivations, interests and capacities to certain work roles" (Meijers, 1995, p. 63). Developing a vocational identity means going through processes of meaning-making in which students gain understanding about what work means to them and how it relates to their personal norms, values, interests, and ambitions (Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002). In such processes of meaning-making, self-directedness of students is important (Peavy, 2000). Self-directedness in learning and career development processes refers to students' capacities to act for themselves, speak on their own behalf and realize actions aimed at creating their preferred futures (McMahon & Patton, 2006). In the integral career guidance as implemented in the Netherlands, these capacities are realized by training students in developing career competencies (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2009).

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Integral career guidance is implemented in the Netherlands as part of the everyday educational practice by teachers who are given direct responsibility for the supervision of students and receive extra time for this. Teachers have to take the role of coaches who facilitate their students in developing individual learning and career paths. Besides this 'first-level' guidance from teachers, students are entitled to one-on-one career advice or guidance from school counsellors when needed. School counsellors thus provide 'second-level' guidance which means they mainly focus on students who have (severe) difficulties with their career choices or have personal issues that need extra care (Mittendorff, 2010). In most schools, all teachers are expected to participate in first-level career guidance and many of them receive training and guidelines to help them carry out this new task.

Research by Kuijpers and Meijers (2009) and Mittendorff et al. (2008) has shown the *career conversation* between teacher and student to be an essential element of integral career guidance; without these conversations students find it difficult to reflect upon their own learning processes or to construct meaning about themselves and their future career (Mittendorff et al., 2008). Although many schools are in the process of implementing this (new) integral career guidance, knowledge on how teachers are actually guiding students during these career conversations, and especially on *how students perceive this guidance* is still scarce. The present study attempts to contribute to obtaining a more differentiated and detailed image of teachers' career guidance during career conversations through research on student perceptions. The present study examines the following central research question: *How do students perceive their teachers' career guidance during career conversations and what profiles can be identified?*

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Career guidance by teachers during career conversations

An earlier study by Mittendorff, den Brok, and Beijaard (2010) investigated career conversations by observing and analysing two videotaped career conversations of sixteen teachers, each time with a different student. Following several communication scholars (Schultz von Thun, 1981; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967), three levels of communication were distinguished in this study and applied to the investigation of the conduct of career conversations: the content of the conversations, the activities undertaken by teachers and students, and the nature of the relationship between teacher and student. In this section we will first describe these three elements of career guidance during career conversations. Next, attention will be paid to differences between teachers in guiding students' career and the perception of these by their students.

#### 2.1.1. Content of career conversations

The career conversation between a teacher and student is largely defined by the topics discussed – the *content*. The goal of integral career guidance in vocational education is to guide students in the development of required career competencies and a vocational identity (Kuijpers, Meijers, & Bakker, 2006). This goal addresses the importance of meaning-making of students with respect to the professional context and their own or personal identity (Peavy, 2000). Meaning-making is seen as the process of making experiences of students explicit and stimulating students to reflect on these experiences and learn more about their personality, ambitions, strengths and weaknesses and about the professional context (Peavy, 2000). Meaning-making concerns the connection of knowledge and one's understanding of oneself in relation to certain professions (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Consequently, it is important for teachers to discuss student personality, qualities,

motivations and ambitions in relation to future work, norms and values in relation to labour, but also professional experiences and characteristics of certain professions. Another aspect of career guidance within career conversations is related to the personal development planning or action planning of students, for which purpose instruments such as portfolios or personal development plans are often being used (Mittendorff et al., 2008). One of the fundamental aims of personal development planning is to develop skills of personal understanding. Important topics for conversation in this respect are students' motivations for writing something in their portfolio or personal development plan, or the learning goals students will set for themselves (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2009).

#### 2.1.2. Activities undertaken during career conversations

There is a large knowledge base on approaches or techniques (*activities*) to be used for career guidance. Bimrose, Barnes, Hughes, and Orton (2004), for example, showed that useful guidance comprises: creating awareness by students or clients about themselves and the labour market (exploring and challenging client perceptions, providing direction or information and creating awareness of learning and employment opportunities); giving students or clients access to networks, information and knowledge, enabling them to feel better informed and better able to progress; encouraging constructive change in the student or client (increasing self-confidence, developing skills, developing understanding which broadens ideas, together with motivating, inspiring and encouraging clients); and providing students or clients with positive experiences (creating opportunities for reflection and in-depth discussion by reassuring, confirming and/or clarifying plans and/or showing progress). In relation to the goal of stimulating self-directedness of students, career guidance during career conversations is particularly effective when the student has an active role to play, can influence the conversation and where teachers aim at stimulating the self-directedness of students by taking a less directive or instructive role in the guidance process (Patton & McMahon, 2006; Peavy, 2000; Savickas, 2000).

#### 2.1.3. Communicated relationship in career conversations

The nature of the *relationship* between student and teacher during career conversations can strongly affect the manner in which students learn from teachers (Brekelmans, Slegers, & Fraser, 2000; Erickson & Schultz, 1982; Schultz von Thun, 1981). For effective career guidance, the importance of beneficial interpersonal relationships has also been emphasised (e.g., Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Peavy, 2000). Personal qualities such as showing interest, establishing commitment and being trustworthy appear to be critical to the career guidance process (Kidd, Hirsch, & Jackson, 2004; Rogers, 1951); this also applies to the 'working alliance' or personal bond between guidance counsellor and student/client (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2003). A circumplex model with a specific focus on the relations between teachers and students is the model for interpersonal teacher behaviour of Créton and Wubbels (e.g., Wubbels, Créton, & Hoymayers, 1987) that focuses on the analysis of teacher behaviour on the level of proximity and influence. This model is based on Leary's (1957) model for the interpersonal diagnosis of personality and was specifically adapted for the study of interpersonal teacher behaviour. The model helps identify to what extent teachers are cooperative or dominant towards the student, in this study during career conversations.

The earlier mentioned observation study by Mittendorff et al. (2010) showed that, concerning the *content* of the conversations, many teachers talked about the personal development planning instruments and the progress or functioning of the students in school. Teachers and students talked very little about career issues such as the students' future ambitions or previous education. The

study also showed that most teacher *activities* were coded as explaining or informing and requesting information. Teachers provided little feedback, encouraged hardly any reflection by students, and little was done to stimulate self-directedness on the part of the students. Regarding the *relationship* between teacher and student the results showed that teachers mostly acted as the dominant and controlling persons in the conversation, but that they were also cooperative towards the student (friendly, helpful, etc.).

## 2.2. Observed teacher behaviour during conversations

The earlier study by Mittendorff et al. (2010) revealed several similarities between career conversations and teachers' behaviour during these conversations, but uncovered many *differences* as well that were not investigated in great detail. In the UK, Bullock and Jamieson (1998) also found different guidance practices between teachers. In their study on how teachers guided students during a personal development process, they found clear differences between teachers in the way they guided students during the one-to-one dialogues on how to use a personal development plan and portfolio. Their results showed that one-on-one teacher guidance could be placed on a two-sided continuum consisting of *non-directive, non-interventionist teachers* encouraging students to explore their own thoughts/feelings with minimal comment and feedback versus *prescriptive tutor-dominated teachers* giving instructions and concrete suggestions to students. Also, some tutors felt it more appropriate to discuss personal and educational aspects while others emphasised transition choices and career issues. The dialogues that were flexible enough to address both topics, seemed most effective (Bullock & Jamieson, 1998).

## 2.3. The importance of student perceptions on teacher guidance

Differences between teachers, especially the manner in which these differences in behaviour are *perceived*, can influence student learning. In his chapter on teaching and student learning in the Handbook of Research on Educational Psychology, Shuell (1996) argues that the way in which *learners perceive* their teachers and learning environment is crucial in determining what the student will learn. Research on teaching and learning environments shows that students' perceptions of their teachers' behaviour often differ from the teachers' perceptions of their own behaviour and from observations by external observers, and have been found to be reliable, valid, and more strongly related to students' learning processes than teacher perceptions or observational data (den Brok, 2001; Fisher & Fraser, 1983; Fraser, 1982; Hofstein & Lazarowitz, 1986; Levy, Wubbels, den Brok, & Brekelmans, 2003; Wubbels, Brekelmans, Den Brok, & Van Tartwijk, 2006). Student perceptions can contribute to reflection and learning processes by teachers, especially when they compare student perceptions to their self-perceptions. In order to stimulate teacher's professional development with respect to career guidance, instruments devised to measure students' perceptions are supposed to be very helpful (Rickards, den Brok, & Fisher, 2005). This professional development can be further enhanced if information containing these perceptions is presented by means of images or profiles. These are powerful tools for reflection because they can be used to conceptualise complex and inter-related information, summarise information in smaller chunks that are easier to comprehend, and stimulate associations and links with teachers' own knowledge (Rickards et al., 2005; Wubbels, 1992).

In general, only limited research is available on the way teachers guide students in their careers and especially with regard to the perceptions of students. The present study will fill this gap and

builds further on the previous work of Mittendorff et al. (2010). By focussing on student perceptions of the career guidance processes during career conversations, this study aims to contribute to a clearer insight into teachers' career guidance styles.

## 3. Research questions

This study investigates how students perceive their teachers' career guidance during career conversations. It will answer the following more specific research questions:

1. How do students perceive the guidance of their teachers during career conversations in terms of *content discussed, activities performed, and the relationship* with their teacher?
2. What career guidance teacher profiles can be identified?

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Sample

The sample in the present study was a convenience sample: students (N = 579) from four schools for senior secondary vocational education participated in the study. Students in senior secondary vocational education in the Netherlands are mostly between 16 and 20 years old. The four schools that participated each represented one of the four main areas of Dutch vocational education (technology, care and welfare, economics, and agriculture) and a different course was selected from each area: car mechanics (N = 105), which trains for occupations such as car mechanic or salesperson in the car industry; juridical studies (N = 257), which educates for occupations such as desk employee at a law office; agriculture (N = 86), which educates for occupations such as gardener; and social and cultural work (N = 123), which instructs for occupations such as youth worker. One criteria for including the schools and courses was their use of career conversations as part of an integral career guidance system. Juridical studies and car mechanics courses appeared to have a very clear, organised, weekly curriculum for integral career guidance and used manuals for all teachers, in which weekly assignments and instruments were incorporated. Agriculture and social and cultural work did not use manuals and did not have weekly plans for career guidance, but both had a certain reference guide that teachers used with the students. The schools representing social and cultural work and juridical studies had approximately four years of experience in conducting career conversations; the school representing agricultural had approximately two years of experience; and the school representing car mechanics had just started conducting such career conversations.

The students were from several years and levels of education within the schools<sup>1</sup> and thus comprised a typical overview of the student population within vocational education schools. The mean age was 17.8 (SD = 1.64) with a range of 15–25 years; 46% were female and 54% male. Of the sample, 21% had a non-Dutch ethnic background (student or student's parent born outside the Netherlands). Three schools were located in the southern part of the Netherlands (two in a large city and one in a rural town) and one school was located in a large city in the northern part of the Netherlands.

<sup>1</sup> Senior secondary vocational education in the Netherlands consists of 4 levels: level 1 (assistant worker – one year), level 2 (junior worker – two years), level 3 (vocational training – three to three-and-a-half years), level 4 (middle-management training – three to four years).



**Table 1**  
Details of teachers and students participating in each course.

Sector		Car mechanics	Juridical studies	Agriculture	Social cultural work
Teachers	N	8	9	6	5
	Gender	6 Male 2 Female	1 Male 8 Female	4 Male 2 Female	3 Male 2 Female
Students	N	105	257	86	123
	Gender	101 Male 2 Female	92 Male 155 Female	66 Male 15 Female	39 Male 83 Female
	Level	1 (n = 8)	4 (n = 257)	2 (n = 13)	4 (n = 123)
		2 (n = 22)		3 (n = 16)	
		4 (n = 70)		4 (n = 50)	
Year	1 (n = 65)	1 (n = 124)	1 (n = 44)	1 (n = 47)	
	2 (n = 33)	2 (n = 69) 3 (n = 55)	2 (n = 19) 3 (n = 10) 4 (n = 6)	2 (n = 38) 3 (n = 35) 4 (n = 1)	

Students' perceptions pertained to the guidance during career conversations concerning 28 teachers in total: 14 male and 14 female. All teachers had limited experience with regard to providing career guidance. They all had received a short in-service training to fulfil the task of career guidance teacher. At this time, pre-service programs (for example, teacher training programmes) did not explicitly prepare novice teachers for their new role, because it is such a very new aspect of school and governmental policy.

At each school, permission was sought to conduct the study with the management and all teachers and students who were asked to participate consented. No incentives were given for participation, apart from providing the results of the study to the teachers and students. In Table 1, details of the participating students and teachers are shown.

#### 4.2. Data collection

Results of the observational study conducted by Mittendorff et al. (2010) were used to develop the *Questionnaire on Career Conversations* (QCC). The different categories in that study defined with regard to the elements *content*, *teacher activities* and *relationship* were used to develop items for the QCC. Twenty items were developed for content, 21 for teacher activities, and 21 for the relationship between teacher and student.<sup>2</sup> Students rated items in terms of the frequency of content and teacher activities using a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) almost never to (4) very often, and for relationship using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from (1) totally disagree to (4) totally agree. After having been instructed the teachers were asked to administer the questionnaire in the classes selected.

To investigate construct validity, an exploratory factor analysis (using SPSS) was done for each element to verify the existence of possible scales within the three elements. In these analyses the eigenvalue, a value that indicates the amount of variance in the items that can be explained by a factor, was used to determine the number of factors, namely by including those factors with an eigenvalue larger than one (Gorsuch, 1983). Also, only those items were included in a scale with a factor loading larger than 0.40. In Table 2, the scales resulting from the factor analyses are displayed for the three elements as well as some item examples for each scale (with their factor loading). The *content* element resulted in three scales; based on an interpretation of factor loadings, the factors could be labelled as 'planning and instruments' (e.g., talking about

a portfolio, or progress at school), 'career issues' (e.g., talking about future ambitions, or previous education), and 'personal issues' (e.g., talking about the students' private situation, or the students' personal character). The three scales explained 44.8% of the variance. *Teacher activities* resulted in four scales; they could be labelled as 'questioning' (e.g., asking for opinions of the student), 'providing information' (e.g., informing the student), 'being personal' (e.g., giving compliments to the student), and 'stimulating self-directedness' (e.g., stimulating the student to take own initiative). The four scales explained 52.5% of the variance. The factor analysis for *relationship* resulted in two scales: 'influence' (the extent in which the teacher shows dominant behaviour) and 'proximity' (the extent in which the teacher shows cooperative behaviour). The two scales explained 45.9% of the variance. To examine reliability, Cronbach's alpha was determined for each scale (see Table 2). The results showed all scales to be reliable (above 0.65).

To further investigate construct validity, scale inter-correlations were analysed (see Table 3).

The correlations in Table 3 suggest that the scales are inter-related, though sufficiently distinctive (de Jong & Westerhof, 2001). Correlation coefficients range between 0.19 and 0.71. High correlations exist between questioning and stimulating self-directedness; questioning and talking about personal issues; influence and proximity; and between talking about planning and instruments and discussing personal issues. Some of the high correlations could be expected: for example, activities such as asking students questions and stimulating self-directedness are likely to go together (Kuijpers, 2008). Other high correlations were not expected: for instance, between influence and proximity (Wubbels et al., 2006). According to the model for interpersonal teacher behaviour, the two interpersonal dimensions should be independent. Possible explanations for this finding might be that the instrument and model from Wubbels et al. (2006) were originally devised for whole-class situations rather than one-on-one contexts. In addition, their framework has rarely been used outside general education, and the sample of the present study was specific (vocational education). Finally, a 4-point response scale was used in the present study, whereas other studies used 5-point scales. Research has shown that the type of answering scale may affect the consistency and validity of interpersonal scales (den Brok, 2001).

#### 4.3. Data analysis

To answer the research questions, the following analyses were conducted. First, a means analysis (ANOVA) was done to determine mean scores of the students on the scales, standard deviations, and proportion of variance at the teacher level (eta squared). The latter provides an indication of the degree to which an instrument is able to distinguish between teachers (de Jong & Westerhof, 2001; Fraser, 1998).

Second, a cluster analysis was conducted with SPSS on aggregated (teacher level) data to investigate whether profiles could be identified. The cluster analysis identified groups of career conversations in relation to the content, teacher activities, and relationship scales. The squared Euclidian distances method was used to create groups that were optimally different from each other. The Ward method was used to assign respondents in such a manner that they were optimally similar within each group (profile) (Rickards et al., 2005). Cluster solutions ranging from two to eight clusters were tested in order to find the optimal number of profiles. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to check whether sufficient amounts of variance could be explained by the different cluster solutions. The results indicated that a solution with *four clusters* was the most preferable, in terms of explained variance and interpretation possibilities.

<sup>2</sup> For those who are interested in the complete instrument please contact the first author.

**Table 2**  
Elements, scales, Cronbach's alpha, number of items, and sample items for the QCC scales.

Element	Scale	$\alpha$	Number of items	(Factor loading) Item examples
Content	Planning and instruments	0.78	8	(.70) 'During the career conversation I talk with my teacher about my portfolio' (.68) 'During the career conversation I talk with my teacher about my progress at school'
	Career issues	0.75	6	(.70) 'During the career conversation I talk with my teacher about my future plans' (.64) 'During the career conversation I talk with my teacher about my previous education'
	Personal issues	0.75	4	(.85) 'During the career conversation I talk with my teacher about my character' (.73) 'During the career conversation I talk with my teacher about how I'm feeling'
Teacher activities	Questioning	0.80	7	(.61) 'My teacher asks me for information' (.55) 'My teacher asks my opinion'
	Providing information	0.76	5	(.73) 'My teacher informs me and explains things' (.56) 'My teachers gives me suggestions'
	Being personal	0.78	3	(.85) 'My teacher gives me compliments' (.50) 'My teacher tells me what he or she thinks of my character'
	Stimulating self-directedness	0.73	5	(.63) 'My teacher encourages me to tell or explain things' (.58) 'My teacher stimulates me to take own initiative'
Relationship	Proximity	0.86	8	(.73) 'My teacher is very friendly towards me' (.72) 'My teacher understands me'
	Influence	0.68	9	(.58) 'During the conversation I need to follow my teacher's rules' (.73) 'My teacher sees everything I do'

Third, all teachers (N = 28) were assigned to one of the four identified clusters, and another means analysis (ANOVA) was done to determine whether profiles were statistically significantly different and explained variance in scale scores. A Scheffé test of post-hoc comparisons was also performed to investigate significant differences between the means of the four groups on the different scales of the questionnaire. To interpret the findings, the scores of the four clusters on the different scales of the questionnaire were represented graphically.

**5. Results**

*5.1. Student perceptions of the elements of career conversations*

The results show that students rated their teachers differently on the scales of the questionnaire (see Table 4). In Table 4, it can also be seen that students differed to quite some extent in their perceptions: standard deviations were around 0.30 and higher, which is equivalent to 10 percent or more of the scale range.

In terms of the content that is discussed, it was remarkable that students all rated their teachers very low on the scale 'talking about career issues' when compared with the other two content scales. With regard to the activities performed by the teachers, students scored their teachers lower on the scale 'being personal' in comparison with the other scales. As for the relationship element, students perceived their teachers as being cooperative, which is shown by the high score on 'proximity'. The ANOVA analysis showed that between 6 and 22% of the variance in the scale scores between students were located at the level of the teacher.

*5.2. Teacher profiles of career guidance*

Cluster analyses distinguished four clusters of career guidance between teachers, based on students' perceptions. In Table 5, the mean scores of each cluster on the different questionnaire scales are shown, as well as the proportion of variance explained by the cluster solution (eta squared). The clustering explained the variance between teacher mean scores rather well, with the exception of the content scale 'career issues'. The four clusters thus comprise many of the differences at the teacher level.

A graphic representation of the different clusters is shown by Fig. 1.

As reflected in the graphic representation, the clusters have similarities in terms of patterns in scoring on the different variables. Teachers in all clusters were rated very low on 'career issues' in relation to the other content scales. The four groups were also rated higher on 'providing information' than on 'questioning' and higher on 'proximity' than on 'influence'. However, the Scheffé test that provides a more detailed analysis with respect to the different scales of the QCC showed several statistically significant differences between the clusters. The main differences between the groups were related to 'talking about planning and instruments', 'talking about personal issues', 'being personal', 'questioning', and 'stimulating self-directedness' by the teacher. The eta squared showed that the cluster solution explained differences between teachers well: 30–82% of all differences on scale scores between teachers could be explained.

Two clusters of teachers were most typical in terms of their pattern or profile: clusters 3 and 4. These clusters will be described

**Table 3**  
Correlations between QCC scales.

	Planning and instruments	Personal issues	Career issues	Questioning	Providing information	Being personal	Stimulating self-directedness	Influence	Proximity
Planning and instruments	1.00								
Personal issues	0.573	1.00							
Career issues	0.400	0.396	1.00						
Questioning	0.475	0.561	0.333	1.00					
Providing information	0.482	0.414	0.193	0.534	1.00				
Being personal	0.444	0.441	0.273	0.508	0.404	1.00			
Stimulating self-directedness	0.413	0.474	0.275	0.710	0.529	0.438	1.00		
Influence	0.423	0.347	n.s.	0.438	0.427	0.408	0.421	1.00	
Proximity	0.265	0.334	n.s.	0.501	0.456	0.329	0.421	0.559	1.00

All correlations shown are significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 4**  
Means, standard deviations, and proportion of variance at teacher level.

Variables	Mean	SD	Eta squared
<b>Content</b>			
Planning and instruments	2.87	0.36	0.14
Personal issues	2.84	0.46	0.21
Career issues	2.04	0.37	0.06
<b>Activities</b>			
Questioning	3.00	0.34	0.17
Providing information	3.04	0.36	0.10
Being personal	2.80	0.50	0.16
Stimulating self-directedness	3.01	0.36	0.19
<b>Relationship</b>			
Influence	3.10	0.28	0.21
Proximity	3.42	0.32	0.22

below in more detail. Clusters 1 and 2 teachers were rated highly moderate and are therefore not easy to 'label' in terms of a typical pattern or profile. Because these two clusters have no clear distinctive pattern, they were considered 'mainstream profiles' that lie between the more extreme profiles 3 and 4.

**5.2.1. Cluster 3: the personal teacher balancing non-directive and directive behaviour**

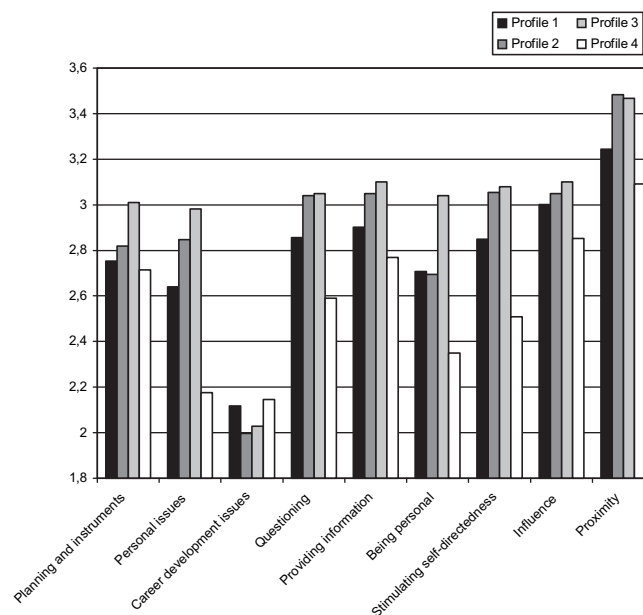
Cluster 3 teachers were rated *significantly higher* on 'talking about planning and instruments', 'being personal', and 'influence' than teachers from the other three profiles. Cluster 3 teachers were perceived as very active in discussing the students' personal issues (e.g., a student's characteristics or well-being), acting very personal (e.g., giving compliments), and talking a lot about planning issues and personal development instruments (e.g., a student's portfolio or personal development plan). These teachers struck a happy medium between the two sides of the non-directive vs. directive continuum: they were perceived in some way to be controlling or directive (e.g., had high ratings for the influence scale and providing information), but were also perceived to show non-directive behaviour (e.g., had high ratings for questioning and stimulating self-directedness). They were perceived as dominant tutors but at the same time as respectful listeners. Cluster 3 teachers were all from juridical studies (N = 6) plus one teacher from car mechanics (see Table 6). In terms of gender, cluster 3 contained 6 females (5 from juridical studies and 1 from car mechanics) and one male (from juridical studies).

**5.2.2. Cluster 4: the non-personal and directive teacher**

Cluster 4 teachers were rated *significantly lower* than the other three profiles on the variables 'talking about personal issues',

**Table 5**  
Means and proportion of variance explained by the cluster solution.

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Eta squared
<b>Content</b>					
Planning and instruments	2.75	2.82	3.01	2.72	0.53
Personal issues	2.64	2.85	2.98	2.18	0.82
Career issues	2.12	1.99	2.03	2.14	0.30
<b>Activities</b>					
Questioning	2.86	3.04	3.05	2.59	0.69
Providing information	2.90	3.05	3.10	2.77	0.59
Being personal	2.71	2.70	3.04	2.35	0.80
Stimulating self-directedness	2.85	3.06	3.08	2.51	0.72
<b>Relationship</b>					
Influence	3.00	3.05	3.10	2.86	0.65
Proximity	3.24	3.48	3.47	3.09	0.70



**Fig. 1.** Graphic display of the four profiles and QCC variables.

'questioning', 'being personal', and 'stimulating self-directedness'. The profile of the cluster 4 teachers can be typified as non-personal and directive. They were rated low on talking about personal issues and being personal. Additionally, these teachers were perceived to ask few questions and seldom stimulated self-directedness. It seems that these teachers were directive towards the student, offering little space for the student to introduce subjects or issues, and allowing no personal issues on the agenda. Only two teachers were identified as style 4 teachers; both were male (see Table 6), one from car mechanics and one from agriculture.

**6. Discussion**

**6.1. Conclusions and interpretations**

In this study the Questionnaire on Career Conversations (QCC) was developed to analyse students' perceptions of career guidance provided by their teachers. The analyses showed the QCC to be a reliable and valid instrument. Students rated their teachers differently, although several similarities were identified as well. Student ratings on talking about career issues and providing information and their ratings on showing cooperative and dominant behaviour were very much alike. Remarkable were the low student ratings of their teachers on the content variable 'career issues'. Although this is such an essential aspect of career

**Table 6**  
Distribution of clusters across schools and gender.

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Total
Car mechanics	5	1	1	1	8
Juridical Studies		3	6		9
Agriculture	3	2		1	6
Social cultural work		5			5
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>28</b>
Males	5	6	1	2	14
Females	3	5	6	0	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>28</b>

conversations, all teachers were perceived to talk very little with the students about career issues.

The study identified four different profiles with regard to teachers' guidance during career conversations. Two were highly moderate in nature (profiles 1 and 2) and labelled as 'mainstream guidance styles'. Profile 3 teachers clearly differed from these mainstream profiles because of their high ratings for talking about planning and instruments, talking about personal issues, acting personal, and stimulating self-directedness. This profile was labelled 'the personal teacher balancing non-directive and directive behaviour'. Profile 4 teachers, labelled 'non-personal and directive', were perceived to be low on talking about personal issues, being personal, questioning, and stimulating self-directedness. Although these two profiles were most distinctive, they only represented 30% of the teachers participating in this study. It could be that teachers did not vary that much in guiding students in their career. The abundance of mainstream styles of guidance is in alignment with international research on interpersonal teaching styles (Brekemans, Levy, & Rodriguez, 1993) for example in Australia (see Rickards et al., 2005).

Remarkable is that the two most prominent profiles were formed by one group of mostly female teachers (profile 3) and one group of only male teachers (profile 4). Moreover, profiles were not equally distributed across schools and courses either; many profile 3 teachers were located at the juridical studies course, the other profiles were more scattered across schools. Possibly, variables such as teacher gender, experience and the school context all have a (unique as well as overlapping) effect on guidance profiles. This would be in line with research on teaching styles (den Brok, Bergen, & Breklemans, 2006; Fraser, 1998, 2007; Wubbels et al., 2006). However, the small sample only allowed for some descriptive reporting, future research on a larger sample would allow for statistical testing of the effect of teacher and school background characteristics on guidance style.

The results of the present study did not match the findings of the UK study of Bullock and Jamieson (1998) who found that one-on-one teacher guidance in personal development planning could be fitted into a two-sided continuum: a non-directive, non-interventionist model vs. a prescriptive tutor-dominated model. Our study did not show such a two-sided continuum or distinction, and even demonstrated that teachers who were perceived by their students to act personal, to ask a lot of questions, and to stimulate self-directedness (like the non-directive model) were also rated highest on dominant behaviour and on providing information (like the tutor-dominated model). An explanation for this could be that students perceived their teachers as more dominant than external observers would do. Our findings indicated that some teachers (for example from Profile 3) showed dominant behaviour, but also scored high on stimulating self-direction. This indicates that they shift on a continuum, and cannot be placed in one category of being directive or non-directive. Bullock and Jamieson (1998), additionally concluded that, most effective one-to-one sessions avoid the extremes and lean towards the centre of this continuum. In their study, explaining and suggesting was frequently needed, but moments of silence and showing interest (which allowed students to consider choice and time to articulate thoughts) were also regarded as productive, so students could gradually learn to plan their own career (Bullock & Jamieson, 1998). It could be that the profile we found in the present study that consisted of teachers who balanced between being dominant tutors and being respectful listeners (cluster 3), corresponds to their 'preferred' guidance style.

### 6.2. Limitations of the study and future research

The present study had certain limitations. First, data was gathered within four schools and the sample was relatively small, so the

results cannot be broadly generalised to other schools. Second, the results are based on the perceptions of students from different years and different levels of education. The study performed here needs further refinement through validating research and larger samples, and it would be interesting as well to investigate whether differences might exist between countries. It is also important to verify the stability of these findings. Future research should therefore also include qualitative data, such as interviews with both teacher and student participants in order to provide descriptions for newly found types and to validate the labels attached to them.

Although student perceptions are seen as an important measure when investigating aspects of learning environments (Shuell, 1996), they often differ from the perceptions of teachers or researchers (Mittendorff et al. 2010; den Brok, 2001). The results also showed some differences between this study and the results of the observational study performed earlier (Mittendorff et al., 2010). Future research could focus on examining the differences between these data sources, not only observations of external observers but also the perceptions of teachers.

As previously stated, the study lacks an examination of the effects of certain career guidance styles on student outcomes, such as competence development. Are differences between students in their perceptions of their teachers' career guidance as reflected in the different profiles indeed associated with student outcomes? These are questions to be answered in future studies.

Finally, the study only focused on career guidance of teachers during career conversations. Although career conversations are a crucial aspect of teachers' guidance, it is part of a broader learning environment – not only with respect to activities or instruments for career guidance in the school but also in terms of the learning environment as a whole. Teachers and students are influenced by several factors in the guidance process, for example the way the instruments such as the portfolio and personal development plan are organised, or even the content and didactics of the broader educational curriculum. When students have many opportunities to explore and experience the professional practice, it provides a context to talk about in career conversations. But when the curriculum is mainly focused on learning at school, transfers to professional aspects is difficult to make. To conclude, further research could focus on the broader learning environment in which career conversations take place.

### 6.3. Implications

The study sheds light on some implications for practice. Students perceive their teachers guidance as different and we would advise schools to think about their goal and policy for career guidance and to which extent it is desired to have differently perceived styles of guidance among colleagues. It could be that teachers deliberately used different styles to better assist the specific students that are in their class: for example, because car mechanics students need another type of guidance than students in a social and cultural work class. However, reasons for differences in perceptions should be investigated and discussed with teachers in order to evaluate the guidance practices in terms of goals and policies of schools.

The research also offers an instrument and a set of typologies that can be used as a tool or personal means to reflect on one's own career guidance style. For professional development, teachers not only can compare their own perceptions with those of colleagues or the perceptions of their students (e.g., Rickards et al., 2005), but they can also compare their own perceptions or those of their students with each of the different types to see with which typologies they fit best. Teachers and educators could benefit from developing sensitivity and skills in distinguishing different styles of guidance and be aware that there are several ways to achieve their goals.



The results indicate that career issues are seldom on the agenda of career conversations, a finding identical to what we observed in the earlier observational study (Mittendorff et al., 2010). Earlier studies have already shown that teachers often 'stick' to talking about school subjects (progress at school, making action plans, etc.) and find it difficult to broaden their perspective to possible careers of students and the professional practice students will be working in (e.g., Mittendorff, 2010; Winters, Meijers, Kuijpers, & Baert, 2009). But when the goal of career guidance is to help students develop a vocational identity and plan their learning process and career development, career issues such as future ambitions of students or reasons for participating in the course, should definitely be on the agenda.

A final issue to be considered is that the transition into this new teacher role is not easy. It can interfere with a teacher's professional identity (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). International research has shown that such a transition can be something so different from a teacher's daily educational routine that it is difficult to change (see for example Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). Training teachers to become career guides or counsellors is not only about instructing them how to use conversation techniques or skills (for example, how to ask open questions). A dialogue about the goals and ideas of the individual teachers in relation to career guidance for students is also important (Meijers, 2006). It deals with sharing ideas about what the school team wants, and what suits their culture and their students. For realising career guidance, such dialogues begin with a certain notion that it is important to provide student-centred education instead of focussing on traditional knowledge acquisition and transition and on broadening the scope outside the school environment. As Fullan (2001) argues, to engage in a process of innovation and learning in a school, there needs to be time for teachers to discuss shared norms and values, to talk with each other about their individual teaching practices, to work together on developing instruments or curricula for the new educational practice, and to have reflective dialogues.

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