Career Writing: Creative, Expressive, and Reflective Approaches to Narrative Career Learning and Guidance

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Abstract

Narrative approaches in careers guidance have been developed to address the increasing complexity, insecurity, and individualization of the career journey. Well-founded practical and creative approaches are needed to help students and guidance professionals construct narratives that provide both meaning and direction. The authors argue for career writing to promote career learning and distinguish three types: creative, expressive, and reflective writing. The necessity of developing a career identity (i.e. narrative) will be discussed and a model of writing for transformation will be presented along with exercises that can be used and examples from practice.

Resumé

Des approches narratives dans l'orientation professionnelle ont été développées pour répondre à la complexité croissante, l'insécurité et l'individualisation des parcours de carrière. Des approches pratiques et créatives sont nécessaires pour aider les étudiants et les professionnels de l'orientation à construire des récits qui donnent un sens et une direction. Les auteurs plaident pour une écriture professionnelle afin de promouvoir l'apprentissage et de distinguer trois types d'écriture : créative, expressive et réfléchie. La nécessité de développer une identité professionnelle (c-à-d narrative) sera discutée et un modèle d'écriture pour la transformation sera présenté avec des exercices qui peuvent être utilisés et des exemples tirés de la pratique.

As a result of the shifting economy and changing notions and arrangement of work (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005; Savickas, van Esbroeck, & Herr, 2005), schools are increasingly acknowledging a role in guiding students, not only in their academic growth, but also in their career development (Gysbers & Henderson, 2005; Jarvis & Keeley, 2003; Mittendorff, 2010). That said, (vocational) education infrequently provides effective career guidance, nor are career dialogues between teachers and students the start of career learning (Winters, Meijers, Kuijpers, & Baert, 2009; Winters, Meijers, Lengelle, & Baert, 2012). Although employers now expect new employees to have more knowledge and skills and be more intrinsically motivated than three decades ago (Bailey, Hughes, & Moore, 2004) there are serious doubts whether students have enough practical and theoretical knowledge (OECD, 2006), let alone the work habits and emotional skills necessary for success (Jarvis, 2013).

Studies indicate that most students are not intrinsically motivated to do their school work (Holt, 1995; Light, 2001; Gatto, 2009; Fecho, 2013) nor do the majority of them know what they want to do career wise. The latter fact leads to rather random educational selections and subsequent dropout rates of between 30 to 50% (Eurostat, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). A Dutch study (Borghans, Coenen, Golsteyn, Hijgen, & Sieben, 2008) estimated that the societal costs of students taking longer to complete their studies as a result of unsuitable choices was 5,7 billion euros a year. Similarly, a Canadian study found that the majority of high school graduates do not have career goals to which they are emotionally committed and that about a third of students enter university or college directly after high school without clear workplace goals, hoping to discover their calling through further study (Jarvis, 2013). It is therefore not surprising that more than a third of post-secondary students change programs or drop out by the end of their first year. "Considering how badly our workforce now needs the right talent in the right place at the right time, today's 'talent pipeline' has far too many leaks", Jarvis concludes (2013, p. 3). That said, there are also studies that show that the issues mentioned above can be addressed if youngsters are helped in developing a fuller picture of who they are and what their program and work options look like (Lewin & Colley, 2011; Kuijpers, Meijers & Gundy, 2013).

In this article we propose that 'career writing' a narrative and

dialogical guidance approach that uses creative, expressive, and reflective writing, can address the need for personal (and thereby professional) growth in the area of career. We already know that enabling students to face the career challenges of the 21st century – which requires the making of intrinsically motivated choices and being more luck ready (i.e. able to respond constructively in the face of uncertainty and unplanned change; Pryor & Bright, 2011) – is not merely a matter of providing more information nor focusing on matching skills to existing work (i.e. trait-and-factor model) (Savickas et al, 2010). Career learning now requires that students understand more deeply what is important to them personally (i.e. meaning), and what they would like to contribute to society (i.e. direction) (Wijers & Meijers, 1996; Savickas et al, 2010). Those who are preparing and re-preparing themselves for work must not only invest their knowledge and skill base and orient themselves on the labour market, but they must be helped to construct a career identity (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012).

Such self-construction is required precisely because of the increase in both the range and number of choices. Traditional patterns are losing hold as the 'cafeteria of options' (Guichard, 2009, p. 252) expands and the 'grand narratives' that used to dominate career choices no longer offer realistic models to emulate (Meijers, 2013). To illustrate this more concretely, one has only to consider that in 1976, in The Netherlands there were 5500 recognized professions and 2000 job titles that could be described as "nonspecific" (e.g. policy assistant; regional advisor; data worker). By 2010 the number of professions had dropped to 1073 and the "nonspecific positions" had grown to over 23,000 (CBS, 1993; CBS, 2012). In light of these

issues, we argue for a more narrative and dialogical approach to career guidance, so that students are helped to construct a workable and meaningful career identity. Whereby a career identity is defined as an emotionally salient and flexible story, based on life themes, that explains, "how the self of yesterday became the self of today and will become the self of tomorrow" (Savickas, 2005, p. 58). Such a story is "not factual truth but narrative truth; meaningful to the individual in terms of experience, understanding of the world and of future possibilities" (Reid & West, 2011, p. 4). It takes into consideration the complex and fragmented nature of self and society, whereby the self (in relation to career) can be defined as a dynamic multiplicity of positions or voices regarding work (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012).

In introducing "career writing" and arguing for its use in career learning, we will begin by explaining this inherently narrative and dialogical approach in more detail. First we will present the model of writing for transformation, which describes the process an individual goes through in constructing a career story. With that we will present and explain the three types of writing, which can be distinguished and considered part of this approach and make going through the learning stages possible. Along with the three types of writing we will show – using partial case studies – how career writing works concretely and thereby illustrate how it contributes to career learning. We also explain why there is a need for dialogue in career learning, how it is lacking, and argue that writing is both cost and time effective dialogical approach. We will conclude with several reflections on the use of career writing in practice.

Career Writing Model

To make understandable how career writing facilitates the creation of a career identity, we have developed the *Model of Transformation through Writing* (Lengelle & Meijers, 2009; Meijers & Lengelle, 2012) or what we refer to in this context as the "Career Writing Model". This model shows the steps and elements by which people come to identity learning through a story-construction process and is useful to practitioners because it helps them understand the learning stages as well as the process as a whole. The model shows the learning here is intended to take us out of our story of chaos (e.g. I have no idea of my direction) or restitution (e.g. I will do what has always worked) towards a quest narrative (e.g. This is the new direction in which I can now take steps) (Sparkes & Smith, 2003). The overview the model provides is important for the career professional and allows him/her to identify which stage a student or client may be in and ease the discomfort or resistance a person might have, but without denying the insecurity which is part and parcel of this type of transformative learning process.

At the start of any new learning is what Bühler (1935; Bühler & Allen, 1972) refer to as a boundary experience, "an experience whereby an individual encounters the boundaries of his or her existing self-concept and cannot cope with a situation and its exigencies" (Meijers & Wardekker, 2002; Lengelle & Meijers, 2009, p. 58). It is a situation, event, or (outmoded or unhelpful) attitude where a person's default response so longer brings positive meaning or direction. In the career context, this crisis might be becoming suddenly unemployed or being uncertain about a career direction. The (first) story we tell ourselves about that experience triggers

the fight, flight, or freeze response of our limbic system (i.e. survival system), effectively blocking out our ability to use the neo-cortex and gain perceived (i.e. cognitive) control over the situation (Griffin and Tyrrell, 2002). The symptoms of a first story are summed up succinctly in Baker & Stauth (2002) useful acronym VERB – the signs are a sense of Victimization, or Entitlement, imaginings of needing Rescue, or resorting to Blame.

That said, a first story is not all bad – life themes emerge that have the potential to provide the unity in life (hi)stories (Savickas, 2002, 2005). Our habituated and negative responses to boundary experiences are "…the affective and cognitive representation of a problem or set of problems, perceived or experienced either consciously or unconsciously, which constituted a fundamental source of psychic stress for a person during childhood, for which that person wished resolution above all else, and which thereby triggered adaptive efforts, resulting in an attempted identification of the perceived problem, which in turn formed the basis for a fundamental interpretation of reality and ways of dealing with that reality." (Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979, p. 48).

Thus, a boundary experience, is a triggering event and relates not only to the situation or event at hand but connects with ways in which we have are used to coping (or not). The invitation to construct a more life-giving second story is what Savickas (2011) summarizes aptly when he says that in our careers we are in fact trying to "actively master what we have passively suffered" in youth. The aim of career writing then – like other narrative approaches – is to help those in a career crisis with the aim to develop a 'second story' (i.e. a narrative that provides both meaning and

Figure 1

Transformation Through Writing: A dialogical model in four steps
© Lengelle & Meijers, 2009
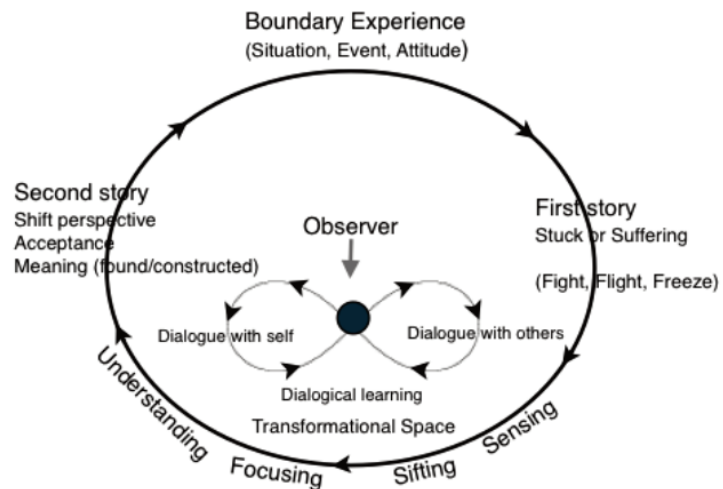
direction). This happens in four cognitive learning stages – though not always linearly – and includes: sensing, sifting, focusing, and understanding based on the Piagetan learning theory and developed by Law (1996, 2010). In order to move through the stages effectively, individuals require both a dialogue with self and others. Here a career narrative is an interaction (LaPointe, 2010) between an individual who is trying to understand his/her life via a story shared and an audience (e.g. career counsellor, coach, (imagined) reader). The various exercises that fall within the three types of writing, which we will describe below, constitute the practical tools that can be implemented in order to move through the transformational space in stages.

Three Types of Career Writing

Career writing as a narrative approach to career construction (Cochran 1997; Savickas 2005) draws its forms and practices primarily from the field of writing for personal and professional development (Bolton 1999, 2010; Hunt & Sampson, 2002). The three types of writing are creative, expressive, and reflective. Most, if not all, practical writing exercises and approaches fall within these categories. The table below shows generalized distinctions.

Creative Writing

Creative writing refers to the writing of fiction or (fictional) autobiography, with the potential of gaining self insight (Hunt & Sampson, 2002; Bolton 1999); the idea here is that one's deepest truths are often told in the form of lies made up to tell a story (Allende, 2013). One's creations are compelling and revealing not because they are true reflections of reality but because a story is psychically credible (Sonik, 2006) and symbolically salient. Academics and practitioners of writing for personal development have also found that fiction can be a way of exploring professional issues that are too problematic or not accessible enough to deal with by any other means (Bolton, 1994).

In creative writing, the one writing is encouraged to make up a story and find out what happens without preplanning the storyline too much (Sonik, 2006; Lengelle, 2002). This is contrary to what most

students are taught in school, but resembles that way in which many novelists work (King, 2000; Doctorow, 2013). All that is usually needed is a starting point: a character and a situation, which may come in the form of a prompt from existing (literary) fiction. A facilitator brings to the student(s) some knowledge of fiction writing (e.g. showing as opposed to telling) and encourages the student/client to use concrete, specific details so that characters and situations are brought alive. One might say that the self insight that emerges comes through the backdoor; the writer plays a trick on him/herself by letting the "inner writer" (or narrator) express some dimension of his/her multi-voiced self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) and then spies on him/herself to discover what it might reveal (Sonik, 2006, p. 5).

The stories used to illustrate the types of writing below are from students who engaged in the courses created and taught by one of the authors, Writing the Self (Lengelle, 2002), Narrative Possibilities (Lengelle, 2008) at Athabasca University, and finally "In Other Words" which was part of a research project on the efficacy of career writing at the Hague University of Applied Sciences in The Netherlands (Lengelle, Meijers, Poell & Post, 2013).

Andrea's creative writing

In response to a fiction-writing prompt, Andrea wrote the following piece:

> *My assistant pulls diarized files and brings them to me for review and instruction. We discuss payroll and sub-contracts that must be reviewed and I speak to her of her potential in business management and accounting and my excitement at*

Table 1

Creative, Expressive, and Reflective/reflexive writing

Category	Creative	Expressive	Reflective/reflexive
Brief definition	The writing of fictional pieces for the purposes of personal and professional development.	Writing about one's deepest thoughts and emotions surrounding a painful experience for the purpose of processing life events.	Writing from life experience, reflecting to gain insight, constructing meaning and direction, and questioning pre-existing identifications.
Primary form	Fiction	Non-fiction	Non-fiction/Inquiry
Role or Archetype	Artist	Healer	Scientist/Philosopher
Chief qualities	creativity imagination	expressiveness	reflexivity/examination structure
Vital drive/goal	play exploration	pain/resolution	insight/a sense of order
Pitfall/dangers	superficiality flights of fancy	rumination VERB*	over-intellectualizing

*VERB: victimization, entitlement, rescue, blame (Baker & Stauth, 2003)

her continuing education. She is a major part of my succession plan and I hope to groom her into taking over the majority of my duties in the months to follow. We, however, still need to deal with the situation with my partners. My assistant desires to please, and it appears that her desire to please my two male colleagues carries a much higher value to her than pleasing me. Ironically, if my colleagues wanted her removed, I would not let her go easily. But she doesn't seem to connect her future career to the only other woman in her employment world: a woman who is her senior, an owner, and her immediate supervisor.

Upon reflection, Andrea made the following discoveries about herself:

> "My assistant is one version of a younger me: born into patriarchy in the early 1960s behind four older brothers, working in careers with only men for authority figures, understanding safety only when authority figures (men) were pleased, and always choosing peace over conflict, regardless of the personal cost. I recognize that I longed for a mentor; a woman who would teach me how to be confident in what I know to be

true and still be feminine, how to stand firmly and not allow myself to engage in co-dependent behaviour, and how to not compromise myself for the sake of peace. I realize I was looking for a female role model; a pioneer from whom I could fashion my career and my relationships. I also realize that I see my older self as the mentor for whom I longed, and that through fiction, I could return to support and care for my lost younger self. (My reflection is entirely accurate (ouch)…"

It may be argued that Andrea could have discovered these things by talking to someone or through her own private journal writing. However, the power of writing fiction is that often the parts (or 'selves') that are hidden in the margins of our lives appear on the stage. And if we've shared and shown others, we project on those readers a witness of our self-discoveries and once that happens, we can no longer pretend we did not see what we saw. Such a piece and associated reflection can provide insight into the "self of yesterday" and how the self of today needs to be supported and nurtured.

Expressive Writing

Research has been done in the past three decades on the therapeutic effects of writing in the face of loss and trauma (for an overview see Pennebaker, 2011) and this type of writing has become known as expressive writing. The term *expressive writing* itself has been used to refer to a number of different practices, but in this context it refers to writing where an individual is encouraged to explore his/her deepest feelings and thoughts about an emotionally charged or negative life event.

A myriad of topics have been explored in expressive writing research, including college performance (Frattoroli et al, 2011), the alleviation of asthmatic and rheumatoid arthritis symptoms (Smyth et al, 1999), and whether professionals could be helped by writing in the wake of job loss (Spera et al., 1994). The job-loss study focused on the benefits of writing about one's deepest thoughts and feelings following a layoff and found that professionals who did so were much more likely to be reemployed within the months that followed the layoff than those who did not write or those who wrote about superficial topics.

Researchers concluded that it was the emotional as well as the cognitive processing that made the writing a successful intervention; "*having* a coherent story to explain a painful experience was not necessarily as useful as *constructing* a coherent story" (Pennebaker, 2011, p.11). Much like the "talking cure", the benefits of expressive writing (i.e. better college performance; reduced doctor's visits; fewer illness symptoms) have been attributed to the alleviation of the pent-up feelings of non-disclosure, the freeing of working memory, and the sense of gaining control over a situation (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Pennebaker, 2002).

Expressive writing's most common prompt asks those writing to write about their deepest thoughts and feelings for a period of 20 minutes for 3-4 consecutive days. The writing about traumatic experiences is not ongoing because researchers noted certain pitfalls of revisiting painful life events for an extended period and noted the following drawbacks: over-intellectualizing, rumination, or substituting writing for action (Pennebaker, 1997). However, research has confirmed benefits in numerous studies (Lepore & Smyth, 2002, Pennebaker, 2013) and now the development of 'healthy writing' can be identified in part with the Linguistic Index Word Count (LIWC) program developed by Pennebaker, Booth, and Francis (2007) looking at for instance a shift in the use of pronoun words and the presence of both positive and negative emotions words.

Edith's expressive writing

Graduate student, Edith Robb, (2009) shared her experience of a sudden layoff; her story was used elsewhere as a more extensive case study (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012). Edith lost her job suddenly and unexpectedly after 38 years as a journalist and describes the pain associated with this event. Although her story happened at a stage later in her career, the challenges and insecurities she describes are comparable to those students face. In both cases, a person is challenged to ask questions like "what am I suited to do?" or "what kind of work is meaningful to me?" and "what must I do to enter (or re-enter) the labour market successfully?" The initial part of her writing to process this boundary experience included expressing her pain and frustration, as well as gaining a sense that she was not yet in a place to make a career decision.

"Each night my journal was full of questions about faith, and how I could have any, and how it can be betrayed. My quest became as spiritual as it was practical; I wasn't just looking for a replacement job now; I was looking for work that really mattered." (p. 9)

Following the layoff, Edith was encouraged by others to send out resumes and look for new work immediately, but the expressive writing she did as part of her course work necessarily slowed her down, giving her time to grieve and not foreclose. With the guidance from the online course instructor and course peers, she began writing to uncover new meanings and directions.

"On cold winter nights that followed my lay-off, I wrote and wrote, for the first time not on a deadline, not determined to get from point A to point B, but to simply express my thoughts and penetrate those others I was exposed to in the course." (p.10)

Besides getting out her pain, she also gained insight into why it might be useful to do so.

"At this point in my resurrection, I encountered the work of Charles M. Anderson and Marian MacCurdy in their book Writing & Healing. When they described trauma survivors, I could immediately identify, "We feel powerless, taken over by alien experiences we could not anticipate and did not choose. Healing depends upon gaining control over that which has engulfed us. We cannot go back and change the past." (p. 8)

It is noteworthy that despite Edith having spent almost four decades as a journalist, she did not discover or know writing to be a transformational process until she took the Narrative Possibilities course (Lengelle, 2008). We anticipate that even for those working in careers that require writing competency or for whom journaling is a place of refuge, career writing will offer new ways to work with career challenges.

Reflective/Reflexive Writing

Reflective/reflexive writing refers to 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). Reflective writing can include memoir writing, list-making, poetry and is in principle non-fiction. It involves reliving, rerendering, and structuring experience by means of witnessing and reworking one's life experience, to gain, absorb, and integrate insight. It also requires the questioning of existing preoccupations and identifications that might stand in the way of one's agency (Lengelle & Meijers, 2009).

Reflexivity is not the same as reflection and involves '*doubling the self*' (Hunt & Sampson, 2006, p. 4) or working directly with the idea of the self as multi-voiced, "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" (Bolton, 2010, p.4). Although reflective practice and reflexivity differ, reflexivity can be seen as a broader and multi-dimensional form of reflection and there

fore we use the term reflective writing to refer to either or both.

Kelly's reflective insight

In our most recent research into career writing (Lengelle et al, 2013) Kelly, a student in her early twenties wrote that she had always wanted to join the military. At the same time she was about to embark on a trip to Thailand to 'find peace'. In her writing she described herself as a 'down-to-earth' type with a fervent wish to become a helicopter pilot. As the course progressed she articulated an interesting discovery, "The military is a family…it is a family I want desperately to be a part of. Because my family has fallen apart completely, I think this is why the army is attracting me now." By the end of the course she reported having "more doubts" and "seeing how broken I am in places". Her career wish to join the military was still present, but she expressed it with the realization that it was not only the excitement of the work she sought but also a sense of family. We anticipate that, just as in successful career counselling, such discoveries may help students make suitable choices. Career writing may give them a chance to give more meaning to what they believe they should choose and discover what may underlie their directions and actions.

Margot's deconstruction

Another aspect of constructing a career identity – whether it is done in a counselling office or on paper as a reflective writing exercise – is de-construction (Savickas, 2011). Shifts in perspective and restorying require both gains and loss in the 'selves' and self-definitions that we cling to and gain strength from and therefore career writing must include this element.

There are specific writing exercises that are particularly effective in this deconstruction process (Lengelle & Meijers, 2013) and "The Work" (Katie 2002) is such an exercise.

Margot, a graduate student in the final stages of her project felt gripped by a sense of fear and ineptitude as she embarked on her master's thesis. She had taken the MAIS (2008) course and, like the other students, had done the 4-question inquiry process called "The Work". Although she was being supervised by other professors, she asked one of the authors for support; we recommended that she try the process on the thought that seemed to be paralyzing her, which was, "I am not an academic."

The idea of this form of inquiry begins with the invitation to write down a host of fears and complaints on what is called the "Judge-your-neighbour" (JYN) worksheet. From that worksheet, one thought at a time can be worked through. The process can also be done if a single fear or thought is already clear as was the case with Margot.

While, in memory, going back to a concrete situation that seems to trigger or verify the belief (e.g. trying to write the thesis proposal), the person doing the work writes the thought out in full and then answers four questions about that statement.

Statement: *I am not an academic*
1. Is it true, I am not an academic? (Yes or No)
2. Can I absolutely know that it's true, I'm not an academic? (Yes or No)
3. How do I react when I believe the thought, I am not an academic (and have to write the thesis proposal now)?
4. Who would I be without the thought, I am not an academic (in this situation of embarking on the writing the thesis proposal)?

The first two questions allow the writer to consider the validity of her assumption and usually this loosens the sense of panic or certainty about a given story. However, even if the answer to question 1 and 2 are still firmly yes, the Work remains effective. This might be because the third question allows a person time to revisit the feelings of hopelessness and fear and notice what such a belief is costing him/her, while the fourth question provides a concrete contrast to that experience. At question four, a person can make the (temporary) leap into the imagination and re-experience the situation in memory without the limiting or fearful thought.

After the 4 questions are answered, the person questioning their thoughts is asked to formulate a "turnaround", the same statement worded in alternate ways. In this case, the student wrote, "I am an academic" and had to find three specific examples of how this statement applied to her and/or was just as true or truer than her initial statement. Margot named her course work, papers she had completed with success, and the fact she was greatly interested in academic readings on her subject matter. Later, after finishing her thesis with success, she wrote to say that she had attended a meeting in her field and felt like "the only academic in the room." When the irony of this statement was pointed out to her, she was both delighted and humoured by it.

Although there is overlap between creative, expressive, and reflective writing, it should be clear that each has a particular emphasis and starting point. We propose that actual writing exercises fall within the categories or combinations thereof. Poetry might more often be used for expressive and reflective purposes, while playwriting would be a creative approach that might morph into non-fiction as a reflec-

tive dialogue where various voices can be tried out on the page. The aims of all three types of career writing are essentially the same: to be the means by which a person constructs (and deconstructs) his/her career identity or story using narrative, poetic, dialogical, and inquiry-based exercises. The latter are the veritable tools that students or clients use to give body to their stories and move through the cognitive stages described below.

The Stages

Whether applied to the context of students and study choices or an employment crisis, an individual must be supported and encouraged to acknowledge the range of thoughts and feelings experienced, even if the content of what ends up on the page is not directly or fully shared. It is important to note also that effective career writing is not just about catharsis – writing out what is thought and felt about a particular situation, event, or attitude also promotes noticing (i.e. engaging the observer) and viewing the situation with some detachment (Griffin & Tyrrell, 2002) alongside space for emotional expression. This dual process of engaging with emotions and detaching from the stress or drama (i.e. V.E.R.B), supported by a writing teacher using specific writing exercises as shown above, allows a movement out of the 'first story' into the cognitive stages: sensing, sifting, focusing, and understanding.

Sensing is the stage in which information is gathered and put on the page – in particular aspects of a person's experience that are emotionally compelling, while no explanation or perspective is yet developed. Edith entered the sensing stage as she started to write out her hopelessness instead of trying to find other work right away. Had she

done the latter, she would have been trying to 'jump' to a second story. Sensing is the stage that sets the tone for a second story that will eventually be felt by the person writing, instead of an attempt to reach for a comforting affirmation. The Work's third question, "how do I react when I believe (stressful thought)" is also a way to sensing, as is the JYN worksheet that is used to capture a fuller picture of one's first story at the start of the process (Katie, 2002).

Sifting is a sorting process, which moves a person "towards the issue of causality" (Law, 1996, p.55). One compares one's circumstances with those of others and starts to develop analogies and from those analogies, constructs and concepts start to emerge. Andrea did this as she looked at the themes in her fictional piece and compared them with those in her personal reflection. Sifting also occurs when a person does the Work and has started to identify and articulate specific stressful thoughts to put through the four-question inquiry process.

Focusing allows actual viewpoints to be formulated. These viewpoints are still fragmented, but they are an attempt to string together feelings and ideas that arose during the sensing and sifting stages. This stage ideally segues into the final or understanding stage, where felt insights become a second story. We see this in Margot's story, where focusing on the question, "who would I be without the thought, I am not an academic" and turning it to "I am an academic" and finding evidence in support of such a statement led her to a supported viewpoint.

The four stages taken together are referred to as episodic learning and involve a combination of expressing thoughts and feelings, ordering one's thoughts, uncovering

key themes, and articulating insights that are also felt (Law, 2008).

Discussion

The learning stages described by Law do not clarify how the macro-narrative takes shape; the model assumes that processing an experience leads necessarily to clarity (i.e. understanding) and the development of a coherent reflective narrative of lived experience. However, evidence shows that developing a coherent reflective narrative is anything but an automatic process. Because emotional reactions happen before thoughts (Damasio, 2000; Pinker, 1997; Stuss & Anderson, 2003), feelings of fear, sadness, and anger dominate (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995) when processing a boundary experiencing and that usually results in avoidance and irrational behaviour (Tversky & Kahneman, 2000). The tendency to remain stuck in a first story is very tempting, despite the accompanying symptoms.

What then, makes for successful career learning (i.e. a learning process resulting in a second story) possible? To understand this, the development of a career story must not only be understood as an emotional-cognitive learning process but as a dialogical learning one as well (see Figure). A story can only be developed when its episodes are tested by reality and the only way to do so is by telling the story to relevant others (Cochran, 1997). The 'motivational engine' that drives career learning is dialogical in nature because the "I" is actually a kind of "polyphonic novel"– it entails a combination of various voices embodied as one person (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Although written by one person, the polyphonic novel is spoken by many 'sub-personalities' (i.e. inner authors of the story), characters or I-positions. "As differ-

ent voices these characters exchange information about their respective Me's and their world, resulting in a complex, narratively structured self" (Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992, p. 28-29). The dialogical self is not static and is inherently transformed by the exchanges amongst I-positions (the internal dialogue with ourselves) or with other individuals (the external dialogue).

A career identity, therefore, is co-constructed, socially situated, and performed in interactions. According to Hermans & Hermans-Konopka (2010) this co-construction is a practice of positioning, whereby 'master narratives' (Davies & Harré, 1990) and discourses – as LaPointe (2010, p.2) puts it - "position individuals and construct their identities in the interaction between narrator and audience. (…) Positioning refers to the process through which people can adopt, resist and offer the subject positions made available in discourses and master narratives". In short, second stories take shape through emotional-cognitive learning stages that are driven by an internal and external dialogue and social forces shape our stories. As Bakhtin (1981, p.345) puts it "the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's". The construction of career identity is a dialogical learning process.

Dialogue as it stands

It is clear that career stories are not constructed in isolation (even if a person is writing alone at a desk) and courageous conversations (Whyte, 2001) are needed to give them shape, whether in the context of narrative counselling or not, however the necessary dialogue isn't happening in most career-learning settings. Research in Dutch vocational education shows that students are frequently spoken about and spoken to, but that they are rarely

spoken *with*. Researchers found that 65% of conversations were directed at students, 21% were about students, and a mere 9% were *with* students (Winters et al. 2011). Guidance counsellors also rarely have enough time to spend with students (Kuijpers, Meijers & Gundy, 2011) even though the two resources considered "most helpful" to students are one-on-one time with a guidance counsellor and practical work experiences (Dietsche, 2013), where a combination of the latter two proved to be most effective (Kuipers & Meijers, 2012a). Studies continue to show that guidance counsellors spend most of their time focusing on academic achievement. And even when career topics are addressed, students frequently consider these conversations unhelpful (Meijers, Kuijpers, & Gundy, 2013).

Narrative and dialogical counselling approaches, though more effective in career learning and promising to remedy the issues of a lack of dialogue, pose a considerable problem in that they are time consuming and have hitherto depended largely on focused verbal exchanges. To be truly effective, this time must also be spent with someone who has well-developed narrative and dialogical counselling skills, including compassion and an understanding of the self-construction processes. A skilled career counsellor within schools infrequently has enough time to spend with each student, let alone use a narrative approach, and such services outside of schools are unaffordable for most. Studies have shown that unless career counselling is publically funded or heavily subsidized, the use of such services drops sharply (Meijers, 2001). We argue that career writing is a dialogical career guidance approach and addresses – at least in part – the issue of time investment, cost, and the need for professional skill.

Career Writing as a Viable Career Narrative Approach

There are several reasons why writing is a dialogical learning process. First, the moment one puts pen to paper, the writer is in the company of two (or more) selves. Anne Frank wrote to "Kitty" – the name of her inanimate diary and although she would never know she would be read by millions, she wrote for herself but also for that imagined audience. Her writing is a conversation between various parts of herself and the world: the teenage school girl, the house-bound prisoner, the child dreaming of fame and the future. Everything is entrusted to the witness Kitty and the conversation goes on between the selves and the imagined reader.

Indeed, writing is innately suited for expressing the self as "a dynamic multiplicity of positions" or voices. Also, as the reader of one's own work, the writer becomes the observer of his/her life and the words constructed about a life and self – which consciously or inadvertently reveals things about social, cultural, psychological, and biological influences – become the object of conversation. Not only are these inner characters or selves at the table ready for conversation, but the text itself becomes the basis for exchange and dialogue (Bolton, 2010).

Besides dialogical, writing is also time and cost effective; it can be done independently or in a group setting where more students or clients are helped at the same time. It is also cost saving because few resources are needed to begin and pursue the process. Students can work with pen and paper or on a mobile device or computer. Writing can also be done in an online classroom environment where pieces are posted and can become part of a greater dialogue, which might include teachers, peers, and even mentors.

Additionally, a lot of the work that might otherwise be done in the classroom or with a teacher one-on-one, can be worked on further by the student once he/she has become intrinsically motivated (i.e. inspired) to do writing outside of class time. It is precisely the 'internal' dialogue that can get underway if a student tries various approaches on his/her own. A teacher can also have a whole group of students working during class in this way and turn the products into fodder for group discussion (and/or performance), instead of scheduling one-on-one meetings. The added advantage here is that in a group setting, the conversation is no longer only between student and teacher, but between students, teachers, and peers; the workload of reflection and dialogue is spread out among more individuals.

Career writing is also cost and time effective because a teacher or counsellor working effectively with students' written pieces can provide more tailor-made feedback, instead of more general information or guidance. An oft-cited issue, out of research done with students, is that teachers frequently provide "answers" to questions students have never asked and don't consider relevant to them. If teachers are to make more effective use of their time, they would benefit from responding with "just enough" information and they would do so "just in time" (Hargreaves, 2003; Bailey, Hughes, & Moore, 2004). Responding to students' written work is useful because it is the student him/herself who has effectively 'set the agenda' for the conversation. Writing is also cost effective because approaches and exercises can be taught to students, teachers, counsellors, and mentors with relative ease. We have found that interested teachers, actively engaged with the exercises

themselves, can learn a lot with an experienced facilitator in two days.

Facilitating Career Writing

In foundational skills a facilitator of career writing requires needs are much the same as those a career counsellor or teacher uses in careers guidance (Lengelle & Meijers, 2013). Those in the guiding role must create a safe enough holding space for the expression and sharing of emotions, encourage clients and students to express themselves, and in steps help the client to reflect and construct a story (or career identity) that provides both meaning and direction.

In the context of career writing, it is also important for a facilitator to have actual experiences with writing creatively, expressively, and reflectively and thereby access in themselves the inner "artist, healer, and philosopher". This is only possible if a teacher or guidance counsellor is open to the experience of writing for the purpose of personal (and professional) development as describe in this article. It is not enough to 'teach' writing exercises and hope students will gain something from doing so.

An advantage of career writing is that the approaches are intuitive for those who already work in a narrative or dialogical way and learned by career professionals with a modest time investment, again, assuming there is genuine interest and a willingness to try the approaches out for themselves (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2012b). In addition, a wide range of writing activities for personal and professional development already exist and can be modified and applied to the career context (Bolton, Field & Thompson, 2006, 2010; Bolton, 2010); there are examples of such exercises applied to career learning already (Hunt, 2010).

Once facilitators have their own developing experience of career writing, they can begin to facilitate others successfully. The authors advise a simple 'test' in evaluating whether a career professional or teacher is indeed becoming equipped to teach career writing:

1. Safe space: can he/she create a safe space for students/clients to share personal material?
2. Personal experience: has he/she tried the process and noticed a sense of 'reconnection'; a development of an internal dialogue in the face of personal stressors (i.e. boundary experiences
3. Curiosity and Inspiration: does she/he want to learn more about the writing exercises that are possible to use. One might start by exploring existing creative, expressive, and reflective approaches and eventually find oneself improvising and adding one's own ideas.

A first and key piece of advice on guiding others is that when writing work shared (e.g. read aloud in class or handed in), feedback is given on the text and is not directed at the writer (Bolton, 2010). Two helpful prompting lines to achieve this and give and receive feedback are "I like the sound of…" and "I want to hear more about" (E. Scarfe, June 1993, personal communication).

Conclusion

Career writing can serve as an adjunct to existing career learning practices (Taylor, 2013) or be used as an approach unto itself, addressing in part the issue of the lack of "structures, techniques and tangible products" in the field of narrative career's guidance (Reid, 2005). The examples and ideas presented here may help career professionals see a use for this creative, expressive, and reflective form of narrative guidance and they may even reduce the fear and trepidation practitioners face when they do not yet have extensive experience with narrative methods (Reid & West, 2011). The career-writing model presented here also provides a theoretical foundation for those methods; a way to view what learning process is at work in the "quest" towards career construction.

The oft-quoted William Arthur Ward's (2013) insight that, "The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails" is an apt description of how different people respond to the current world of work. The world of the boundaryless career serves up a host of boundary experiences, which individuals have to navigate. Those who stay in their first story might be considered the pessimists; the optimists are those who wish to jump immediately to second stories without consideration for their feelings and the circumstances that challenge them, while realists are people who know where to go to get sailing lessons and counselling to tackle fears of drowning.

To translate the metaphor: those who would set a successful course on today's rough and changeable labour market will require opportunities to define themselves in ways that provide meaning and direction. Young people must receive support during their education from career professionals who have approaches, tools, and ideas to share and do so in a truly dialogical way. Career writing in this context may be a viable and promising addition to narrative career guidance approaches, one in which "poetic creativity" (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012) is at the heart of identity construction.

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