

Evolution of Dialogue for Students' Career Guidance in Secondary Vocational Education

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Abstract. Dialogue has always been used to address the relevant issues and assist to survive in uncertain and unpredictable world, as it is now. Due to the own unique nature, dialogue helps explain the complex processes through the context in which we are live, challenge the reflection and express encountered thoughts. Experience of career guidance has shown that the meanings constructed through dialogue, develops an understanding of career planning and life designing. The use of dialogue in career guidance of students of secondary vocational schools helps to build and develops their professional identity. However, shows practice, not always the conversations among students and career professionals develop a dialogue. The scientific article is answered to the following questions: How to form and developing a dialogue? What are the stages of the conversations need to be overcome for getting to the dialogue? Is there a dialogue between the student and career counsellor in secondary vocational education? How to ensure that student is willing to look for an assistance of career counsellor? The aim of the study is to explore the development of dialogue and evaluate which developmental stages are prevailing in dialogue of student's career guidance in secondary vocational education. Objectives: 1) to describe developmental stages of dialogue; 2) to analyse the use of dialogue in students' career guidance at the secondary vocational education. The study summarizes and analyzes theoretical cognitions, as well as semi-structured interviews, which justified necessity of dialogue in student's career guidance of secondary vocational education.

Keywords: dialogue container, talking, debates, reflecting, generative dialogue, vocational education.

Introduction

At the moment it is observed that significance of career guidance is increasing in vocational education of Latvia. However, it can be described as a set of campaign-package where activities of career guidance often do not give desired result - encourage the students to think and act in order to achieve their stated career goals. One solution is to use a varied dialogue, because in its essence it is a set of techniques of knowingly sequential cognition and exploration. The consequences of that is not sufficiently harnessed for dialogue in students' career guidance in secondary vocational education. The problem what repeats year by year is that high and constant proportion of students (~18 %) dropping out of school prematurely without a diploma (Izglītojamo skaits..., 2016). Part of the students has low learning motivation; they do not have understanding of deliberate further education and direction of own career choice (Par Karjeras..., 2015). Dialogue is a bilateral. Therefore, it should be viewed from the perspective of both students and career professionals, because it is the issue of ability to build, maintain and develop a dialogue between two parties. Researchers of dialogue (Isaacs, Senge, 1992; Isaacs, 1993; 1999) are convinced that dialogue includes a movement of meaning of the communication process with a series of changes and reactions, and it is also an important way how to achieve thinking of individual and group and also change of behaviour. Case study on this issue in Europe (Kuijpers, Schyns, 2006; Kuijpers, Meijers, 2011) and in Latvia (Soika, 2013; 2015) shows that there must be purposefully focused and directed conversation between a student and trusted persons - teachers, career counsellors, educators, who can help to find answers to the questions of young person about their life and career.

Currently situation about the vocational education in Latvia is similar with The Netherlands situation few years ago. The Netherlands scientists K. Mittendorff, B. den Brok and M. Beijaard (2010) had recognized that career conversations are an essential element of career guidance, because the students have difficulties to reflect on their own learning and to construct meaning of their careers. The study results showed that career conversations had more academic character. In addition, a number of secondary vocational schools did not have enough competencies how to build and maintain career conversations (Mittendorff, den Brok, 2010). According to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 484 (Kārtība, kādā..., 2016), career guidance is being actualized and integrated into the secondary vocational education in which transition on work-based learning is being started. It means that student

will have to assume more responsibility to acquire the theory and practice at the school or enterprise to use these knowledges in accordance with their individual plan.

Such kind of training contributes to students' personal development and professional identity (Vondracek, Portfeli, 2006) or career identity (Winters, Meijers, 2012). It is achieved if students are provided with a context (different information, materials, educational environment) in which they are exploring own ambitions, strengths and weaknesses, as well as clarifies the plans for the future (Meijers, Kuijpers, 2013). Therefore, it is important to stimulate both the internal dialogue about students' personal significance and the external dialogue with the various support persons. To succeed a good dialog, a positive attitude and undivided attention among the participants of the dialogue are required; there should be mutual trust for finding the best solution; conversations should focus not as much to a problem as to its solution.

Dialogue is varied and it can be viewed, first of all, as a human relations form - as a *face to face* communication act or individual communication into groups, which includes a variety rules of behaviour and which is fundamentally linked to an individual's personal development (Bakhtin, 1984; Бун, 1985; Hermans, 2001). Secondly, the dialogue is as a cultural form (Bauman, 2005), because it is influenced by the context. Thirdly, as comprehension and interpretation of the text where dialogue is viewed as a way of thinking and questioning (Senge, 2010; Isaacs, 1999). To a large extent the dialogue is a matter of relationships and communication patterns, which has a lasting maintained quality of communicative relationship. The individual attitude is important under which he or she engage in communication with others. Communication begins with ourselves, because, first of all, individual finds himself in the presence of others, where caused the conversations leading to the irrevocable change. Contemporary dialogue researchers P. Senge (2010), W. Isaacs (1999), R.C. Arnett and K. Cissna (1994) recognize let' to participate in the genuine dialogue, the parties are not necessary to consider the relationship among selves and others, because approval of each other is a key for dialogue relations – a process by which individuals are validated and recognized by others, because it promotes a greater understanding of themselves, each other and develops the capacity of the new behaviour.

The aim of the study is to explore the development of dialogue and evaluate which developmental stages are prevailing in dialogue of student's career guidance in secondary vocational education.

Methodology

The research was done by studying scientific literature and guidelines, as well interviewing career counsellors of secondary vocational schools about the development of students' career dialogue. The data were collected during *face to face* interviews with vocational schools' career counsellors in November, 2016. The 6 respondents from 6 secondary vocational schools were involved in survey, representing regions of Zemgale, Riga and Kurzeme. The semi-structured individual interviews were used in this study, which gave a picture of dialogue in students' career guidance in secondary vocational education. The evaluated analytical data of the study shows that small number of students reaches the dialogue. The research results are important because they confirm: if a dialog develops between student and career counsellor, it is a safe space for mutual trust, which changes the student's thoughts and behaviour.

Results and discussion

The dialogue of career guidance can take many forms, such as conversations and debates on both the internal and external dialogue and reflecting of personal experience. While these techniques are self-evident, they are not used effectively. As a reason for that is mentioned that the part of students and teachers are not fully aware of necessity of systematic and qualitative career guidance. All surveyed career counsellors note, that schools have developed career education and guidance programs, the school strives to provide this processes with the necessary resources (for example, rooms and methodology), but that does not contribute significantly to students' interest in their fulfilment of career expectations. As demonstrated results of the semi-structured interviews, still several years ago only a few secondary vocational education schools had the staff of career counsellor. Only after the recent alignment of Latvia legislation it is possible to put forward specific requirements of qualitative and systematic career guidance in education (Grozījumi Izglītības..., 2013; Iekšējie noteikumi, 2015). It led schools' teachers to obtain relevant qualifications in the field of career counselling. Therefore, experience of the majority

of secondary vocational schools' career counsellors is still limited, which also points to the fact that their professional capacity still should be developed. As shown by the interview data, now a career counsellors of secondary vocational schools are more involved in the planning, implementation and management of career guidance than in practical advising and counselling. Usually their organized activities have informative character; those are designed for the large groups; for individual consultations remain little time. The responsiveness of the students to attend these consultations is very low - on average 14 - 16 throughout the school year. Moreover, they attend those students who are active in both learning and extracurricular activities.

The surveyed career counsellors recognized that a large proportion of first-year students are not acquired skills or afraid to express their views not only publicly, but also *face to face* with a career counsellor. It occurs only in the third and fourth year when students, supported by their teachers has overcome learning difficulties at school and work environment and has understood significance of learning. It will take time for student to talk confidently and freely about individual career issues.

What is needed for participation in dialogue? Scientists W. Isaacs (1999), J. Habermas (1984) and O. C. Scharmer (2016) believe that aspiration on the *whole* provides a dialogue. It means that what was said in the speech text can be understood in relation to the body language and in the wider context. The *whole* constitute space or *container for dialogue*, in which occurs transformation of persons' thoughts, words and behaviours. W. Isaacs (1999) writes that *container of dialogue* is psychological security space that keeps potential of dialogue. Development of conversations depends from the quality and nature of the *container*. The *container* comprises various qualities of *voltage, energy, ideas and knowledge* (Isaacs, 1999, 255). This space of dialogue develops through major inflection points or crises, because it is able to maintain individual's experience in increasingly rich and more complexity ways, making it lawful through many approaches and styles (Isaacs, 1999, 256). The *container* can be in various forms, such as the human body; mutual relations; a specific space where some things can be said and done, which in turn cannot happen anywhere else. In our case, it may be group of students in diverse learning environment.

It's always been a challenge – to open up, to engage in dialogue, to change own mind and behaviour; it is a time consuming and complicated process which must go through several fields of conversations. Order to do so, it has to be develop a variety of essential skills such as attentive listening (to be here and now). It means to be able to individual listening, respecting others, suspending own judgments and do not voicing them in dialogue (Isaacs, 1999, 242). W. Isaacs (1999) believes that there are two forms of dialogue: *reflexive dialogue* is to think about what person has done but-not noticing; and *generative dialogue* in which person creates completely new ideas and opportunities. Practice shows that not everyone is ready and able to engage in dialogue and not everyone knows the benefits of dialogue. If it were so, then there would not be a lot of unresolved issues and problems. C. O. Scharmer (2016, 115-215) writes that the first of all individual has to start with opening of own mind and heart for conversation with themselves and others, through which reveals own good will to engage in dialogue.

Author of this article urges to look on functioning fields of conversations through three forms of expression: 1) students' conversation with themselves; 2) student' conversation *face to face* with career counsellor; 3) conversation between students' group and career counsellor. Hereinafter the four different but logical fields of conversation will be described in detail that leads to the *creative dialogue* (Figure 1).

The first field: *politeness in the container*. This field initiated the conversation process. W. Isaacs (1999, 157-164) describe it as unstable and insecure; there the shared monologues take place. When the career counsellor for the first time meet with group of students or *face to face* with a student, then either they know each other very well or not. Basically, they do not have a safe *container* - space that would allow feeling mutually confidently and trustworthy. The individuals arrive, taking along inherited set of rules on how to interact. For example, if students have come to lecture, then they know that they have to sit down and listen, they have well-validated and acquired forms of interaction, self-evident assumptions about the situation and the rules how to think and act. But they enter in conversation' process with quite different expectations and they do not reveal what they think and feel. P. Senge (2010) considers that in this field of conversation observant scanning of participants is taking place, which allows to get information on the opinions of the other members and to understand conversational techniques. C. O. Scharmer (2016, 115-117) found that it is a place where dominates norms and regulations governing everything that is more important than what is desired by any of these individuals.

They do not intend to discuss with them or find out what to do with them. Therefore, the main feature of the first field is the lack of reflection. This field is characterized by the combination of words *more to follow*, which means that there some individuals are moving, some of which follow, but no one is in opposition. Usually, the emotional component of the first field is *fear to express*. C. O. Scharmer (2016, 115) has called the first field as *Downloading*, autistic system where individuals speak what people around wants to hear; they used correct routine and empty phrases. Attention is structured as *I-In-Me* position (Scharmer, 2016, 117) in which the person senses what he/she knows (Senge, Scharmer, 2008, 35). Energy what is invested in conversation is low, so individuals adapts to each other, because a lot of that is based on customary patterns of behaviour and thoughts (Scharmer, 2016, 119).

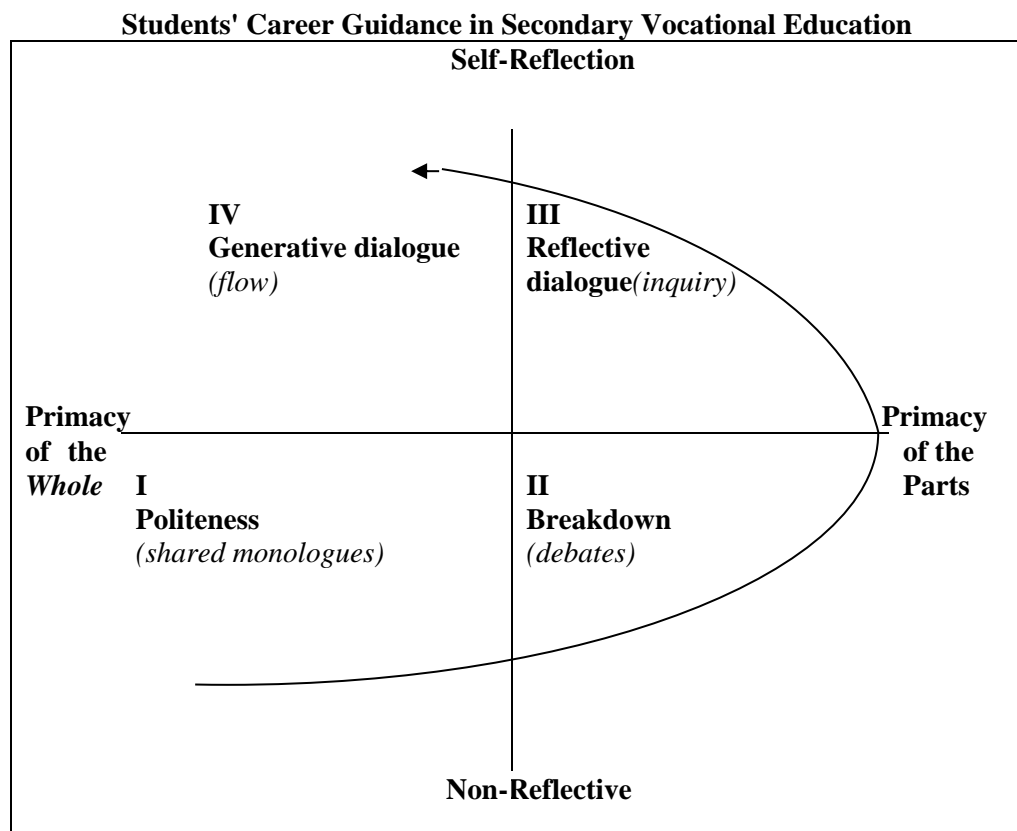


Figure 6. Development of the conversation fields of dialogue in students' career guidance in-secondary vocational education (adapted from Isaacs, 1999).

In order to promote the desertion of the *download field*, negotiator - in this case - a career counsellor helps the student to begin to pay attention on new circumstances. C. O. Scharmer (2016, 124) notes the four obstacles that hamper the transition to the next field of conversation and hinder to see the reality: 1) do not recognize what is obvious; 2) does not say what they think; 3) does not do what they say and 4) does not to see what to do.

The second field: *to engage in debate*. W. Isaacs (1999, 265-271) is calling it *instability* or *breakdown* in field of conversation. That is because the individuals have the instability of the idea and enough of the insufficiently full *container*, which would allow to see their functions. The individuals, who previously had been adopted under the authority of social norms, begin to say what they think. It means that they begin to adapt in a given environment. The individuals hold *I-In-It* position (Scharmer, 2016, 136) and open own senses without judgment (Senge, Scharmer, 2008, 29). The participants of conversations have desire to take own position. P. Senge (2010, 57-58) recognizes that everyone has own point of view, but anyone view does not solve the problem in this field. The typical feature of the second field of conversation is: if someone says something, others must be answered. When individuals begin to express own standpoint, the *debate* is enhanced with a variety of views that challenge the common perception. When different opinions are assessed approvingly, then *cooperation begins to form conversational container, which can provide the intensity and pressure* (Isaacs, 1999, 256). There is

a little or no real reflection of what is happening. Each member of dialogue defends their positions, but they do not stop to inquire of what prompted them to think in the way they do. Data of semi-structured interviews revealed that there are cases in career guidance when the crisis of the second field was not overcome and students leave the conversation process or return to the first field. W. Isaacs (1999), P. Senge (2010) and C. O. Scharmer (2016, 125-139) emphasizes that the *debates* consist of a *container* for the new agreement. C. O. Scharmer (2016, 274) notes that for facilitating the change-away from *own positions*, individuals need to feel safe to change their minds. D. Bohm (2004) suggests to help them to stop their views. If it does not occur, then they return back to the first conversation field, because it is the only alternative what they know. Unfortunately, these situations are also observed in secondary vocational educational environment where students' career management occurs of its own accord, without support of school's career counsellor. Usually individuals experiencing this field when they encounter the problems. They begin to interpret what is going on in the light of personal discomfort; they are starting in less to stick to their point of view. It is driven individuals to begin to discover what they really think and feel. This resulting-break is a necessary step in the revelation process of how hard it is to resolve the persistent problems. During the *debates* students in collaboration with career counsellor becomes aware that it is possible to come to the reflection about the processes which encourage seeking solutions together and stopping the difficulties and going to the next conversation field. The essence of stopping of the crisis for an individual is to begin to understand that so far he/she has not had own point of view. The crisis ends only when individuals are willing to listen to each other. The prevailing emotion in this field tends to be anger, because individuals discover that they do not only to create the dialogue, but they cannot even to get any points of contact during a conversation. Going through the difficulties are motivating individuals to make changes. It means that the *debates* provide a change of meaning of anger and frustration (Isaacs, 1999, 269). Usually the second field is an incoherent *container*; it contains internal contradictions and inconsistencies, and it must pass with different types of pressures. During the dialogue, the *container* provides individuals with energy, opportunities and security. And the individual may ask himself: Is this place safe? Does it give opportunities and energy? If the answer is *no*, then the result of what he/she hoped to get, will be limited (Isaacs, 1999, 244).

The student can choose to lose their power over own position and to accept entry into a deeper field of conversation - reflection area, which previously he did not like; and he has done it together with a career counsellor.

The third field: *reflective dialogue*. This field is recognizable by the different types of conversations and changing of energy (Isaacs, 1999, 272-276). The individuals hold the position of *I-in-You* (Scharmer, 2016, 142-148) and begin to sense the *whole* (Senge, Scharmer, 2008, 42). It is the movement from the third-person's stories about other people and other places to the first-person's exploration about how things look from the place where *I am* located. Here people are starting to think about what they are doing and what are affecting them; here prevailing *spirit of curiosity*. It means that individuals begin to notice and are ready to explore their assumptions. C. O. Scharmer (2016, 255-262) writes that in this field, individuals begin to be surprised - not only from the reactions what they get from others about what is said, but the fact that they are forced to operate and think slowly. It means that individuals see themselves as a part of the *whole* during conversation. C. O. Scharmer (2016) describes this position as a *rule reflecting*, which determines how they act. They are willing to explore the character of the structure that drives their behavior and actions, and they do it more openly. It means that individuals develop thinking from different perspectives. They do not feel forced to be united in any opinion. Ideas tend to flow freely, usually grounded on what they are now talking about themselves. Individuals do not feel an imperative requirement of others respond or to be agree with their point of view. The participants of conversation are trying to respect everyone's opinion. This space of conversation is marked by the increasing ability to speak across different views, until they begin to speak and to listen in a way that allows to connect with individuals who have very different viewpoints. Individuals involved in a common flow of thoughts, got to the point when are being construct new changes. Till now, the individuals are usually focused on their viewpoints and own personal contribution to the inquiry. Influencing each other's judgments, understanding of the individuals becomes a more complete and clearer. This crisis of fragmentation allows go out of isolated identity and gradually moving away from own judgments (Scharmer, 2016, 246).

The third field of conversation can be compared with an intentional, internal dialogue (Brockbank, McGill, 2006, 45-46), in which internally are discussed and explored concerns issues what are caused by the experiences that create and clarifies meaning for them, as a result is changed the conceptual point of view. A. Brockbank and I. McGill (2006, 53) characterize reflexive dialogue as a deliberate process, where is considered social context and experience in which individuals are active, fully present, collaborate with others, adopted challenges and which results is related to the student's own transformation and improvement. Reflexive dialogue with themselves and dialogue with other ensures transformative learning at all levels of learning: from the reflective learning (maintenance learning), what allow to improve thinking, then through reflexive learning (developing learning), what allow to transform thinking and experience, in the broader of learning context, to the third level of learning - reflexive learning about learning. Author agree with A. Brockbank and I. McGill (2006, 54) that the internal dialogue usually happens when the person's mind is overloaded with all sorts of questions and thoughts. When occurs internal dialogues, an individual focus on the issue of qualitative solving of own problem. Consideration of the problem often cause a significant understanding and comprehension. When students engage in generative dialogue, they strive for the possible foreseeable future. *Reflexive dialogue* would also perform changes between career counsellor and students: they become more reliable, what also contributes to the development of own professional identity and meaningful learning.

Fourth field: *generative dialogue* what develops something new, more qualitatively and authentic, based on the relationships of meaning flowing (Isaacs, 1999, 279-285). If there are three conditions for flow of dialogue: safety, energy and opportunity, then it is clear that there are at least five generative activities: 1) devotion to listening process; 2) respect of each other; 3) any suspension of judgment; 4) to come up with an authentic voice; 5) takes the collective search for truth. The fourth field of conversation is fully justified by W. Isaac recognition that *dialogue....is a conversation with a centre, not sides. It is a way of taking the energy of our differences and channelling it toward something that has never been created before* (Isaacs, 1999, 19).

One of the most powerful tools in deep and generative dialogue is *active listening*, which includes a series of cross-skills: open and closed questioning, rewording and recognition of the sense, non-verbal encouragement and aggregation. It is a commitment to listen the unique experience of another person's, to hear and listen not only spoken words, but to feel and respond on the occurred feelings and unmanifested meanings that are located behind the words. C. O. Scharmer (2016, 161-185) describes this conversation field as a *generative flow*. Individuals hold *I-In-Now* position. It is sensing of possible future (Senge, Scharmer, 2008). The qualitative criteria of the fourth field are *stillness, collective creativity and flow*. There exists a creative system in which changes of the identity occur towards to self-authenticity. Author can agree to dialogue researchers that *container* of the fourth field is rare. C. O. Scharmer (2016, 161-185) recognizes that individuals are holistically looking at the things in this field. It is a space where individuals create new rules for interaction; where they personally fit into and fully aware self-impersonal participation in the collective flow. Here more often develops synchronicity of dialogue. Silence is necessary to gain access to themselves and start to cause individual changes. D. Bohm (2004) writes that this space creates a level of harmonization and connection among the people that they are no longer situated nor the opposition, nor the interaction, rather they participate in the common flow of meaning and they are able to transform continuously. At that stage the mood and climate of group switches from the objectives and responsibilities of dialogue participants to the common goals and responsibilities of the team (Senge, 2010, 139). It is no longer an individual importance of the conversations; the group is a reason to talk. There is the freedom and the time to investigate ideas that would develop the team's goals further. Decision making comes later, because first of all here people are getting rid of the prejudices relating to the problems and try to discuss freely about the alternatives.

Progression through all fields of conversations is a progression from the self-defence to the suspension, with the key points of decision that determine the nature of the outcome of conversation. Learning occurs when the negotiator - in this case, a career counsellor helps students to understand their progression through informed decision-making and how they act and think of the outcome.

Conclusions

- Generally, individuals are aware and they have the experience how to operate in the first (*politeness in the container*) and second fields (*to engage in debate*) of conversation, but they have only a limited experience how to communicate in the third and fourth fields of conversation. Getting in these fields of conversation helps students to overcome the crisis: it includes a diverse learning, which evoke changes in both-the students' thinking and action.
- The dialogue develops step by step; for this to occur, the involved persons – students and career counsellor - must be interested and minded on the topic as well as ready to cooperate. Dialogue requires mutual trust, but to obtain it, time and systematic support of adults including the school' career counsellor is required, who tries to encourage student's career thinking and behaviour with appropriate methods and techniques.
- All conversation fields are found in students' career guidance of secondary vocational education. However, the first and second fields of conversation are more strongly dominated. If students and career counsellor communicate in the third field (*reflexive dialogue*), then students are thoroughly encouraged to reflect on their career plans and to take responsibility themselves for their own career development.

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