



# The quality of the training experience: predictor variables of career exploration



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Many young people attending secondary education will do an apprenticeship by the end of their training, which will come as a new context of learning. The quality of this new context can have differentiated impacts on student's lives and on their vocational development. For many students, it can be their first formal and structured contact with the workplace – experiencing a reality that, until then, has always been mediated by other sources and agents of information. Authors like Ducat (1980), Brooks et al. (1995) and Super (1963) evoke the value of work experience as the most realistic way of vocational exploration. However, the efficiency of work experiences is extremely variable (Ainley, P., 1990; Smith & Harris, 2000) and seems to depend significantly on factors like supervision, feedback, autonomy, learning opportunities and peer support. Several studies suggest that the quality of the work experience and the exploratory behavior associated to this have a considerable influence on the vocational development (e.g. Brooks et al., 1995; Carless & Prodan, 2003; Loughlin & Barling, 1998; Mortimer, 2003; Vondracek, 1997). The present study seeks to highlight which qualities of the apprenticeship are predictors of career exploration in a group of students attending the 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

## METHODS

**Participants and Procedure:** Participants were 309 high school students attending 12th grade. The administration of the instruments occurred at the end of the training experience. The sample comprised 160 males (51.8%) and 149 females (48.2%), whose mean age was 18.44 years (SD = 1.581; range = 16 - 26).

### Instruments – Portuguese version (Taveira, 1997) of Career Exploration

**Survey (CES; Stumpf, Colarelli & Hartman, 1983).** The CES is a multidimensional self-administered scale with 53 items using a *Likert-type* response format, designed to assess five beliefs about exploration (employment outlook, certainty of exploration outcomes, external instrumentality, internal instrumentality and importance of preferred position), four dimensions of the career exploration process (self exploration, environment exploration, intended-systematic exploration and amount of information) and three reactions to vocational exploration (satisfaction with information, exploration stress and decisional stress).

**Apprenticeship Qualities Inventory** – is a multidimensional self-administered scale with 36 items using a *Likert-type* scale of 5 points (1- I strongly disagree to 5 – I strongly agree). The IQE was designed to measure the students perceptions in 7 dimensions (qualities) of the apprenticeship: learning opportunities (8 items, alpha=0.90); peer feedback (4 items, alpha=0.81); social support (4 items, alpha=0.82); autonomy (4 items, alpha= 0.78); supervisor support (7 items, alpha= 0.89); Instructions clarity (4 items, alpha= 0.84) and supervisor feedback (5 items, alpha= 0.81).

## RESULTS

Table 1

### Multiple Regression (Stepwise Method) for Apprenticeship Qualities as Predictors of Career Exploration (N=309)

Dependent Variable	Predictor Variables	$\beta$	T	Sig
Environment Exploration R <sup>2</sup> = .217	Autonomy	.224	3.410	.001
	Course	.238	4.594	.000
	Peer Feedback	.123	2.201	.028
	Supervisor Support	.129	1.989	.048
Self Exploration R <sup>2</sup> = .102	Peer Feedback	.244	4.491	.000
	Age	.189	3.471	.001
Intended-Systematic Exploration R <sup>2</sup> = .155	Autonomy	.163	2.271	.024
	Age	.219	4.089	.000
	Learning Opportunities	.172	2.413	.016
Amount of Information R <sup>2</sup> = .065	Supervisor Support	.178	3.201	.002
	Age	.166	2.985	.003

Four multiple regression analysis were conducted to test the relationship between the predictor variables (age, course, learning opportunities, peer feedback, social support, autonomy, supervisor support, instructions clarity and supervisor feedback) and the outcome variables of career exploration process (environment exploration, self exploration, intended-systematic exploration and amount of information).

As shown in table 1, only four of the nine independent variables were significant predictors of Environment Exploration and yield an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of .217 ( $F(4,307) = 21.026, p < .000$ ). The most significant individual predictors were Autonomy ( $\beta = .224, p < .001$ ) and Course ( $\beta = .238, p < .000$ ). In relation to the Self Exploration, older students ( $\beta = .189, p < .001$ ) who did perceive more peer feedback ( $\beta = .244, p < .000$ ), reported more Self Exploration ( $F(2,307) = 17.355, p < .000$ ), R<sup>2</sup> = .102. The predictor variables: Autonomy ( $\beta = .163, p < .024$ ), Age ( $\beta = .219, p < .000$ ) and Learning Opportunities ( $\beta = .172, p < .016$ ) were found to be the significant predictors of Systematic Exploration and accounted for almost 16% of the variance (R<sup>2</sup> = .155). Concerning the amount of information variable, older students ( $\beta = .166, p < .003$ ) who did perceive higher levels of supervisor support ( $\beta = .178, p < .002$ ), reported more amount of information ( $F(2,307) = 10.574, p < .000$ ), R<sup>2</sup> = .065).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to highlight which qualities of the apprenticeship are predictors of career exploration process. Multiple linear regressions revealed that qualities like autonomy, social support, learning opportunities and peer feedback are positively correlated with career exploration. The effects are small / moderate but give interesting hints for the significant role of contextual dimensions on exploratory behavior. In sum, the students who perceived higher levels on the apprenticeship quality reported more exploratory activity. In line with our expectations, which were based on previous research (e.g. Araújo, 2007; Kenny & Bledsoe, 2005; Ketterson & Blustein, 1997; Kracke & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2001; Kracke, 2002) and on the vocational exploration literature (e.g. Blustein, 1997; Flum & Blustein, 2000; Flum,

2001; Taveira, 2001), contextual qualities are significantly associated with the intensity of career exploration. Consistent with career theories (e.g. Super et al., 1996) age was also important in predicting career exploration, older students reported more exploratory activity than did younger students. Our results have some practical implications: through organization of work experiences with high standards of these contextual qualities, teachers and guidance counsellors might facilitate the career development of high school students.

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