**Type of contribution:** Paper

**Title:** Reduction of options or learning to cope? – strengthening the agency of young students by preserving both the creativity and rationality in career learning

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**Abstract and 3 – 5 keywords**
This paper will study career learning activities in Norwegian primary school. The aim is to analyse how this can be designed to strengthen “alternative” career management skills, like creativity, courage, fantasy, optimism, flexibility and curiosity, and ensure that these skills, being natural for young children, is preserved during the transition into the more formalised career guidance in lower secondary school.

Keywords: Primary school, Career learning, Transition, Creativity

**Relation to the conference theme**
Reduction/restriction in the perceived options for choice when it comes to future education and work, is among the major constraints on the freedom of choice of young people/children. Schools should strive to broaden the limits of what children see as their possibilities, through giving them a wider supply of career management skills. How this can be done through career learning activities in primary school, enlarging the creativity and curiosity in the choices of youth, is the main team of this paper.

**General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework**
Career Management Skills (CMS) are defined as "... a range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals and groups to gather, analyse, synthesise and organise self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions" (ELGPN Resource Kit 2012, p.21), in other words, the skills of rationality and rational choice. In seemingly contrast to this, theorist like Krumboltz (2008) and Gelatt (1989), argue that the central competencies for choice in a world characterize by change and uncertainty, are skills like creativity, courage, fantasy, optimism, flexibility and curiosity. In the to-the-point formulation by Gelatt; Changing one's mind will be an essential skill in the future", elaborated like this: A quarter century ago the past was known, the future was predictable, and the present was changing at a pace that was comprehendible. The rational,
objective decision-making frame of reference for counselling was appropriate then. Today the past is not always what it was thought to be, the future is no longer predictable, and the present is changing as never before. In fact, today even the status quo is in a state of flux. ... What is appropriate now is a decision and counselling framework that helps clients deal with change and ambiguity, accept uncertainty and inconsistency, and utilize the non-rational and intuitive side of thinking and choosing. The new strategy promotes positive attitudes and paradoxical methods in the presence of increasing uncertainty (Gelatt 1989).

When interviewing pupils in Norwegian primary schools (age 6-13, grade 1-7) about careers and working life and choice, we met your people with all these alterative career competencies. They had yet to be included in the formal career counselling in school (starting at grade 8). Their fantasies and reflections about their own future working life was best characterised by words like creativity, courage, fantasy, optimism, flexibility and curiosity (Mordal et al 2018). Their “fantasies” were often nor censored by reality. To them everything was possible, in the sense that their image of working life and their role in it was to a small degree filtered through the harsh realities of what is possible. They still had the power to dream.

Interviewing older pupils/students in Norwegian lower and upper secondary schools (Buland et al 2011), Buland, Mathiesen, Mordal 2014), we often met young people confronting reality in quite a different way. For them, integrated in the formalised career counselling system, the choice of future education and work, was serious business. The choices they were to make, was seen as determinant for their future life, and they reflected on “serious” questions like future labour market, education possibilities, their own shortcomings, wages, this restricting their future choices. The process of circumscription and compromise (Gottfredson, 2002) had reached a new level, limiting the perceived choices, and much of the creativity, courage, fantasy, optimism, flexibility and curiosity of their younger selves, were filtered through and subordinated to the demands and limitations of what was seen as unavoidable reality.

In the paper, we will try to analyse ways in which schools can seek to preserve the creativity of young people, and combine it with the rationality of older students. How can primary school contribute and strengthen the “dream power” of young people when it comes to future careers, and thereby strengthening the agency of young people, getting a larger repertoire in the perceived possibilities? How can primary school through career learning activities help children to develop career management skills that goes beyond the rational skills of gathering, analysing, synthesising and organising self, educational and occupational information, and skills to make and implement decisions and transitions?

**Methods/methodology**

This paper is based on a study of career guidance in primary school, conducted on behalf of the Norwegian Directorate of Education in fall 2017/spring 2018. During the project, individual qualitative interviews were conducted with representatives of school owners in six municipalities. Based on this, four case schools were selected for visits, during which representatives for school leadership, teachers and pupils in grade 4 and 7 participated in focus group interviews. A total of 68 persons involved.

As part of the data collection, we conducted eight group interviews with pupils in primary school, four interviews with 4th grade students and four interviews with 7th grade students. We
interviewed a total of 37 students about their career aspirations, about career education at school and about their knowledge of working life.

We conducted the analyses according to the principles of grounded theory. This is a systematic, inductive and comparative approach to conducting analyses without strong a priori theoretical guidelines. In this way, it’s the informants’ opinions and considerations that determine the focus, and theoretical perspectives play in as different ways of understanding the informants' statements. All interviews were conducted by two researchers, recorded digitally and transcribed.

Outcomes/ expected results

We hope to be able to call attention to concrete career learning activities that can be integrated in already normal learning activities in primary school, thereby strengthening young pupils’ basis for the transition to the formal career guidance introduced to them at grade 8, thereby ensuring that the creativity of young reflections on work, are not lost in the rationality of higher level career guidance.

References


