

## Becoming a professional: comparing four interventions to promote an identity change

Tornando-se um profissional: comparando quatro intervenções para promover mudança de identidade

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**Abstract.** This study describes the main results obtained in a research in which the aim was to promote a positive developmental transition involving an identity change: from being a student to becoming a professional. Taking into account recent literature on promoting positive youth development we designed an ideographic process-oriented intervention. This aimed to compare the effects of four different kinds of intervention: remediative, generative, life-learning and an integration of all three. Twelve students belonging to two different groups (6 students from university studies and 6 students from technical studies) were studied during three months from an initial interview. Every participant was assigned to an experimental group depending on the kind of intervention taking place: G1. Remediative Intervention, G2. Generative Intervention, G3. Life Learning Intervention, G4. Integrative Intervention, G5. Interview, G6. Control Group. In addition to the interview and intervention there were two qualitative tests of changes taking place one month and 3 months after the first interview. In this article we will describe the characteristics of the different interventions, the comparison of their main effects and the main issues appearing in the sessions. We will finish with the presentation of some useful concepts in order to prepare developmental interventions dealing with transitions.

**Key words:** transition, identity, intervention, process, ideographic.

**Resumo.** Este artigo descreve os principais resultados de um estudo cujo objetivo foi promover uma transição positiva do desenvolvimento envolvendo uma mudança de identidade: da fase de estudante para a profissional. Levando-se em consideração a literatura recente sobre promoção do desenvolvimento positivo na adolescência, foi delineada uma intervenção ideográfica orientada para o processo. O objetivo foi comparar os efeitos de quatro diferentes tipos de intervenção: remediativa, generativa, aprendizagem de vida e uma integração das três. Doze estudantes pertencentes a dois diferentes grupos (6 estudantes universitários e 6 de uma escola técnica) foram acompanhados durante três meses após uma entrevista inicial. Cada participante foi alocado em um grupo experimental, de acordo com

o tipo de intervenção: G1 Remediativa, G2. Generativa. G3. Aprendizagem de vida, G4. Integrativa, G5 Entrevista, G6. Controle. Além da entrevista e intervenção foram realizados dois testes qualitativos sobre as mudanças ocorridas um e três meses após as diferentes intervenções. Neste artigo serão descritas as características das diferentes intervenções, as comparações dos principais efeitos e os principais resultados das sessões. Finalizando, serão apresentadas algumas concepções úteis para a preparação de intervenções desenvolvimentais que lidam com transições.

**Palavras-chave:** transição, identidade, intervenção, processo, ideográfico.

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## Introduction

A developmental intervention aims to promote changes that will take place through time, in terms of moving somebody into the future and exploring for example how he/she is dealing with normative and non-normative life events, turning points, transitions, life pathways and general stages. A valuable variable which is becoming a usual target for intervention from a developmental point of view is the promotion of Identity.

In this sense it is not strange that recent research concerning Identity has been characterized by an increasing number of articles and research projects related to the application of intervention programs (Schwartz *et al.*, 2005; Ferrer-Wreder *et al.*, 2003) and by a growing interest in studying the development of Identity during adulthood, going beyond the adolescent stage (Kunnen and Wassink, 2003; Marcia 2002; Kroger, 2002; 2003). Both current research trends are contextualized by the interesting theoretical revision considering if Marcia's Status Paradigm is the most appropriate approach to study Identity Development (Bourne, 1978a, 1978b; Van Hoof, 1999; Côté and Schwartz, 2002). As a consequence of this debate two different theoretical models have emerged (Schwartz, 2001): those models interested in extending and complementing the Status Paradigm which developed concrete elements of the status paradigm such as the exploration process (Grotevant, 1987) or even added new components (Berzonsky, 1989; Kerpelman and Lamke, 1997; Waterman, 1990) and those models interested in expanding their applications as a way of being more sensible to the original work of Erikson (1968), understanding identity as a multidimensional construct going far beyond the mere

relationship of variables such as exploration and commitment. These "expanded models" stress the social and personal facets of Identity as we can see in Kurtines and Silverman (1999) who frames identity in a socio-cultural context where attributes such as "responsibility" and "critical thinking" are considered key elements.

It is in the context of these expanding models that we can find a growing interest for changing the perspective from describing and explaining the formation of a sense of identity to developing and promoting new intervention programs focused on adolescents and even adults. The complexity of current western societies gives more importance to the task of promoting an identity formation as it is stated by Gil-Calvo (2001, p. 114) "as modern society becomes more complex, more experiential trials are needed in order to facilitate the maturity of young people in order to achieve an authentic adult identity" or by Côté and Levine (2002, p. 1) "as humans have attempted to adapt to modern and late modern forms of social organization, where choice has replaced obligation as the basis of self-definition, identity formation has become a more difficult, precarious and solitary process for with many people are unprepared". As a consequence of this cultural context individuals are expected to be self-directed in their life-courses but people attempting to enter "adulthood" as well adults themselves find they have few cultural patterns to follow. It is in this cultural context that intervention programs are more needed in order to promote the transition to adulthood and even the promotion of new skills to manage how to deal with transitions through life.

In the revision made by Ferrer-Wreder *et al.* (2003) about eleven programs whose purpose was to promote the identity of their participants it is interesting to note two

issues: first of all, the demonstrated evidence to reduce behavioural problems in their adolescent subjects; second, the considerable distance between the cited intervention programs and the theoretical research about the construct of identity. According to this the variables used and developed through the programs dealt with: academic achievement, assertiveness, attachment, autonomy, expectancies, communication, managing problems skills, decision-making skills, tolerance to frustration, impulsivity control, social skills, parental relationships, resilience, responsibility, tolerance, etc. None of these variables is directly related with the construct of identity or to processes typically associated with identity such as commitment, exploration or expressiveness (Waterman, 1990). There are very few studies designed exclusively to measure the impact of some intervention programs developed to promote Identity instead of a group of variables apparently connected with Identity but different from that construct.

Some interesting exceptions due to its foundations in the eriksonian-identity literature would be the following examples: first, the program "Changing Lives" (Ferrer-Wreder *et al.*, 2002) applied in the School Context with young people in a risky situation of social exclusion which makes use of a format of critical group discussion about life decisions with the objective of "incrementing in the participants a sense of responsibility and control in their lives, the exploration and commitment of positive identities and their active participation in their social contexts" (Ferrer-Wreder *et al.*, 2003, p. 605); second, the attempt of Schwartz (2002) and Schwartz *et al.* (2005) of distinguishing between two different approaches in order to intervene in Identity: the perspective of Self Construction (more rational directed) and the perspective of Self Discovery (more affective directed); and third, the most recent proposal of Berman *et al.* (2008) whose program is directed toward the promotion of Adult Identity Development with the objective of expanding self-understanding and insight through identity exploration with the help of learning critical thinking and problem solving skills and fostering a disposition for taking control and accepting responsibility for life decisions.

Other examples which exemplify this growing interest in the need to do some kind of intervention focusing on the development

of identity through adulthood can be found in Kunnen and Wassink (2003), Kroger (2002, 2003) and Marcia (2002). All these works share an emphasis in Adulthood, a selection of idiographic-qualitative methodologies and a common utilization of Marcia's Status Paradigm demonstrated in the variables employed in order to interpret the transitional pathways of the studied subjects: "In most of our lives, there are disequilibrating circumstances in addition to the normal, expectable ones. These could be life events such as divorce, falling in love, job loss, job promotion, positive and negative reversals in fortune, retirement, spiritual crises, and the loss of loved ones. As with attempts to define stress, one has to look at what is disequilibrating for the particular individual. Not all divorces, job promotions, and so forth are disequilibrating for all people. Again, we are thrown back on an individual-by-individual approach" (Marcia, 2002, p. 15).

We present our research in this context of new interest about creating intervention programs related to the promotion of a sense of Identity. Instead of using a structural and content-oriented perspective so typical from a Marcia's perspective, we focus on a process-oriented approach indebted from the work of John McWhirter (2000a, 2000b, 2001) and his Remodelling methodology (Developmental Behavioural Modelling, DBM). This process-oriented approach goes beyond a variable-oriented intervention (such as those previously mentioned of exploration, commitment, critical skills, assuming responsibilities, dealing with problems, personal expressiveness, etc). Being coherent with an ideographic perspective, we part from the natural model of an individual to make sense of a transitional moment of his/her life in order to help him/her to add new useful experiential distinctions which could facilitate the passing of this transitional moment. The key point is not the learning of new experiential distinctions but its utilization as an example of a new way of self-organization in the process of making sense of the world.

As it is well expressed in Marcia's (2002) previous quote life events such as job promotions, divorces and so forth constitute vital challenges for many individuals and also provide good opportunities of revising one's identities. Life events and the subjectively lived transition experienced around them are good examples of watching identity work more clearly. Transitional periods are periods of fragility that can threaten the coherence

of the narratives or story that people have constructed about themselves (Devís and Sparkes, 1999) and because of that are a good moment to plan an intervention.

Achieving the first job is a good example of a transitional period for many young people. Erikson (1968) maintained that one of the most valued problems of young people was related with the consolidation of a work identity. In this sense we plan to intervene in the transition of becoming a professional as an example of achieving a work identity in the more general transition of becoming an adult. In the process of consolidating this new work identity considering oneself as a professional it is quite important to take into account the original educational context of young people. In this research we propose two different educational contexts: university studies and professional studies as an alternative to high school. According to some authors (Zacarés *et al.*, 2004), students belonging to this kind of "alternative" educational pathways maintain a concept of work rooted in classical representations stressing elements such routine procedures, timetables and salary: "there appears a concept of work insufficiently

elaborated and not influenced by previous work experience" (Zacarés *et al.*, 2004, p. 248). Including intrinsic motivational elements not so oriented to an instrumental perspective is considered one of the variables which makes the formation of a new professional identity easier. In this sense we propose a comparison of the effects of four different kinds of interventions aimed to optimize this transition towards the achievement of an identity as a professional in two different samples: new workers coming from University Studies and new workers coming from professional studies as an alternative to high school. In the next section we describe the design of the research and the methodology employed.

## Method

### Design and sample

The design of the research is summarized in Table 1.

As it can be seen in Table 1, there were four intervention groups (1 to 4) and two control groups distributed along four sessions. All participants in the study were distributed

**Table 1.** Sequence of the sessions and description of 6 groups by kind of intervention.

<b>GROUPS</b>	<b>Session 1</b>	<b>Session 2: one week later</b>	<b>Session 3: A month follow-up</b>	<b>Session 4: Three month follow-up</b>
<b>1. Remedial Intervention Group</b>	Interview + Test of Change	Test of Change + Intervention	Test of Change.	Test of Change.
<b>2. Generative Intervention Group</b>	Interview + Test of Change	Test of Change + Intervention	Test of Change	Test of Change
<b>3. Life Learning Intervention Group</b>	Interview + Test of Change	Test of Change + Intervention	Test of Change	Test of Change
<b>4. Integrative Intervention Group</b>	Interview + Test of Change	Test of Change + Intervention	Test of Change	Test of Change
<b>5. Control Group 1 (just with an interview)</b>	Interview + Test of Change	Test of Change	Test of Change	Test of Change
<b>6. Control Group 2 (pure)</b>	Test of Change	Test of Change	Test of Change	Test of Change

between the different groups following a randomized procedure. All participants were in the same situation as they had been working only for three or six months in their first job. The main difference between the participants was whether they had university studies or not. First sample was formed by 6 young people aged 20-21 who had finished studies to become an administrative (secretary) professional. This first sample was formed by one man (belonging to Group 1) and five women. The second sample was formed by 6 young people aged 23-25 who had finished university studies (library science and documentation studies; telecommunications engineer studies and psycho-pedagogy studies). The second sample was formed by three men (Groups 4, 5, 6) and three women (Groups 1, 2 and 3). The research with the first sample took place during the course 2005-2006 and the research with the second sample took place during the course 2006-2007.

The research team was formed by three researchers who were in charge of two different groups in both samples. All of them had been conveniently trained in order to carry out the interview and all the different kinds of interventions which were designed by all the members of the research team, after listening to the recorded interviews.

Before beginning the research process the confidentiality of all the obtained information was ensured and the researchers asked all participants' permission to record digitally all the conversations produced during the sessions, in order to facilitate the following transcriptions. It was also agreed to use pseudonyms when referring to them.

## Interview

The main characteristic of the interview is that it is process-oriented instead of being

oriented to obtain content about the experience of the participants. Our aim was to sensitize the participants to think about their transition in terms of some experiential distinctions that could be useful in the following intervention phase. Another aim was to increase the participants' sensibility to the transition experience of becoming professional as a whole.

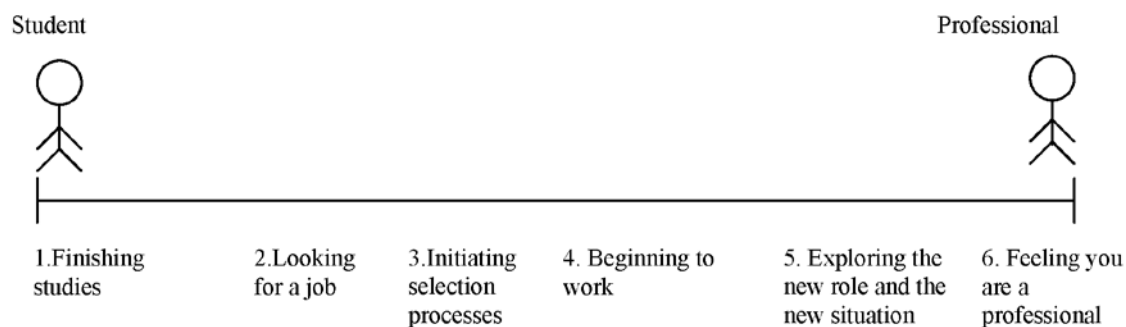
After introducing the research, ensuring the confidentiality of all the information and asking for permission in order to record the interview we presented the following diagram (see Figure 1). The instruction for the participant was locating himself/herself in the continuum representing his/her transition to become a professional (Figure 1).

Once the participant had located himself in the continuum, we began the interview which had a fractal structure in order to make use of different DBM Models aimed to facilitate the exploration and the investigation of the transitional experience of the participants. The structure was described in Table 2.

We can see the combination of four models that we explain giving some examples of the questions used in the interview. The purpose of the interview was not obtaining content information but leading the attention of the participant to cover new areas of information about his/her experience. Actually it was quite common to get replies beginning with *"I don't know, I had never thought about that"* followed by some time of reflection to generate an answer.

## Model of motivation: Positioning/Achievement/Affiliation

Initially developed by McClelland (1973) and remodelled afterwards by McWhirter, this model stresses three general areas of motivation: (i) Achievement, oriented to do things and get effects in the world; (ii) Affiliation, oriented to the affection and the



**Figure 1.** Representation of the transition from being a student towards becoming a professional.

feeling of connection with others and even oneself;(iii)Positioning,oriented to the meaning of a situation, its relevance, appropriateness and impact in the world. We assume the hypothesis that a balance between these three motivational areas is needed in order to complete successfully any transition. The first part of the interview begins with Positioning

and finishes with Affiliation because a pattern of beginning with abstract information towards concrete information is followed.

**Model of time, space and matter**

Matter refers to any example of (a) Positioning, Affiliation and Achievement Moti-

**Table 2.** General structure of the interview.

Fist Part														
Positioning														
Time					Space					Matter				
Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is	Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is	Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is
Achievement														
Time					Space					Matter				
Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is	Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is	Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is
Affiliation														
Time					Space					Matter				
Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is	Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is	Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is
COMPARISON OF														
Time in terms of					Space in terms of					Matter in terms of				

Second part														
Belonging														
Time					Space					Matter				
Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is	Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is	Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is
Bonding														
Time					Space					Matter				
Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is	Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is	Have to	Like	Want	Need	As it is
Being														
Time			Space			Matter								
How often does the participant relate himself/herself with his/her new identity?	How often does the participant feel the new identity relates with him/her?	How often does the participant feel the bonding with his/her new identity?	Where in his/her body does the participant relate himself/herself with his/her new identity?	Where in his/her body does the participant feel the new identity relates with him/her?	Where in his/her body does the participant feel the bonding with his/her new identity?	How does the participant relate himself/herself with his/her new identity?	How does the participant feel the new identity relates with him/her?	How does the participant feel the bonding with his/her new identity?						

vation; (b) any experiential example of bonding, belonging and being; and finally (c) any of the outcomes in the dynamics of the relationship of the participant with his/her new identity, the dynamics of how the participant feels the new identity relates with him/her and the dynamics of how the participant feels the bonding with his/her new identity. In terms of Time, all the matter distinctions mentioned above are explored according to the frequency they are felt or noticed. In terms of Space, the spatial localization of the matter distinctions is explored.

### **From the ideal to the reality: "Should, would like; want, need and how it is"**

In any of the mentioned distinctions we explore in more detail different levels from "how do you think it should be?" "How would you like it to be?" "How do you want it to be?" "How do you need it to be?" and finally "How is it really?" Again the gradation follows the pattern of coming from the abstract and continuing towards the concrete. It begins from the most abstract level of an idea (how someone thinks the world should be), going on to a more affiliative point of view (like, want and need) and finally finishing asking the participant how he/she thinks the issue really is like. In Box 1 we can find some examples of how these models ('Motivation', 'Matter, Space and Time' and 'from the Ideal to reality') were used in order to construct the questions of the interview.

### **The 11 B's model**

The 11 B's model was developed by John McWhirter as a modelling tool with the intention of providing a behavioural de-

scription of the experience of a transition. This model was influenced by the work of Bateson (1991), who identified the dialectical relation between structure and function, explaining that the development of the skills or ideas of any structure is the result of this dialectical relation between structure and function, in that a change in the function of something implies a change in the underlying structure, which at the same time facilitates a new function. The initial structure of the model is sensory. When we have a new experience, we are able to identify it because our senses are designed to capture the differences, BITS of information. The function related to this basic structure is BONDING. We connect with the initial information that has made a difference; we feel emotionally tied to attraction or rejection. Each time we bond to that bit of information we can begin to organize it, making way for a more complex structure (BUNCH), group of things that are enclosed. If we develop this bunch we can group them in a stronger way, ensuring a more secure enclosure, and forming what is called BANDING. It is easier to separate a bunch of people than a band of people. This structure, which is determined by the previous function, is BELONGING. The elements, structured in a significant way, develop a feeling of belonging that reinforces the relationship maintained between them. If these elements commit more strongly with belonging, the developed function is that of BOUNDING to define limits of whom or what is included and of whom or what is excluded in relation to the new structure organized. Not only is there a belonging structure but also everything is organized by function of the limits that this structure provides in terms of inclusion and exclusion. When a limit or distinction is created between several different

#### **Box 1.** Examples of questions of the previous models in the interview.

- In relation to your current professional situation, how often in a day's time do you think about this in order to consider yourself a professional? (Positioning, Time and Have to).
- What places do you think you would need to go to as a professional? (Positioning, Space and Need to).
- What does it mean for you to be a professional? (Positioning, Matter and Like to).
- How many times do you need to invest time to do things as a professional? (Achievement, Time and Need to).
- What would you like to feel according to the fact that you are a professional? (Affiliation, Matter and Like to).

types of things, the resulting structure is that of BELIEF, with which one realizes how things should or could be. If these beliefs strengthen (BINDING), an identity (BE) emerges. In this way, 'to be' goes beyond belief, creating less flexible space than that of the belief, the change being less open. Only when one goes beyond this structure (the function is BEYONDING) can one transcend the previous formalizations (BINDS) that had given birth to a determined identity (BE), which in the end generates the last structure of BECOME, transcending the previous situation and constructing a new structure.

The model provides a series of distinctions that could be quite useful in order to follow a process of change during a transition (Abengózar *et al.*, 2006; Iborra, 2005, 2007). One of its principal contributions is that it studies not only structures but also functions that explain how these structures originate and are transformed, starting from sensory experience and arriving at the most complex mental processes. Furthermore, this model shows how identity implies a dynamic process, and instead of being something static that we possess, it would best be considered something that we do. In this way the model gives direct attention to the process rather than to the product.

In order to highlight those distinctions of the model more easily related and recognizable for the participants, we only included in the interview the function of BONDING and the structures of BELONGING and BEING (see Box 2).

## Intervention

We compared four different kinds of interventions with the purpose of facilitating the transition towards a new identity as professional. All interventions were tailor-made according to the special needs and concrete problems mentioned by every participant. In the following section we define each intervention.

In brief, a Remedial intervention consists in adding resources in order to overcome a problem (Dilts, 1983a, 1983b, 1990). For this kind of intervention to take place, it is needed first to find a "problem situation" to be solved or coped. The utilization of any of the distinctions mentioned in the previous section could be used in a Remedial way if they were useful to solve the situation for the participant. For example, the participant of Sample 1, Group 1, David, did not know how to take advantage of his leisure time in order to attend an academy to improve his technical knowledge. The Remedial intervention focused on this issue connected with adaptation and promotion problems in his first months of work. He was not committed to the idea of attending an academy because he thought about it in terms of an obligation instead of something he really wanted to do. Once he noticed this he began to manage his decision taking on more responsibility.

A generative intervention, on the other hand, follows the opposite pattern of the Remedial intervention: you establish resources first independently of the presence of potential

### Box 2. Examples of questions according to Belonging, Bonding and Being distinctions.

- How long would you like to dedicate to your job in order to develop a sense of belonging to a professional group? (Belonging, Time, Like to).
- How physically present would you want your work place to be in order to develop a sense of belonging to a professional group? (Belonging, Space, Want to).
- How long should it pass by in order to feel the emotional connection, the sense of bonding? (Bonding, Time and Have to or should).
- Where -inside of you- do you think you will really feel this emotional connection? (Bonding, Space and how really is).
- Thinking about you as a professional and the emotional connection between that new identity and you, where would you notice the sensation of that new identity connecting with you? (Being, Space, how the participant feels his/her new identity fits with him/her).
- In terms of your new identity as a professional, what do you feel connected with to it? (Being, Matter, how the participant relates or will relate himself/herself with his/her new identity).



problems with the aim of generating new behaviours or responses. It is likely there will be a new understanding of the situation that could help to solve potential problems or even to transcend limitative frames. For example, subject belonging to Sample 1 and Group 2, Lola, after the interview was fired from her first job. During the intervention, previous resources she had demonstrated successfully during her Educational Period were activated, exploring where it would be appropriate and useful to use them in her current situation.

The third intervention is named "Life Learning" intervention. McWhirter (2001, p. 11) defined it as "a sort of a reflective modelling of life as a whole, what is this life of ours like. Whereas developmental is about stages or interaction you are going to be doing and life-learning is a step back a bit, understanding how the world works, how it all fits together [...] it's about life as a whole, not about a particular stage or a particular issue or challenge but just more about how does life work". Life-learning intervention implies not only using some of the experiential distinctions of the models mentioned so far but also internalizing and specifying them through their utilization with someone's own experience. The purpose is to achieve a more complex idea about life. For example in both cases of Group 3 (coming from Sample 1 and 2) the Motivation Model and the distinctions of Belonging, Bonding and Being were framed in a more general point of view presenting them as examples of a proactive attitude once living in a situation to deal with, as opposite of a reactive attitude. Participants used to react once a situation (problematic or not) was happening instead of noticing previously how they could actively organize it in order to fit the situation better to his/her plans (eg. how to enjoy or cope with something).

The fourth intervention was an integration of all the previous ones. There was first an exploration of current issues for the participant related with his/her transition. Then there was a remedial intervention with one of those issues selected by the participant, what was followed by a generative intervention finishing with a life learning intervention, usually specifying some of the models employed to do the previous interventions.

### Test of change

After the intervention phase there were two follow-up sessions one month and three

months later. Their purpose was to explore and collect all the changes mentioned by the participants related to the intervention in several contexts such as oneself, relationships with his/her partner, family, friends and colleagues. Changes could be related also to three areas (what you feel, what you do and what is important for you). Again we stress a qualitative, idiographic and process-oriented perspective in this part of the research design. We were interested not only in the content expressed by the participants but also in the process of orienting their attention towards noticing changes and even being aware of previous changes stated and in the issue of its maintenance or transformation through time. Even though we were more interested in exploring those changes related with the transition of becoming professional (taking place in the Work Context) we also paid attention to any change taking place in contiguous contexts such as family, partnerships and friendships. This is an example of the generative nature of the interventions because asking the participants to think about their changes could lead their attention towards the amplification and even the creation or continuation of small changes previously unnoticed. Secondly, it is generative because an intervention theoretically focused on a specific context could influence the experience of parallel transitions.

### Results

We present the results related to the changes mentioned by the participants after the interview and the intervention had taken place and comparing these changes in terms of the nature of the intervention performed. A qualitative content-analysis (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998) of the reports transcribed given by the participants after one month and three months of the intervention was done. The most relevant categories or issues, depending on their frequency of appearance and theoretical contribution, were selected. This whole analysis was conducted with N'VIVO software (Bazeley and Richards, 2000) which was very useful in order to manage the ongoing process of categorization and the organization of that categorization in a structured system. The software provided fast and flexible access to the previous categorized material which helped us reflect on the categories.

According to this we have organized the results around five big themes: (i) influence of the interview and the overall process in determining their spatial localization in the psychological continuum of the transition; (ii) main issues mentioned by the participants when describing their transition towards becoming professional; (iii) main differences found between both samples; (iv) main differences found between all groups (intervention and control groups); (v) main changes referred to by the participants after the intervention phase.

### **Influence of the interview and of the overall process in determining their spatial localization in the psychological continuum of the transition**

None of the participants located himself/herself at point 6 of the transition (considering himself as a full professional) at the beginning of the interview, when we asked them to situate where they felt they were in the diagram representing the transition towards being a professional. Actually one of the effects of the interview was that when they were asked again in the final part of the interview, people used to relocate themselves behind the initial point they had signalled. In general, thinking in more detail about their transition led them to conclude they had not advanced so much as they had presupposed initially. In contrast, after the second test of change, six months later, all of them had already arrived to point 6 or at least had made a progress.

### **Main issues mentioned by the participants when describing their transition towards becoming professionals**

Participants' narratives dealt mostly with security, the meaning of mistakes, the relationship with their superiors or companions and the emphasis on an achievement motivation. In our opinion security was the main theme for all of them. This interest in security is typical in any transition as it is characterized by the uncertainty of a period when one has to learn many procedures, practical knowledge, contextual factors, applications and so on. Security was associated with a professional way of doing things. In our opinion a potential limitation of this connection between security and professionalism was that in general it blurred the security felt once a decision had

been made (this is the product of the decision or the product of any activity they had to do) with the process of doing it safely (deciding or any other activity). The lack of familiarity with many of their activities was confused with being insecure and therefore it was evidence for the subjects of not being a professional yet. In this sense, instead of considering mistakes from a process perspective as a necessary proof of their learning process to become professionals, they considered mistakes as a product equivalent to their lack of professionalism. In this sense, they had the belief that professionals did not commit mistakes. From this point of view, it is understandable their need to seek their superiors' or companions' approval. The external approval is based again on products of their behaviour (decisions, activities and finished tasks) instead of being based on internal processes while making those decisions, or doing activities or tasks. Taking into account all this, it was quite common to find they were focusing on and stressing things to do (achievement motivation) and not how they felt doing them (affiliation motivation) or the meaning of those activities, roles, tasks and decisions (positioning motivation).

### **Main differences found between both samples**

In contrast with the first sample, professionals coming from university showed more expectations to improve their career. They had a clearer direction towards their future. The first sample of professionals coming from technical studies were more present oriented, and they valued the most what they could get in terms of new belongings (work, cars, house). Actually, professional achievement was measured with these external standards.

In terms of how they made use of the different models and distinctions covered during the interview and intervention phases, the second sample of subjects coming from university studies developed more the topics treated during the sessions, extending and connecting the new distinctions they had. They internalized faster these experiential and process-oriented distinctions.

### **Main differences found between all groups (intervention and control groups)**

All the subjects of the intervention groups (Groups 1, 2, 3, 4) presented more changes and advanced more in their transition compared

with the subjects of the control group (Groups 5 and 6). There were more changes in the Test of Change 3 (three months later), compared with those changes described during the Test of Change 2 (one month later). These changes were related above all with the intervention performed in session two, according to the subjects. Those changes referred to by participants belonging to intervention groups differed from the natural and less frequent changes taking place in control groups (Group 5 and Group 6).

Subjects of Group 5, who only received a process-oriented interview, showed more changes and more progress in the transition compared with subjects of control group Group 6. But even though they (Group 5) presented changes, they were not able to maintain the exploration process initiated during the interview. Participants of Group 5 were more sensible to changes in their situation but these changes did not imply evolution and besides changes were perceived in an isolated fashion instead of being inter-connected.

Participants from Group 4 (integrative) referred to the biggest and deepest changes in comparison to the other intervention groups, followed by the Group 2 (generative). For example, subject Edmundo from the second sample (Group 4) mentioned several key changes: he considered himself as a full professional after 3 months of the intervention, he considered that he had more security in his life and at work above all, and he finished a couple relationship he had had for three years. Even after the last test of change, he phoned to one of the researchers to announce that he had moved to another job.

### **Main changes referred to by the participants after the intervention phase**

We can find qualitative changes in all intervention groups, not only do participants feel a progress in their transition, but they also present some common issues:

They feel more security, a higher positive self-evaluation, a more balanced connection between three motivational orientations: achievement, affiliation and positioning, they begin to use some process distinctions employed during the interview and the intervention such as: have to; need, like, want etc. They feel more security at work and manage mistakes better, for example the belief that professionals do not make mistakes is not maintained.

One interesting change described by most part of the subjects is that they are more conscious of their evolution thanks to their participation in the research. They can compare their current state with that one they had at the beginning of the research. As one of the subjects (David) stated (Sample 1, Group 1): "I see the experience I have, my professionalism, the changes I had. Perhaps I could have been working a year and a half and I would have continued the same, you don't think about this, time goes by and you don't think about it. If I had not participated maybe I would have not noticed this evolution and then would have continued the same".

Another interesting change is that this transition of becoming a professional coincides with other transitions such as "getting involved in an intimate relationship" and "leaving family home". The intervention influences these other transitions as well. For example, it was quite common that changes with the partner were introduced and opened to exploration by the participants. The clearest case was already mentioned (Edmundo who even decided to finish his couple relationship).

## **Discussion**

We present this research in the context of the growing interest in exploring new ways of intervening to facilitate the development of identity in adolescence and adulthood. We chose a transition such as becoming a professional because we thought in the first place that it would be easier to detect identity changes and in the second place that it would be a moment where intervention could help to ease the transit through this key life event of getting a new job.

In contrast with other interventions we have stressed a process-oriented approach focused on the individual particularities. We have tried to go beyond interventions focused on variables such as exploration, commitment, assimilation, accommodation and so on. Instead of that, the content of the intervention was provided by the participants when referring to how they were living their own transition towards becoming a professional. The processes used in the interview and in the intervention phase aimed to increase the competence of the participants to lead their own transition in part being more sensitized to the changes taking place. The main distinctions we used dealt with differentiating kinds of motivation, evaluating the relationship

they had with their new identity as a professional, the belonging and bonding with different work places and professional people, the distinction of processes and their products, the comparison of their identity in different moments during the research (along at least 3 months), the concrete exploration of how they were actually transiting and making sense of changes, the exploration of how they were constructing a new concept of professional, etc.

Although in general it could be said that we have just promoted the exploration of participants in order to better accommodate to their changing situations and then to form new commitments, we had in mind the purpose of describing in deeper detail some of the processes involved in this concrete exploration. Exploration of changing experiences as such arising during a transitional period can benefit from the utilization of some of the key distinctions we mentioned above. If these distinctions are not rooted with experiential information provided by participants they become abstract labels which are not very useful when designing and performing an intervention.

Integrative interventions generated more changes compared with generative, life learning and remedial interventions. This can be explained probably because the integrative intervention was more complete but furthermore because it had a bigger elaboration: beginning with a concrete difficulty or problem to remediate and finishing with a new learning about how life is, in relation to how to manage different contexts, how "work identity" is part of a "general identity", how identity instead of something you have is something you do, etc. This life learning (and the process distinctions mentioned in the models we used) was rooted in the concrete experience of the subject, and because of that the effect of the integrative intervention was bigger than performing only a life intervention or any of the interventions performed separately.

## Conclusion

According to the comparison of changes referred to by the participants we think that it has been demonstrated that the intervention to promote an optimal transition is more positive than not intervening. Interventions gain more impact if they are adapted to any subject's concrete needs and if they are process-oriented. In that sense, integrative

interventions (remediative; generative and life-learning) have more potential adaptability to subject circumstances.

In order to achieve more effect, one key implies maintaining a developmental perspective promoting a sense of direction in one's life. This can be attained generating differential information emerging from the comparison of different moments in the past (of the transition) and in the expected and desired future (sense of becoming). This comparison of continuous or analogic experience is better done making use of the digital distinctions in the experience of the participants achieved by the use of different process-oriented models.

This highlights the promotion of special kinds of change: developmental change, a relative change due to it is taking place through time, in terms of moving into the future and exploring what would be useful learning for dealing with similar situations. As McWhirter states (2001, p. 3) "life learning can be completed in any situation. Situations of change are particularly useful as the changes are indications of difference".

In future research studies we will explore the effect of sequencing the integrative intervention in a different way. If we begin always with a remediative intervention this could prejudice the following interventions (generative and life learning) setting up a remedial bias. We also plan to design a group intervention in order to generate more impact and also open the possibility of introducing new ways of evaluating the effect of these interventions, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

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