

From Planning to Design: Implications of the Life Design Paradigm for the Reform of Career Education Curriculum

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Abstract: *There are currently three main career education paradigms, namely the matching-oriented career guidance paradigm, the development-oriented career guidance paradigm, and the construction-oriented life design paradigm. Different career education paradigms have different understandings of career, educational subjects, educational purposes, and educational strategies. Compared with the first two paradigms, the life design paradigm, which originated in the postmodern society, aims to cultivate students' ability to actively construct and manage their own careers to cope with the uncertain VUCA era and has a greater enlightening effect on the development of career education courses. In terms of educational concepts, there is a shift from static "person-job fit" to dynamic "career construction", focusing on the subjective initiative of students in career development and the continuous constructiveness of situations on students' career development. In terms of curriculum objectives, it focuses on students' initiative, narrative and adaptive development. In terms of curriculum content, starting from the theme of students' career development, it integrates related content such as self-awareness, environmental exploration, decision-making planning, psychology, interpersonal relationships, etc., emphasizing the design of content that is coherent as whole. In terms of course implementation, the problem-solving career education steps provide a reference for classroom teaching and pay more attention to the use of indirect and direct experience mixed methods such as metaphor, life story, role model, career practice, etc. In terms of course evaluation, attention should be paid to the construction of the fractal model of the intervention effect, and indicators such as students' career adaptability, hope, and career exploration should be given particular attention.*

Keywords: Career education, Life design paradigm, Curriculum reform.

1. Evolution of Career Education Paradigm

Since the publication of the first career guidance theory book, "Choosing a Career," in 1909, career education has been evolving along with social development, and the guidance paradigm has also evolved to respond to social changes, technological advancements, and various cultural trends. Although the stages of development of career education vary from country to country, the general stages are similar, and career education has changed accordingly. There are three main career education paradigms.

1.1 Matching-oriented Career Guidance

Before the Industrial Revolution, the type of work adolescents undertook upon leaving school was largely determined by their family and surrounding environment. With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, the advancement of industrialization and urbanization gave rise to a contradiction between labor supply and demand. As the division of labor became increasingly refined, new occupations emerged, imposing higher demands on workers' educational qualifications and skill levels. Owing to the inadequacy of vocational education in schools, a large number of school leavers lacked vocational skills and thus struggled to find suitable employment. Concurrently, enterprises faced difficulties in recruiting qualified employees, leading to a significant waste of human resources. It was against this backdrop that career guidance—the embryonic form of career education—came into existence. During this phase, rudimentary forms of school-based career guidance emerged but had not yet evolved into a systematic framework. Career guidance at the time was employment-oriented, while

differential psychology and the psychometric movement facilitated the development of "person-job fit" oriented career guidance. Practitioners in the field also initiated endeavors toward professionalization.

The matching-oriented paradigm of career guidance is built on the construct of similarity. It involves rationally examining individuals' vocational psychological traits from the perspective of counselors, with a focus on aligning personal attributes with occupational requirements or work environments. Its core lies in matching individuals to careers that suit their inherent traits (Yang, 2015). This paradigm is counselor-centered, grounded in trait-factor theory, and employs various aptitude and interest assessments as tools to achieve "person-job" matching. Its guidance model primarily aims to foster self-career alignment by enhancing self-awareness and expanding occupational knowledge. Both Frank Parsons, known as the "father of career counseling," and John Holland, the proposer of the environmental typology theory, developed theories that bear a strong imprint of this career guidance paradigm.

Matching-based career guidance achieves its purpose by classifying individuals and occupations. It first addresses the question "What does it look like?" and then helps identify the correspondence between implicit individual traits and specific manifestations of the environment. This approach is practical and has been supported by empirical research. For instance, Yu et al. (2013) found that person-environment fit exerts positive effects on both individual and organizational development: the higher the level of fit between employees and their environment, the better their health, performance, and well-being.

However, some scholars have criticized this paradigm, arguing that it tends toward “formalism” and neglects the wholeness and developmental nature of individuals. The matching orientation has fostered a career education perspective characterized by “fitting people to jobs” and a “static, unchanging” view of careers. This epistemological stance, often rooted in specific types of knowledge or abilities, places students in a passive role during career guidance. They receive a series of concepts and terms related to themselves or their environment, yet when required to make choices or decisions, they fail to form a comprehensive understanding or make holistic judgments. Since the career guidance paradigm is centered on specific, concrete knowledge types, it also leads to fragmentation in individuals’ development—separating the past from the present and the present from the future. This results in a static and linear perception of career, which in turn gives rise to issues in career development (Savickas, 2013).

1.2 Development-oriented Career Guidance

Development-oriented career guidance emerged as a product of highly modernized societies (Savickas, 2008). The shift from “matching-based career guidance” to “development-oriented career guidance” was driven by multiple factors: the technological revolution and adjustments in industrial and employment structures brought about by the civilian application of military technology after World War II; the rise of “client-centered” therapy in psychological counseling; and advancements in career-related research and theories across fields such as psychology and sociology. During this period, the connotation and form of career guidance in schools also underwent transformation—evolving from “one-time” matching services provided at graduation to systematic “developmental” career guidance services aimed at fostering adolescents’ career thinking. The necessity of schools offering career guidance became increasingly prominent, while practitioners in this field made further strides in professionalization and occupational development.

Development-oriented career guidance is rooted in the organic progression of developmental stages. From an individual development perspective, it seeks to help individuals form vocational attitudes, beliefs, and capabilities through education, preparation, and guidance, enabling them to make viable career choices and realistic work adjustments. Its core focus is on cultivating students’ career decision-making skills, equipping them to successfully address developmental tasks at each career stage. Additionally, it emphasizes assisting students in clarifying their self-concept, enhancing self-understanding and self-acceptance, which serve as the foundation for career choices and decision-making. The guidance model under this paradigm involves assessing students’ developmental status, guiding them to accomplish impending developmental tasks, and nurturing the attitudes and abilities required to master these tasks. Theories such as Super’s career development stage theory, Krumboltz’s social learning theory, and information processing theory all embody this developmental orientation.

Development-oriented career guidance advocates providing career guidance to individuals based on the tasks of their developmental stages, adapting guidance to fit people and

aligning it with their life experiences. It seeks to answer the question “How does it develop?” From this perspective, development emerges from within—much as Super often described “career unfolding” as a process where individuals “discover who they are” and “manifest their true selves.” Compared to matching-oriented career guidance, this paradigm is more dynamic (viewing careers as divided into distinct stages), comprehensive (regarding careers as a combination of an individual’s multiple roles), and developmental (seeing careers as shaped by one’s career choices).

Some scholars have critiqued this paradigm, arguing that its underlying metaphors warrant critical scrutiny. Guided by this paradigm, individuals are framed as agents who enhance themselves and make choices by applying career-related knowledge associated with learning and developmental tasks, reflecting a linear transition from one stable state to another. However, in real-world learning contexts, environments are fluid, and individuals are not passive recipients of career knowledge; instead, they bring their own “scripts,” characterized by creativity and non-linear leaps. Because development-oriented career guidance focuses heavily on whether individuals have completed their developmental tasks, it fails to fully embody their initiative, reflexivity, and capacity for reconfiguration, leaving it ill-equipped to address ever-changing environments (Savickas, 2013).

1.3 Construction-oriented Life Design

Construction-oriented life design emerged in postmodern society, with the uncertainty of modern society providing a realistic foundation for its development. Factors such as globalization, technological transformation, changes in work patterns, and the emergence of boundaryless careers collectively drove the shift from “development-oriented career guidance” to “construction-oriented life design” (Savickas, 2008). During this stage, career education within schools became more systematic and comprehensive. Endowed with higher expectations, its status and resource allocation in schools were further enhanced, and schools became the primary responsible entities for career education.

Construction-oriented life design shifts from the scientific conception of objects/subjects to the social construction of projects. It views work and life as a series of projects, focusing on situational possibilities, dynamic processes, non-linear progress, multiple perspectives, and personal patterns. Its core lies in cultivating students’ ability to cope with uncertainty, proactively construct and manage their own careers, and emphasizes providing support for students’ self-formation, identity integration, and career construction through various interventional approaches. The guidance model under this paradigm involves constructing career paths through small stories, deconstructing these stories, reconstructing them into identity narratives or life portraits, and on this basis, collaboratively building frameworks that lead to the next action episode in the real world. Theories such as Savickas’ career construction theory, Pryor & Bright’s career chaos theory, McMahon’s career systems theory, and hope theory all embody the characteristics of construction-oriented life design.

Construction-oriented life design takes context-embedded behavior as its starting point, regarding individuals as “beings constantly navigating change,” and seeks to answer the question “How does it happen?” This paradigm advocates promoting meaningful activities to further self-creation, identity formation, and career building. It guides individuals to navigate ambiguities by creating scenarios that connect future actions with past achievements. This constructivist perspective emphasizes flexibility, career adaptability, commitment, emotional intelligence, and lifelong learning, advocating for the promotion of individual self-formation, identity building, and career construction through meaningful activities (Savickas, 2010).

This paradigm has also prompted governments worldwide to reassess the purpose and approaches of career education in schools. For instance, career education interventions in U.S. high schools have evolved, attempting to support students’ career construction through the design and implementation of meaningful activities. The UK government expects construction-oriented career education to encourage individuals to proactively respond to changes, meet labor market demands, and promote social mobility and social justice.

1.4 Comparison of the Three Paradigms

The field of career guidance extends beyond school education, and the evolution of its paradigms, as responses to social change, boasts even broader applications. Matching-oriented career guidance, from an objective perspective of individual differences, regards individuals as “actors” defined by trait scores, assisting them in matching themselves to occupations that hire those with similar traits. Development-oriented career guidance, from a subjective perspective of personal growth, views individuals as “agents” whose characteristics are marked by readiness to tackle developmental tasks corresponding to their life stages; it helps individuals acquire new attitudes, beliefs, and capabilities to enhance their career adaptability. Constructivist life design, from the project-based perspective of social constructivism, conceptualizes individuals as “authors” characterized by autobiographical narratives, aiding them in reconstructing their “authorial” identity in career development through a series of continuous and meaningful project constructions.

Each paradigm is equipped with its unique discourse, standard rhetoric, and skill sets (Savickas, 2012), which in turn lead to differences in how educational objects are perceived, educational goals are defined, and educational strategies are formulated when applied in the educational context.

The Understanding of Career from the Three Paradigms

Understanding the career constitutes the starting point of career education. And the three paradigms differ in their conceptualizations of career.

Matching-oriented career guidance regards a career as a general term for a set of jobs with similar attributes. It posits that a career or job exists as a stable entity independent of individuals—its nature and characteristics remain unchanged regardless of whether an individual chooses to pursue it.

Development-oriented career guidance conceptualizes career as a combination of a series of vocational roles and other life roles throughout an individual’s life course. This paradigm breaks away from the static view of career that treats individuals and careers as mutually independent entities. Instead, it perceives career as dynamic developmental stages, a synthesis of an individual’s multiple roles, and a trajectory shaped by one’s career choices. Compared with matching-oriented career guidance, development-oriented career guidance exhibits greater diversity in connotation and multidimensionality in perspective.

Constructivist life design views career as an individual’s subjective reflection on and self-construction of various vocational activities and roles. It emphasizes an individual’s subjective initiative in creating career meaning, highlights personal self-identity, and focuses on the overall context in which an individual’s self-construction takes place. In contrast to the first two paradigms, constructivist life design approaches career from a constructivist perspective, underscoring the individual’s agency in career development and meaning-making, emphasizing their actions in transforming their own environment and roles, and attending to the impact of the broader context on their career development and construction.

The Comparison of Understanding of Educational Object across the Three Paradigms

The three paradigms’ differing understandings of career determine their distinct conceptions of educational objects. McAdams et al. (2010) characterize the educational objects of these paradigms as actors, agents, and authors, respectively.

Matching-oriented career guidance conceptualizes the educational subject as an “actor.” It posits that individuals exhibit distinct behavioral tendencies from childhood, manifesting specific types. Career guidance, through various assessment tools, can identify the types of educational objects and, based on the principle of consistency, match them to occupations requiring similar traits.

Development-oriented career guidance views the educational subject as an “agent,” focusing on their readiness to tackle developmental tasks corresponding to their career stage. This paradigm emphasizes the educational object’s self-regulation and the setting and achievement of personal goals rather than the specific content of their actions as performers. It prepares them for career development by cultivating relevant attitudes, beliefs, and skills.

Construction-oriented life design regards the educational object as an “author,” aiming to enable them to become conscious authors of their autobiographical life stories. It encourages them to reflect on their life themes, integrate their actions and agency into a coherent life narrative, and form a unique identity. This paradigm places greater emphasis on the uniqueness of the educational subject, advocating for listening to their stories of self and identity formation from their perspective, helping them reflect on their life themes, and co-constructing the next chapter of their career.

The Comparison of Understanding of Educational Goals

across the Three Paradigms

Matching-oriented career guidance focuses on occupational matching. Its goal is to identify the traits of educational objects, help them understand the world of work, and match them to specific occupations.

Development-oriented career guidance, by contrast, extends its focus to activities both before and after students' career choice behaviors. Accordingly, its goal shifts to cultivating students' necessary career decision-making abilities and enhancing their career maturity, enabling them to successfully complete developmental tasks at specific stages and transition smoothly to the next stage.

Construction-oriented life design focuses on how educational objects respond to a complex and changing world. Its purpose is to foster their career management capabilities and provide support for career construction. In a context where boundaryless careers are increasingly becoming a reality, it aims to enable them to develop curiosity about and concern for the future, actively engage in career exploration, anticipate potential future career requirements, boost career confidence, manage their careers effectively, and endow them with unique personal meaning.

The Comparison of Career Education Strategies across the Three Paradigms

The educational strategy employed by matching-oriented career guidance can be summarized as "Test and Tell." This involves administering appropriate career assessment tools (e.g., vocational interest inventories) to educational subjects, interpreting the results to enhance their understanding of their own traits, and providing them with information about occupations that align with these traits to deepen their knowledge of the working world. Ultimately, it aims to facilitate a reasonable match between educational subjects and occupations (Cochran et al., 1974). This strategy of

"enhancing self-environment awareness and guiding matching" has exerted a profound influence and remains a method used in many career education activities to this day.

Development-oriented career guidance primarily adopts the following strategy: first, identifying the career development stage of educational subjects; second, helping them understand the upcoming career development tasks; and finally, cultivating the attitudes and abilities required to complete these tasks. Guided by this strategy, career guidance assists educational subjects in enhancing self-awareness and clarifying self-concept as the foundation for career decision-making. It designs and presents career tasks in a systematic, phased manner and enriches students' learning experiences through activities such as career courses and career exploration, thereby improving their attitudes and skills in career decision-making to support them in completing developmental tasks at different career stages (Savickas, 2012).

Construction-oriented life design employs the following strategy: designing high-quality career development activities to create real-life contexts where educational subjects can engage in meaningful interactions. It helps them assign meaning to experiences derived from these contextual interactions, thereby fostering and enabling them to embrace a complete and appropriate self-image and career role in the working world, leading to positive developmental outcomes. This paradigm advocates using personal narrative to help educational subjects articulate their objective career experiences. In the process of analyzing and deconstructing these narratives, it supports them in reflecting on and constructing the meaning of their career stories, recognizing and correcting potential biases and limitations, and ultimately facilitating the construction of individual identity. It encourages individuals to extend this identity construction to their career actions, thereby enhancing their career adaptability, career satisfaction, and well-being (Savickas, 2012).

Table 1: Differences in Career Education among the Three Paradigms

	Matching-oriented Career Guidance	Development-oriented Career Guidance	Construction-oriented Life Design
Understanding of Career	Career is a collective term for a series of similar jobs.	Career is a combination of a series professional of roles and other life roles.	Career is an individual's subjective reflection construction and of various activities.
Understanding of the Educational Object	Actors	Agent	Author
Educational Goals	Achieve the best match between the educational object and the specific occupation.	Develop career decision-making skills for students and promote career development.	Develop career management skills for students to help them build their careers.
Educational Strategies	Enhance the understanding of "self-occupation" and guide the educational objects to make the best match.	Design and present career development tasks in stages and systematically; Development of career decision-making skills.	Design high-quality activities, create real situations and support students' active career construction in the overall environment.

1.5 The Relationship among the Three Paradigms

Currently, all three paradigms coexist in career education. Neither in theoretical discussions nor in practical operations are they mutually exclusive; instead, they tend to be parallel and interconnected. For researchers with a distinct focus on research and practice, the development of their theories and practices reflects the adoption and integration of different paradigms. As Savickas (2012) noted:

"Depending on an individual's personal needs and social context, practitioners may apply guidance reflecting different paradigms: career guidance that determines occupational suitability, career guidance that fosters career maturity, or life design that constructs career meaning. Each guidance paradigm is valuable and effective for its intended purpose."

2. The Essence of Life Design Paradigms

As noted earlier, students in China are also confronted with

the rapid changes of the VUCA era, requiring them to engage in exploration, adaptation, and construction. Thus, the life design paradigm offers significant insights for the implementation of career education in schools. To enhance understanding of this paradigm, its connotations will be elaborated below in terms of premises, goals, frameworks, and steps, etc.

2.1 The Premises of Career Education

Compared with matching-oriented career guidance and developmental career guidance, constructivist-oriented life design has undergone a profound shift in the thinking underlying career education—a shift often regarded as a necessary and sufficient condition for the establishment of a new paradigm. This transformation is primarily reflected in the following aspects:

First, it emphasizes context over traits or states, acknowledging that career education occurs under conditions that are not fully controllable, where objective measurement and standardized guidance are insufficient to address dynamic real-world situations.

Second, it focuses on survival strategies rather than adding information or content, placing greater emphasis on discussing “how to act” with individuals rather than “what to do.”

Third, it attends to non-linear dynamics rather than linear causality, expanding the perspective from simple career decision-making advice to the collaborative construction of more comprehensive life designs.

Fourth, it prioritizes narrative realities over scientific facts that rely solely on group norms and abstract terminology, emphasizing individuals’ continuous construction and reconstruction of subjective and multiple realities.

Fifth, it centers on modeling the fractal patterns of intervention effects rather than assessing single outcome variables (Dauwalder, 2003), aiming to predict the potential behaviors of complex systems (Thomas & D’ari, 1990).

2.2 The Goals of Career Education

Construction-oriented life design aims to enhance individuals’ adaptability, narrativity, and initiative. Adaptability addresses change, narrativity addresses continuity, and initiative addresses predicaments. Together, adaptability and narrativity provide individuals with self-flexibility and authenticity, enabling them to engage in meaningful activities and thrive in a knowledge-based society. Initiative, on the other hand, stimulates individuals’ action and reflection, helping them construct the meaning of their careers.

First, the life design paradigm seeks to help individuals articulate and develop a career narrative, supporting adaptive and flexible responses to developmental tasks, career transitions, and career challenges. It assists them in developing the ability to anticipate changes and envision their future in a constantly evolving environment, and helps them identify ways to realize their aspirations through participation

in diverse activities. All these efforts are directed at enhancing individuals’ adaptability.

Second, the life design paradigm aims to help individuals construct and narrate a story that portrays their careers and lives with coherence and continuity. It supports them in defining their identities in their own words, mapping out their system of subjective identity forms, and thereby enabling self-design. It also assists them in recognizing all forms of subjective identity or life roles (and their interrelationships) and in finding ways to increase the likelihood of fulfilling their aspirations. These endeavors are focused on enhancing individuals’ narrativity.

Finally, the life design paradigm endeavors to help individuals transform their self-concept by engaging in diverse activities to develop new dimensions of themselves, prompting the reinterpretation of certain life themes. It supports them in constructing intentional processes through forward-looking thinking or retrospective reflection. All these actions are aimed at enhancing individuals’ initiative.

2.3 The Framework of Career Education

The educational measures of the life design paradigm are grounded in the five premises mentioned earlier: situational possibilities, dynamic processes, non-linear progress, multiple realities, and personal patterns. Based on these five presuppositions, Savickas et al. (2009) developed a fundamental framework for career education that is lifelong, holistic, contextually connected, and preventive.

Within this framework, the lifelong dimension is reflected in the fact that a support system for life design and construction should not only help individuals acquire skills to address current changes and developmental challenges but also assist them in identifying the skills and knowledge that need emphasis throughout lifelong development. It should help them determine “how” (required methods), “who” (supportive individuals or experts), “where” (appropriate environments), and “when” (optimal timing for education) they can acquire such skills and knowledge.

Lifelong development inherently gives rise to the need for a holistic approach to life design. While career-related aspects tied to work and student roles are central to life design, other significant life roles—such as family member, citizen, and hobbyist—should also be considered (Super, 1990). Individuals engaged in designing their lives should be encouraged to take all prominent life roles into account while engaging in career construction. Thus, career education within life design includes a career-building component but extends beyond it through engagement with all life roles.

Contextual connection means that past and present environments, individuals’ interactions with these environments, and their ways of observing and interpreting environments should all be integrated into career education. Individuals are encouraged to explore the “life theaters” where they might assume different roles and to utilize the insights from such exploration in their self-construction. From this perspective, career education under the life design paradigm is inclusive: all roles and environments relevant to the individual should be part of constructing career narratives

and shaping career education.

Preventiveness implies that career education should not be limited to interventions during transitional periods but should focus on individuals' futures at an earlier stage to expand their actual choices. Special attention should also be paid to at-risk situations. By fostering adaptability, narrativity, and initiative, the effectiveness of career education can be measured by individuals' capacity to bring about significant changes in the "outcomes" of their life stories (Soresi, Nota, Ferrari, & Solberg, 2008).

2.4 The Steps in Career Education

The life design paradigm addresses the specific steps involved in conducting career education (guidance). While these steps are primarily elaborated from the perspective of career counseling (one-on-one guidance), they still offer valuable insights for career education in classroom settings (one-to-many interactions) - whether in identifying problems and goals, building working alliances between teachers and students, or utilizing methods and tools.

First step: Define the problem and establish desired goals.

When initiating the process of setting career development goals, teachers and students form a relationship characterized by a working alliance. Within this relationship, teachers encourage students to articulate the problems to be addressed through storytelling. As students narrate their stories, teachers prompt them to reflect on the themes and meanings embedded in these narratives. Through dialogue, the primary context of each problem is identified. The focus of such dialogue is not limited to a single context; instead, it should help students recognize the key domains of their lives. Additionally, consideration should be given to which of their core and peripheral roles are most prominent.

Second step: Systematically explore the student's current forms of subjective identity.

This involves understanding how students perceive their present selves and how they organize and enact their roles in prominent life domains. Teachers need to support students in reflecting on and constructing their narratives by encouraging them to articulate their experiences, expectations, actions, interactions, relationships with others, and future aspirations.

Third step: Expand perspectives and revise the narrative.

Narrating a story transforms implicit experiences into explicit expressions, making them more tangible and observable. Objectifying the story adds substance and realism, enabling students to examine it from a distance. This close scrutiny allows students to view their stories from new angles, facilitating a reevaluation of their narratives. Teachers may ask students about abandoned choices, shattered daydreams, or restricted options, encouraging them to revisit and reexperience these "silent stories." Through collaborative discovery and re-creation, these narratives can be restructured, revised, and revitalized.

Fourth step: Embed the problem in a new narrative.

A critical moment in this process occurs when the problem is reframed within a new perspective. This enables individuals to conceptualize themselves through new or anticipated forms of identity. This step is considered complete when students create a synthesis of old and new identities by selecting and tentatively committing to specific roles and identities.

Fifth step: Design and engage in activities to test and actualize the new identity.

Students need to participate in activities aligned with the self they are constructing in their narratives. Specifying what they will do and its significance requires developing a plan that outlines activities to bridge current experiences with desired outcomes - what Tiedeman (1964) termed "purposeful action." The plan should include strategies for addressing current or potential obstacles, as well as ways to share their new life stories with important audiences (e.g., parents, partners, friends, teachers) to gain support, thereby enhancing the clarity and coherence of the narrative.

Sixth step: Conduct short-term and long-term follow-up actions.

Through short-term and long-term follow-up, students are helped to further clarify problems, broaden their horizons, and revise their life stories in course of action. These follow-up efforts may involve iterative processes, but ultimately, as students engage in action, they will gain growth and form a continuous, ever-evolving life narrative.

3. The Inspiration for Life Design Paradigms on Career Education

It is evident that the current philosophy of career education is evolving from a static "person-job" matching model to a dynamic model of life design and construction. The life design paradigm is neither a single career theory nor a specific career guidance practice, but rather an aggregate of shared focuses across certain career theories and practices — encompassing ideas, goals, and steps in career education. This paradigm provides guidance for the present study, ranging from epistemological foundations to methodological approaches.

Naturally, the life design paradigm is inherently open and inclusive. It maintains that there is no mutually exclusive relationship between theories or between techniques; instead, each merely has distinct emphases. In practice, it does not exclude the application of techniques from other paradigms.

3.1 Inspiration for Educational Ideas

The constructivist-oriented life design paradigm conceptualizes career as an individual's subjective reflection on and self-construction of various vocational activities and roles. It emphasizes the individual's agency in creating career meaning, highlights personal self-identity, and attends to the broader context in which an individual's self-construction unfolds. From a constructivist perspective, this paradigm views students' work and life as a series of projects, positing that career education is premised on contextuality, a focus on survival strategies (i.e., how individuals "act"), attention to

non-linear dynamic causality, the continuous construction and reconstruction of narrative realities, and the modeling of fractal patterns of educational effects.

This has significant implications for the development and implementation of career education curricula. Career education curricula should be rooted in students' real-life career development contexts, helping them address authentic career challenges rather than mechanically transmitting career-related knowledge. They should prioritize problem-solving and survival strategies, and adopt a dynamic, constructivist perspective to understand the role of career education curricula in shaping students' life narratives.

3.2 Inspiration for Curriculum Purpose

The life design paradigm aims not only to focus on cultivating individuals' career decision-making abilities but also to emphasize improving their career management capabilities. It seeks to enhance students' adaptability, narrativity, and initiative through the design of meaningful activities, enabling them to cope with an increasingly complex and changing world. Specifically, adaptability addresses changes, narrativity addresses continuity, and initiative addresses predicaments.

Initiative entails promoting autonomous learning among high school students; narrativity involves focusing on their lifelong development; and adaptability emphasizes their social engagement. These align closely with the core literacy requirements for high school students in China. The life design paradigm approaches career education from a social constructivist perspective, viewing human career development as a process of solving a series of projects (i.e., adaptation issues in individual-societal interactions) - a perspective inherently characterized by proactivity and positivity.

3.3 Inspiration for Curriculum Content

The life design paradigm posits that the framework for career education should be a lifelong, contextually connected, preventive, and holistic framework. This offers insights for addressing the current issues, such as the lack of systematic design in career curricula and the fragmentation of career education content in China.

The lifelong nature implies that the instructional design of career education curricula should not only help students acquire skills to tackle current changes and developmental challenges but also assist them in identifying which skills and knowledge are critical for lifelong development. It should guide them to determine "how" (required methods), "who" (individuals or experts who can provide support), "where" (appropriate environments), and "when" (optimal timing for intervention) these skills and knowledge can be acquired.

Lifelong development inherently necessitates a holistic approach to designing career education curricula. Such curricula require holistic design in themselves and need to be integrated into the overall structure of the career education system, forming a synergistic effect with other forms of career education (e.g., career activities, career counseling).

Additionally, in the specific implementation of career education curricula, it is crucial to focus on integrating students' life stories across the timeline of past, present, and future, as well as on how various teaching resources and relationships construct students' career development.

3.4 Inspirations for Curriculum Implementation

The life design paradigm provides recommendations for the specific steps (methods) of career education, which offers valuable insights for the implementation of career education curricula. Career education courses require teachers to identify students' real-life career problem scenarios through preliminary curriculum analysis and to determine teaching objectives in collaboration with students. In advancing actions toward shared goals, teachers and students form a "working alliance," jointly striving to achieve these objectives.

Such courses need to focus on students' life stories, helping them identify issues within these narratives. Through narrative and constructivist teaching approaches - such as alternative experiences, metaphors, and role-playing - new perspectives on career development are provided to students, supporting them in constructing or reconstructing their own life stories. This process aims to help students cope with career challenges and adapt to society.

In course of goal achievement, career education curricula should also assist students in formulating plans that incorporate various resources available to them. These plans are adjusted through ongoing construction and reconstruction to identify suitable paths, promoting students' "purposeful actions." Additionally, students are encouraged to revisit the original problems for review and reflection.

3.5 Inspirations for Curriculum Evaluation

The life design paradigm argues that evaluation should focus on modeling the fractal patterns of intervention effects rather than assessing a single outcome variable, which offers significant insights for the evaluation of career education curricula. This implies that the evaluation of career education courses should employ different fractal patterns of evaluation indicators based on variations in educational goals, educational objects (groups), and the selection of educational content.

Meanwhile, the life design paradigm aims to enhance students' adaptability, initiative, and constructiveness. This means that compared with career decision-making ability, the paradigm places greater emphasis on students' career management capabilities, related career adaptability, the ability to pursue goals, hope capacity for path engagement, and career exploration ability that reflects initiative and constructiveness. These insights provide a reference for the selection of relevant evaluation indicators in studies.

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