

The Practical Exploration of Career Education Courses from the Perspective of Career Development Theory—Take Kunming City X School as an Example

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Keywords: Career Education, Family-School-Community Collaboration, Practicum Research

Abstract: Based on Super's career development theory and influenced by the educational experience of Tsinghua High School and the spirit of West Point, X School in Kunming City conducts a school-based career education practice under the collaboration of families, schools, and society. The school has explored a curriculum design that integrates three dimensions, namely "soil-based," "introduction," and "going out," with a goal-oriented hierarchical setting. The curriculum also incorporates a multi-dimensional evaluation system covering aspects such as vocational awareness and determination.

1. Interpretation of Career Development Theory

Career development theory, founded by Super, is based on various branches of psychology and sociology, including differential psychology, developmental psychology, vocational sociology, and personality development theory. Super's theory starts from the individual's subjective position, emphasizing the exploration of internal and external factors, self-analysis, and self-exploration to achieve a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of oneself for better self-development.[1] According to Super, the career experiences provided by schools and families play a crucial role in the development of children's self-concept. He designed a model for the foundational education stage, divided into four developmental periods:

Fantasy Period (4-10 years old): Children perceive various occupations from the outside world, full of fantasies and imitations of occupations they find enjoyable and appealing.

Interest Period (11-12 years old): Centered around interests, children understand and evaluate occupations, initiating the process of making career choices.

Capacity Period (13-14 years old): They begin to consider whether their own conditions align with the desired occupations, consciously engaging in skill development.

Trial Period (15-17 years old): Considering interests, hobbies, and abilities in their self-concept, they make temporary decisions and experiment in academics and daily life.

2. Background of Implementing Career Education

Under the wave of educational reforms in the 21st century, career education has become an integrated and comprehensive practice course spanning preschool, primary, secondary, and tertiary education. In 2021, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Promoting High-Quality Development of Modern Vocational Education," explicitly stating the need to strengthen the integration of general education and vocational education at all levels and implement vocational enlightenment education in ordinary primary and secondary schools. This aims to cultivate interests in mastering skills and awareness and abilities in career planning. X School in Kunming has actively developed career education courses, encouraging exploration of collaborative forms of career education across grades and stages. Additionally, the primary school section has piloted career initial experience activities organized by grade and class.

3. Establishing Career Education Course Objectives

A search in the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) database revealed that from 2013 to the present, there are a total of 6,917 research articles with "career education" as the main theme. However, articles specifically addressing "career education curriculum" only constitute 2% of the total. More scholars have conducted research from perspectives such as "new college entrance examination reform," "core literacy," and "subject penetration," while articles exploring career education practices from the perspective of home-school collaboration are fewer than a hundred.[2]

3.1. Understanding the Purpose of Career Education

Grasping the educational purpose at a macro level is conducive to precisely setting educational objectives. The understanding of the purpose of career education is generally consistent across countries. The U.S. Department of Education believes that career education should be implemented step by step, including career awareness, career exploration, career orientation, career preparation, and career proficiency. The goal is to enable students to acquire livelihood skills and establish their personal lifestyles. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan proposes the initiation of corresponding career education from elementary to university stages. The focus is on acquiring employment-related knowledge and skills, forming a clear work ethic and occupational view, understanding one's personality, and fostering the ability and attitude for independent career choices. In China, the purpose of career education is to "cultivate interests in mastering skills and awareness and abilities in career planning." It is evident that the purpose of conducting career education is to prepare students for future occupational adaptation.[3-4]

3.2. Constructing Course Objectives

As a K-12 school in Kunming, X School, based on Super's career development theory, sets course objectives starting from the primary school section, positioning career education at various stages: elementary school stage—career awareness; middle school stage—career experience; high school stage—career exploration. Grounded in campus culture construction, the school "integrates" career development education into the integrated construction of school moral education. It determines overall course objectives for each stage based on dimensions such as self-awareness, planning consciousness, academic planning, and career decision-making, as shown in Table1.

Table 1: Integrated Design of Career Education Curriculum Objective in Kunming X School

Year period	Location	Program objective
Primary school, grades 1-2	Career perception	Use career development planning and design course learning, a correct understanding of themselves
Primary school, grades 3-4		Find out what teaching activities you like, what hobbies you have, and how to communicate with others
Primary school, grades 5-6		Find their own advantages, how to carry forward their own advantages, correctly deal with their growing troubles
Junior high school, grades 7-8	Career experience	By experiencing "Holland Island of Interest game" and "MBTI personality Test", students can make it clear about "who I am", so as to form a correct understanding and evaluation
Junior high school grade 9		Carry out "design career exploration" and other special lectures and case guidance to establish students' own career confidence
First grade of high school	Career exploration	Cultivate career awareness, including the transition from junior high school to senior high school, understanding the school environment and resources, clear learning objectives, self-knowledge, understanding the career world and selection of new courses
Grade two of high school		Focus on career exploration and planning, including emotions, learning ability, learning habits, will quality training, independent education, anti-frustration ability, interpersonal relationship, career planning and decision-making guidance
High school grade three		Focus on training career decisions, including college entrance examination voluntary filling guidance and career selection guidance

4. Selecting Career Education Course Content

Choosing and designing curriculum content that aligns with the individual's physical and mental development patterns can effectively stimulate individual experiences. Therefore, schools and parents should provide more scenarios for students to acquire "certain experiences." With the primary school section as the main focus, Kunming X School, based on three major academy courses, develops career education courses, dividing them into different stages. The school cultivates the soil for students' vocational experiences through interest courses and clubs, combining "introduction" and "going out," and implementing career experience courses.

4.1. "Soil": Three Major Academy Courses

Traditionally, when faced with various choices, elementary school students are often guided by teachers and parents' "suggestions" regarding the types of interest classes to attend and the selection of club courses. They are less likely to engage in active thinking and decision-making. As research on career education theories deepens, there is a trend of career education moving to lower grade levels.

Three years ago, the school, in collaboration with the school-level parent committee, conducted follow-up visits to two graduating classes and found that their choices to join clubs, student councils, campus radio and TV stations, and some graduates entering the provincial sports school's track and field team were related to their career awareness during primary school.

Self-awareness, including self-concept, self-observation, self-analysis, self-evaluation, etc., develops through continuous practice in elementary school. The primary school stage is a period of forming self-concepts, where students adjust their images through attempts in the external world in different ways and gain the correct attitude toward work. Students in grades one to six are in the psychological self-period, and certain experiences play a decisive role in building self-concepts for elementary school students.[5]

Kunming X School's primary school section offers three major academy club courses from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. each day. Simultaneously, more than a hundred expanded school-based interest courses, such as clay handcraft, flower arrangement, tea art experience, fruit platter, and printmaking, are provided. Each student can choose multiple courses. Under the flexible scheduling system, students can engage in vocational experiences related to their interests each semester.

4.2. "Introduction": Career Exploration Courses

Career education spans all educational stages, starting from an early age. Career development theory emphasizes the significant role of interest development, social factors, and cognitive factors in the career development process during childhood. Williams & Subich discuss how educators can help children explore a specific learning area to truly consider it as a career aspiration.

Career experience is a crucial method for implementing career education courses. Kunming X School leverages resources from Tsinghua High School and, under the guidance of education experts, has designed and developed the "Social and Emotional Learning and Career Exploration Course" throughout the school year. Taking grades one to six as an example, this course includes eight themes: a new starting point for growth, arguing and reconciliation, saying "no" to bullying, moving towards goals, liking myself, people around me, embracing new changes, and career enlightenment. The eighth section, career enlightenment, involves guiding students through learning about their strengths and inspiring them to think about personal career directions. Each theme corresponds to different content. Based on the characteristics of students' physical and mental development and the logic of the curriculum, the school arranges "Understanding parents' professions," "I am a little life expert," "Small positions, big responsibilities," "How much do you know about careers," "Career initial experience," and "Career pioneers" in grades one to six, respectively. Implementation includes not only the established monthly psychological activities but also a large-scale comprehensive practical activity at the school level once a year, as well as career experience activities designated by each grade and class.

4.3. "Going Out": Initial Career Experience Activities

The purpose of career education is to gradually lead students out of a life that has been constrained and arranged for a long time, enabling them to establish their own values, life views, and worldviews, and helping them complete growth and transformation. To break free from constraints and arrangements, there must be more social learning behaviors. Students can only form self-awareness, objectively evaluating their interests, hobbies, abilities, and skills through rich vocational experiences. Since the mental maturity of elementary school students is not yet complete, collaboration between home and school is essential. Providing off-campus career experience activities can well supplement the shortcomings of school education. Class X2020 (4)'s "I am a landscape designer" in March 2022 is a typical case, as shown in Theme 1 of Table 2, "Enter Kunming Black Dragon Pool Park and feel

the spirit of craftsmanship."

Table 2: Career experience theme activities of career education courses

Theme 1: Walk into Kunming Heilongtan Park and feel the spirit of craftsman		Theme 2: approach the cloud leopard als and feel the style of Chinese special police
Time	Activity arrangements	
8:00—8:30	Gate 1 of the school leaves and walks into the park	The school door 1 started to visit the SWAT team motorcycle training
9:30—10:15	Visit the park plants and bonsai exhibition area, knowledge and popular science	Visit the training, and the 200-meter obstacle course
10:15—11:00	Bird-loving and bird-protection activities in the park	Perform the group dance "" Hey!"Come on, take a photo with the Cloud Leopard als
12:30—13:00	Visit Kunming craftsman studio to learn about the spirit of gardeners	Watch the feature "film cloud Leopard als"
13:00—14:00	I am a bonsai artist with hands-on teaching skills	Visit special vehicles and go to the shooting range to pick up bullet casings

"Enter Kunming Black Dragon Pool Park and feel the spirit of craftsmanship" is a sub-project of the "I am a landscape designer" career experience activity. Students explored the maintenance area of Black Dragon Pool Park, getting to know various professions related to flowers and plants. After visiting Black Dragon Pool Park, student L exclaimed, "Behind the common park scenes, there are so many caretakers carefully maintaining them." Student F said, "I didn't know there were jobs like horticulturists, florists, and bonsai designers in the world. After coming to Black Dragon Pool, I now know about so many professions related to plants." It can be seen that allowing students to contact different professions and social groups of different types of work is beneficial for them to form a more comprehensive occupational awareness and, consequently, develop self-awareness.

5. Improving Career Education Curriculum Evaluation

The span of career education in terms of time and space is vast, making its curriculum evaluation a dynamic process that is challenging to establish fixed standards for. After three years of practical research, Kunming X School has summarized two main dimensions that should be included in the evaluation of career education courses: vocational cognition and emotional level, and vocational ethics and willpower level.

5.1. Evaluation of Vocational Cognition and Emotional Level

Social and emotional well-being is a necessary condition for satisfying individuals' sustainable development and life happiness. The qualitative evaluation of career education courses should not solely rely on the achievement of course objectives but also focus on whether students' vocational cognition and social-emotional aspects have been strengthened. The development of minors' social-emotional well-being gradually progresses from low to high, relying on their understanding and comprehension of social roles. Through experiences in different social roles, students can continuously enrich their social-emotional well-being and enhance empathy towards people from different occupational backgrounds. In May 2021, Kunming X School's Grade S in the primary school section, organized by the parent committee, conducted a "Getting Close to China's Special Police" career experience activity, as shown in Theme 2 of Table 1-2, "Getting close to the Snow Leopard

Assault Team and feeling the style of China's special police." To evaluate the impact of this career education experience activity on students' career education, a questionnaire was distributed to 372 parents through Questionnaire Star. The survey included three aspects: cognition, emotions, and evaluation of the three career experience activities. A total of 372 questionnaires were collected, and the validity and reliability were ensured. In addition, interviews were conducted with 6 teachers and 12 students. The reliability and validity met the requirements, allowing for quantitative analysis of the extracted data.

The questionnaire data showed that 87% of parents fully supported such career experience activities, believing that getting close to craftsmen and florists broadened students' understanding of societal occupations. Besides participating in class-organized career experience activities, 53% of parents also arranged for their children to participate in role-playing activities at the "Children's Week Eight Town" on weekends and holidays, experiencing roles such as doctors, teachers, traffic police, cashiers, chefs, and experimental scientists.

Ninety-six percent of parents believed that students' face-to-face interaction with special police officers, understanding their professions up close, was beneficial for enriching students' emotional experience activities. Teacher W said, "Previously, students only felt patriotic emotions through film and television works. This time, they gained a more authentic experience of the hardships of Kunming's special police in their daily training."

5.2. Evaluation of Vocational Ethics and Willpower Level

"Raising trees for ten years, educating people for a hundred years." Moral education is the fundamental task of education. Career education is not simply vocational education; it not only influences students' future vocational orientation but also cultivates students to uphold the principle of serving the people and shoulder the responsibility of the country's rejuvenation. Therefore, the evaluation of career education courses must focus on the "combination of two aspects":

The combination of career education courses with patriotic education, integrity education, and labor education. During the vocational experience process, students often exhibit phenomena of randomly changing career choices, basing their decisions on the power and income that professions bring them. Therefore, vocational ethical norms should permeate career education, emphasizing the importance of understanding vocational norms through gradual career experience from an early age.

The combination of career education courses with resilience education. Although the purpose of career education is to enable students to have a clear and precise self-awareness, allowing them to choose future career directions based on their intelligence, interests, and abilities, students, in the process of socialization and playing societal roles, may encounter various difficulties and challenges in the workplace. This necessitates having the willpower to face difficulties with determination. Teachers provide necessary role model demonstrations, biographies of great people, etc., to help cultivate students' vocational willpower.

6. Conclusion

Career education courses play a crucial and positive role in guiding and reinforcing students' vocational cognition, vocational emotions, vocational ethics, and vocational willpower. K-12 schools should actively leverage the collaborative advantages of home-school-community partnerships, prioritize vocational enlightenment, integrate internal and external resources, establish integrated curriculum objectives, choose diverse career development content through multiple pathways, enhance a multi-level evaluation system, and promote the optimization and iteration of career education courses. This lays the foundation for students' career planning.

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