

Life design group-based intervention fostering vocational identity, career adaptability, and career decision-making self-efficacy

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Abstract

This study examines the process and outcome of a life design group intervention with grade 9 students. In a sample of 139 participants (91 girls and 48 boys), a quasi-experimental design was applied to analyse the intervention's effectiveness at fostering vocational identity, career adaptability and career decision-making self-efficacy. Seventy and 69 participants were included in the experimental and control groups, respectively. Outcome measures were applied at the onset of the intervention, at the end of counselling and three months after the last session. A focus group involving 17 participants was conducted to determine participants' perceptions of the intervention process and outcome. The findings support the empirical evidence on the effectiveness of life design group-based interventions to foster vocational identity, career adaptability and career decision-making self-efficacy. The focus group participants evaluated the intervention as useful by fostering reflexivity and a sense of direction. Overall, the findings suggest the relevance of life design practices in educational settings to foster reflexivity and, therefore, to facilitate students' career construction. The research implications of the findings are also discussed.

Keywords: Life design, vocational identity, career adaptability, reflexivity, adolescents

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1. Introduction

To facilitate the development, career interventions must consider the changing nature of work and the unpredictability of career paths. The route to follow is the execution of interventions built upon a new paradigm in which psychological and contextual differences can be considered (Duarte, 2018). Responding to these challenges, the Life Design paradigm (LD; Savickas et al, 2009) emphasizes the interpretative and interpersonal processes underlying vocational behaviour and career development. This basic idea provides a framework for LD practices structured around four pillars: (1) life-long, to support the continuous need of individuals to acquire the skills required to face career challenges; (2) holistic, to consider all career roles; (3) contextual, to attend to the singularity of each individual living in particular contexts; and (4) preventive, to anticipate the management of career barriers and at-risk situations. These core ideas led to career interventions fostering narratability and adaptability. Narratability is fundamental for individuals to construct their narrative identity, that is, “an autobiography that provides life with meaning and purpose” (Savickas, 2019a). Indeed, fostering narrative identity paves the way for the construction of a coherent sense of self, which is fundamental to strengthen an individual’s sense of security necessary to manage career challenges (Giddens, 1990). In turn, to foster career adaptability, which includes concern about the vocational future, control over the future, curiosity to explore possible selves and future scenarios, and confidence to pursue aspirations, it is also fundamental to manage the unpredictability of career transitions (Savickas, 2020).

Research on LD interventions has found evidence for their efficacy in group and one-to-one counselling (Cardoso & Duarte, 2021). However, there is a need for more research on the potential of narrative approaches to group interventions with adolescents. Research reveals that during narrative approaches to career counselling, adolescents aged from 14 to 16 years old have difficulty narrating self-experience (Cardoso et al., 2017). These findings are justified by developmental limitations in their capacity for autobiographical reasoning, which is fundamental to elaborating a continuous and coherent life narrative (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Hence, the main objective of the present study is to analyse the process and outcome of a group intervention based on LD practices in 9th grade students.

1.1. Facilitating adolescent’s vocational development

Vocational development is of great relevance to adolescents’ identity formation (Erikson, 1968). In the matrix of LD paradigms, facilitating the construction of career plans is a way to foster the self—organization necessary to project the self into numerous social roles (Savickas, 2011). In line with this, research has shown that individual and group LD practices are effective in fostering vocational identity (Cardoso & Sales, 2019), career decision-making difficulties (Barclay & Stoltz, 2015; Cardoso et al., 2016; Cardoso et al., 2017; Cardoso & Sales, 2019; Di Fabio & Maree, 2011; Obi, 2015), and career adaptability (Santilli et al., 2019). The positive effect of LD practices and other approaches to vocational development associated with academic success (Choi et al., 2015; Negru-Subtirica & Pop, 2016; Oliveira et al., 2017), well-being (Obi, 2015; Santilli et al., 2019), and distress (; Milot-Lapointe et al., 2019) also emerges. The findings also reveal that longer group interventions are more effective than those involving one or two sessions focused on school and occupational information or interest and aptitude test scores (Janeiro, et al., 2014; Schloss, 2011). Process research on vocational practices in general shows that good outcomes are related to written exercises that prescribe activities for clients, individualized interpretations and