

## CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO DIALOGICAL CAREER COUNSELLING IN VOCATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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**Abstract.** Constructivism and its dynamic nature from alternative approach in many parts of the world now become the traditional approach for individual career development and counselling, emphasizing his unique learning experience that is based on self-organizational activities for his goals of future life setting and achieving. As reveals studies of foreign scientists V.Peavy, M.Savickas, L.Nota in the U.S., W.Patton, M.McMahon in Australia, M.Kuijpers, F.Meijers in the Netherlands a constructivist approach to career counselling is beneficial, especially for social risk group of young people, which accounting for more than one-tenth of active employment of society. In order to young people including vocational secondary schools' students successfully develop their careers and obtain career management skills, it is necessary a support of systematic career development in different ways on competence-based and dialogue-oriented learning environments: exploring and developing themselves, exploring education and work opportunities as well as planning their career in a chosen profession. Therefore *aim of the study*: theoretically evaluated and justified a constructivist approach to the dialogical career counselling in vocational secondary schools. *Objectives*: 1) to determine the nature of constructivist approaches to career counselling; 2) to analyse relationship between the constructivist approach and dialogical career counselling in the career development; 3) to evaluate opportunities and action of constructivist approach in dialogical career counselling in vocational secondary schools.

**Keywords:** constructivist approach, dialogue, career counselling, vocational secondary education.

### Introduction

Now the dynamic context of the era in the world of work has changed people's understanding of career and its development. According to the scientists Amundson (2005), W. Patton and M. McMahon (2006) considers, the world of work is going through dramatic and irreversible changes. People change occupations and job at different phases of life and career choices is just one of the many challenging aspects of the individual confronted face to face in their life. Over time, career theory has expanded and offers new theories. Therefore now, as never before, these theories adapt the complex socio-economic backgrounds converging with that constructivist approach. Evaluating career counselling practice in 2004 the European Commission (Career Guidance: A Handbook ..., 2004) pointed out inefficiencies of career counselling in EU Member States, including inability to develop an individual career management skills, lack of cooperation between the interested parties; under-utilized information technology and other cost-effective counselling techniques, besides many of students of vocational education establishments received significantly less career support than general education students.

Author of this article studying experience of European countries (Kuijpers, Meijers, ..., 2011; Youth on the move, 2011) in the field of career counselling and developing support system concluded that the period from 2004 to the present has brought positive results - recognizing that dialogical counselling environment can develop, if school education is integrated career education. It disclose study results where the Dutch team of scientists (Career learning..., 2009) has defined a career dialogue in the vocational secondary schools as a conversation or discussion between the student and the trusted adult (ideally, in this case, if it had been a teacher, vice-director and/or school career counsellor), which explicitly discusses the importance of the experience gained by the student what has acquired the practical tasks at school and/or practice time outside of school. This conversation based on clear relationship between the students' experience which has gained into professional practice or labour market and developing of self-image and work identity. The researchers noted that it is important to promote student's internal dialogue focusing on construction of their personal meaning as well as to external dialogue in this process. The study results showed that career dialogue in the vocational

school and practical discussion firstly, promotes formation of three career competencies: 1) career reflection of the character and motivation, 2) career formation, - the work exploration and professional progress; 3) networking and development. The scientists suggested the use of these competencies in learning experience and specific career decision-making. Secondly, encouraged and promoted career dialogue allows greater impact on development of student career skills and work identity than personal qualities. It also pointed out the topicality of constructivist approach in career counselling in the learning environment and successfully operated as a system, by which result the researchers of Hague University (Career learning..., 2009) have come to the conclusion that 1) vocational secondary schools also perform guidance functions because essential attention is paid to students' career skills development and professional identity, 2) vocational training and learning environment is the best place where students acquire practical experience in professional training.

While in 2006 Latvia was developed Concept of Career Development Support System (MK rīkojums Nr.214, 2006) - which provides self-cognition, self-development, career exploration and career planning of vocational secondary schools' students (Karjeras izglītība..., 2006) - cannot be maintained that career education and guidance should be fruitful, because in generally implementation of career education in vocational secondary schools has not yet emerged as an integrated whole learning package, where each teaching staff is fulfilling their role. In schools where career education programme is implemented, measures being focused on the cognition of potential employment aspect. There is no sufficient contact with activities that promote motivation to learn, order to improve learning achievement and reduce the number of not graduated students. Guidance and counselling is the most organized for the groups, applying the "average" student, and these activities are often not very effective in risk groups and/or particularly gifted young people. Successful career development can occur under condition if students develop their career management skills in guidance of a qualified professional or tutor. But professional career counsellors are currently working only in a small number of vocational secondary schools.

In order to develop students' career management skills (*to identify and evaluate their interests, abilities, values; to work with information resources; to assess their compliance of abilities and opportunities; to find the necessary support; to develop policy options in their career planning; make decisions and to deal with uncertainty*), vocational secondary schools of Latvia should be built dialogical learning environment, which takes into account personal and social significance of students' diverse learning experience and the conversations and discussions going on career competencies-based learning environment. Therefore, in scientific article is to answer the following **questions**: *What is dialogical career counselling; what are its features, functions, principles? How a constructivist approach is influencing dialogical career counselling in vocational secondary schools?* **Aim of the study**: theoretically evaluated and justified a constructivist approach to the dialogical within career counselling in vocational secondary schools. **Objectives**: 1) to determine the nature of constructivist approaches to career counselling; 2) to analyse relationship between the constructivist approach and dialogical career counselling in the career development; 3) to evaluate opportunities and action of constructivist approach in dialogical career counselling in vocational secondary schools.

## Methodology

The scientific article is expanded theoretical discussion of the topicality of constructivist approach and uses career counselling in vocational secondary schools. The scientific article analysed 1) theoretical cognitions, 2) practical experience of the Dutch, British, American, Canadian and Australian scientists about the use of constructivist approaches to dialogical career counselling.

## Results and discussion

In the traditional approach of career counselling has been need to understand the context of time, training and work-life, which referred as career guidance. At that time which was the last century sixties, seventies, eighties the world of work essentially is provided a person with information about work of their lifetime, where issue of individual's career choices, typically dominated by school leaving age. In order to promote individual's career choice, knowledge of the world of work became essential part of the career counselling process. Therefore, such career counselling was mainly seen as

an objective cognitive problem-solving process in which, on the basis of knowledge about self and the world of work, was created the right career choice for individuals (International Handbook..., 2008). Traditionally, in Western countries, career guidance in education is mainly based on the feature-and-factor approach (Career Guidance: A Handbook ..., 2004; Sultana, 2004) and rooted in cognitions of J. L. Holland (1997), because those have had a profound impact on the form and content of an individual's career choice and decision-making how to identifying career behaviour. In this model, a good career choice was made when an individual's personality and talents coincided with the needed knowledge and skills of work-related issues. But now career counselling have more problems because there is encounter with the deeply personal trait interaction of individual's, which is difficult to understand before the individual is not revealed their philosophical beliefs and values (Guichard, Lenz, 2005). Over the past few decades has changed the social environment and the human "self" concept, which also affects the career counselling field. As pointed out by the Canadian scientist V. Peavy (2004), a major shift from the theory of *psychometric self-formed* by the changing factors to the *narrative self-made* up stories and meanings. Also, the dialogue is paying increasing importance, because, as one of the most valuable tools of the human mind, is sufficiently valuable for the development of the human personality in the multiple areas of his life, when it comes to his career. As written by H. J. M. Hermans and A. Hermans-Konopka (2010), it means learning process which shows innovative solutions and further develops the individual's current position, thinking about their place in society.

For the main quality characteristics of dialogue they considered: learning experiences and innovative solutions of self; it develops a dialogue space; it recognizes the inevitable misunderstandings of the roles and include changes not only from others but also other positions in the individual; it recognizes the importance of public power differences, reflecting the dominance of relative position of each individual self; it can raise with participation in the wider field of information and awareness; it shall benefit of the speaking silence. Both scientists believe that these dialogue functions are related to learning processes in society, where facing different social groups and individuals and that are not only among them, but also increasingly located within them.

Author of this article investigated the questions: *What is dialogical career counselling? What are its features, functions, principles?* And became acquainted with works of several careers scientists (Patton, McMahon, 2006; Guichard, Lenz, 2005; Savickas, 2002, 2005; Savickas, Nota, 2009, Peavy, 2004), which are focused a constructivist approach to convergence of the counselling process. They all claim that constructivism is based on the individual's cognition and interaction of perspective development that is formed on the person and environment interactions. Based on the theoretical findings of scientists, the author highlights the main elements that characterize the constructivist approach in career counselling process.

- *Individual /customer / help-seeker* as an active participant, which interacting with counsellor and social environment, looking for stability and construct a meaningful career development scenarios for a particular stage of life. A person itself is interested in gathering information and searching, in such way experiencing the positive reaction to the counselling in his career making and planning process.
- *Counsellor* is an inquisitive, interested person who is focused on the interview.
- *The counselling relationships* are focusing on the counsellor and client collaboration, interaction and mutual participation.
- *The counselling environment* is the place where a person's career is assessing through his stories and constructed meanings, individual's attitudes and feelings.
- *Changes of the recursive character* because both individual's personal life and it events, including education, as well as his autobiographical stories, based on the past experience, which is being constructed through a new learning experience, and as a result are changing individual's views/ opinions/thoughts. Recursive changes are related to the events of past, present and future prospects.
- *Holistic approach* which shows that individual's career development is seen through all of the aspects that make up his life: work, family, leisure, spirituality and citizenship - hence job does not exist in isolation from the rest of the individual's life. Important is the context where

individual situated with their own subjective experiences and feelings, which also help to construct his life and career.

- *Nature of knowledge and learning*, where the language is crucial to understand and create knowledge.
- *The own counselling process*, where client's expectations and hopes are changes in his career decision-making and implementation, and a counsellor *enter the customer's living space* and to co-construct his career.

Proponents of constructivism (Patton, McMahon 2006; Savickas, 2005; Peavy, 2004) believe that individual is an open system, which interacting with the environment, looking for stability through ongoing changes. For example, W. Patton and M. McMahon (2006) reveal five basic assumptions: 1) active agency, 2) order, 3) importance of the same individual, 4) socio-symbolic relatedness, 5) development of lifespan. Active agency implies that individual is employed extensively by own life construction. Most of these activities are focused on aligning of the individual's life process which is important point of reference to the individual personal development in order to operate social and symbolic systems in which he live an important question is *how all of the above activities have actuated the ongoing development process?* Because nature of their events reveals how take place continuously the dynamic change in designing of individual's personality and his life in further. According to scientists J. Guichard and J. Lenz (2005), this in turn leads to the research question, which is still used as the basis for the application and development of the profession: *What are the factors and processes affecting person's self-construction?* While it remains within, it is important to understand *how people choose a profession and how individuals construct their lives through their work?* And finally, it should answer to the question: *How the individual can best to develop own life in the community where he lives?* Initially, this question emphasizes the need to focus on activities in other areas of life, not just work and occupation.

A convergence of constructivist approach in career counselling occurs fundamental changes in its character (Savickas, 2005; Patton, McMahon, 2006): 1) from the features to the context, 2) from regulations /instructions to the process, 3) from linear causality to the non-linear dynamics, 4) from the scientific facts to the story of the actual situation, 5) from the description to the modelling. It changes individual's thinking and understanding of the things that helps to design their life. M. Savickas (2005) considers that constructivism represents epistemological view, which emphasizes the individual's self-organization and self-management. He argues that the individual is able to actively construct own real life and significant work-related positions if used narrative method in counselling process. M. Savickas (2002, 2005) as a founder of the Career Construction theory, has determined that this theory is positioning social constructivism. From a social constructivist perspective with a career represents perspective or dynamic of chance which imposes a meaningful role for the personal memories of the past, present experiences and hopes for the future when establishing a model that portrays areas of the individual's life. Thereby subjective career which manage, regulate and maintain an individual's professional behaviour, stemming from the making of active processes not through a prior disclosure of the facts. Constructivist perspective requires that individuals being successfully guided in constructing of meaningful system order to fully integrate their views of the past events, present circumstances and requirements' of future (Amundson, 2005). Furthermore, the career counsellors redirects own expert role as a trouble shooter and play a partner role who carefully listens to the client life stories; notes how stories are constructed, notes the boundaries and possibilities of other explaining of stories (Brott, 2001).

In turn, the authors of Systems Theory Framework (STF) of Career Development W. Patton and M. McMahon (1999, 2006) considers that every individual' learning containing the complex dynamic processes through which he or she is self-organizing and reorganizing until reaching equilibrium (Figure 1). This system is seen as purposeful, continuously self-developmental human system that interacts with other systems, such as family, work, educational institution. In the heart of the Systems Theory (ST) is a human individual system, which displays different deeply personal impact on his career, such as identity, ability, gender, interests. A person as a social being makes their own individual social systems, as well as wider environmental/ social system. At the same time the system is affected by many factors such as geographical location and political decisions that can significantly

influence his career. Systems theory shows career development as a dynamic process through influences of different processes. Each system is an open system because it is exposed to various external influences, as well as the same may affect other systems outside its borders.

This interaction is called *Recursive*, which is represented by broken lines, and has permeable in boundaries of each system. Their impact on individuals can change over time. The final process affects opportunities that are represented by the lightning bolts, reflecting the increased visibility of opportunities that has an important role in career development. All effects in the system within the time - past, present and future - and are inextricably linked (Patton, McMahon, 1999). Theory system for individual career development requires counsellors to build complex transition from individual's traditional world-view to the future view of the world with a different causal explanation. It means – to combine traditional counselling approach with the ability to think a lot circular than in linear terms.

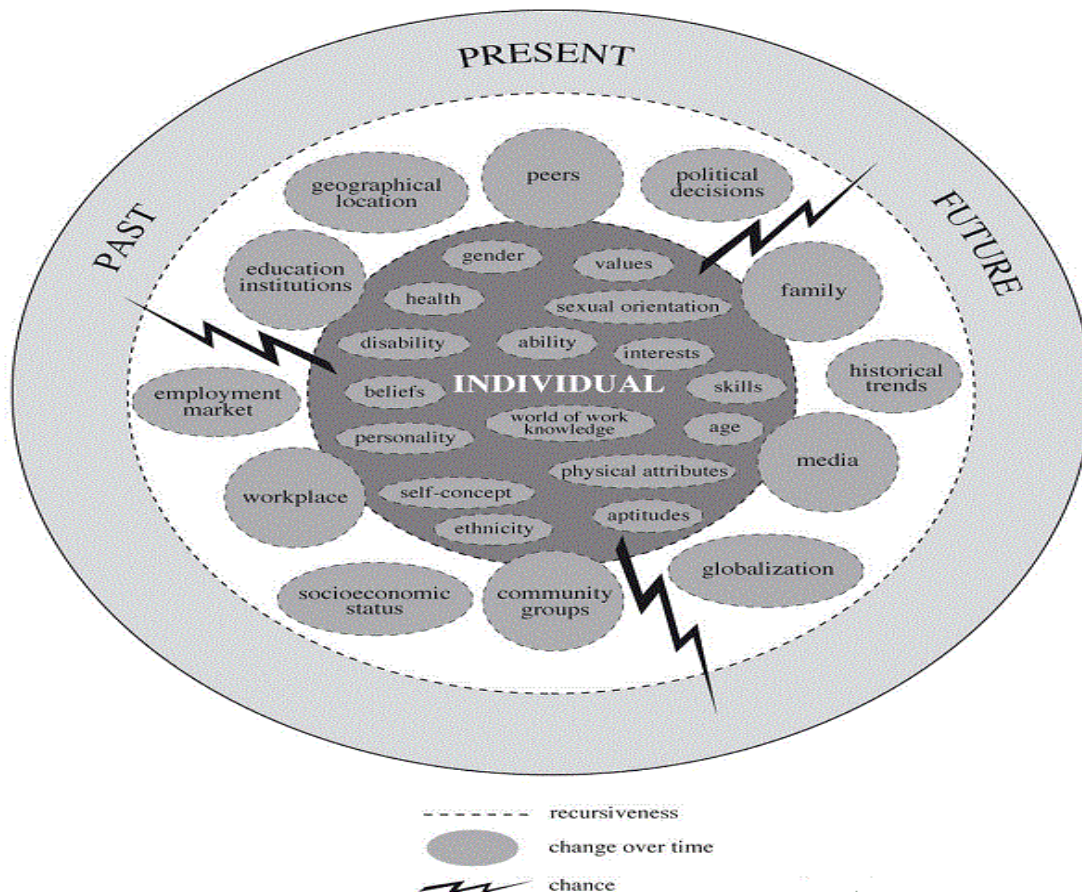


Figure 1. The dynamic process of individual in career counselling (Patton, McMahon, 1999).

Interaction between the counsellor and the client must be a system in which both client and career counsellor becomes as an element of system which is influencing each other. In interaction between these systems, the participants use a common language for the constructing career meaning that by V. Peavy (2004) considers becoming a key tool of counselling, reflecting the complexity of the counselling process and its place in the social and environmental-societal systems. Thereby the career counsellor's task is to understand the impacts of the client's career stories. Career counselling comprises an encountering of two separate systems, leading to the development of new systems. Each system boundaries must be sufficiently permeable in order to be better visible individualities of both the counsellor and the client's personality; in order to develop consultative relationship and dialogue with meaningful results, excluding the possible manipulation of one or the other counselling participants. Thereby, as noted by V. Peavy (2004) and W. Patton and M. McMahon (1999), it enables career counsellors to clearly understand the growth of a client's story through the influence of his own system in the context of past, present and future; how impacting unique model of his social system - how he is

linked with a number of social groups. In this way can make easier exploration of client's life story, including a meaning of career (education and work) in his own life and counselling process goes a more successfully.

The most popular founders and developers of dialogue – M. Bakhtin, M. Buber and N. C. Burbules theoretical findings are validated in constructivist approach of career counselling. Therefore, studying the dialogue in career counselling from the constructivist approach point of view, the author of this article puts forward the following assumptions.

*The dialogue based on communication, which includes an intelligent conversation and patient listening without interference.* It means that dialogue involves cooperation, at the same time tolerated disagreements, misunderstandings and incomprehension. Overcoming these circumstances, it appears on respect, features of trust and reconciliation that in the real dialogue' environment from both communication parties tend to grow and to strengthen. It is a form of dialectic between feeling and thinking that in increasing long-term development of the hermeneutical development leads to the particular line of thinking. Consequently important is the spirit of dialogue, which maintains between its members (Burbules, 1993). Dialogue is driven by the spirit of discovery. It is characterized by exploratory and questioning tone. It foresees commitment to communicative interaction, the desire to *look at things* in order to reach the meaningful understanding or reconciliation between the participants. It has the ability to keeping long-term multiple views, with a primary interest in creating the idea. As written by N.C. Buber (The Letters of Martin Buber..., 1996) it is an encounter with otherwise-minded, gaining new experience and view. Encounters with other and fusion of horizons of thought/ understanding are possible only if there is a principled desire to understand the other person. In dialogue situation, it is possible if we listen, and limit ourselves. Since the dialogue is both an individual and public activity, listening consists of two strands - listening to others and listening to own self. Therefore, in dialogue silence is as important as speaking. It requires thinking and understanding in order to be able to create new meanings. Also a philosopher H. G. Gadamer (1982, 62) considers that the dialogue is a conversation where using a metaphor of the horizon - *we each have our own horizon of understanding*, individuals gain an understanding of the essence of things from their beginnings in origin (sometimes called the dialogically structured understanding). It is a process where dialogue' partners opens one to another, truly recalling their view through their beliefs and values perspective, takes on a new internal thoughts space that has a different experience of an individual. It is the ability range of the vision (imagination) which includes anything that can be visible from a general point of view. With these prejudices and understanding the individual involves himself in what is said. In conversation everyone is trying to understand the other person talks horizon that is not his own, and may be different because the negotiations are tested through the prejudices and understanding.... *Only through search, we learn from others, and at the same time we claim to that it is can be critically biased... We are opening to the ability to understand what others say. Such openness is not designed as a mutual agreement, but rather as a dialogue back and forth. We are looking to open other people's points and horizon lines*, says H. G. Gadamer (1982, 78).

*A dialogue is a mutual and co-constructed, based on the consultant and the client shared activities - shared listening, shared thinking, feeling and shared a common design, common knowledge, coordination and consolidation of intelligence, creativity and wisdom, where each party of dialogue must play contribution towards a useful answer to the questions *What is happening in this particular situation?, What should I perceive, learn, know and do in order to move forward in life?, What can I do next?, How should I live my life?** It corresponds to M. Bakhtin (1984, 29) cognition about invaluable role of dialogue in existence of human as social beings; moreover, *the truth is born in dialogue*. It is a constructive cooperation based on common humanity and respect for the differences. This revealed dialogue anthropological aspect is expressed of M. Bakhtin (1984, 29) in the following words: *only in the interaction they open to each other, that is, man to man*. Through common operation of dialogue partners is clearly visible principle of the formation and development of the individual personality because personal self-reflection is able to emerge in interactions with others and build own *I* only if he puts towards to other *I*. This idea tune with the M. Buber, who say that *I* not in itself, is only *I* which are based in *I-You* and *I-Other* (The Letters of Martin Buber..., 1996, 16).

*The identity of individual and focus on helping himself* tune with the M. Bakhtin (1984) reported that self of the human is polyphonic. He emphasizes that it is appropriate to perceive the self of the human as a hotel with many rooms, each of which contains a voice from herself that never fully checking out at the hotel: *you can stand in the background, but you can always call the forefront, order to as a voice of experience talking again* (p. 16). Often the trust and responsiveness of the fully dialogue affecting individual as the seeker becomes more focused on helping himself and basically says, *I took part in valuable and self-identifying conversation*, or even better, *I did it myself*. The researchers of constructivist approach (Peavy, 2004; Savickas, 2002, 2005; Paton, Mc Mahon, 1999; 2006) points out that the *self* of the human is multiple, co-constructive, and narrative and in largely linked with relationships. And it occurs under the condition in which an individual's life to get some experience and a variety of social roles helps to discover his multidimensional *self* on a dialogue-based consulting environment.

*The need for a new vocabulary* in order to understand the evolution and functioning of the self of human and his identity and community has emerged. As written by V. Peavy (2004, 14) order to understand human behaviour and social dynamics, the concepts of *narrative, symbolic coordination, self-construction, life area attitudes, ethical assumptions, the mood and creation of meaning* are likely to be more useful than the concepts as a personality variable factors, characteristics, classification and behaviour. He points out that a person's life area of thoughts, feelings and actions can also be seen in the context of linguistic, rather than focus only on visible behaviour ... *We can talk about local and cultural knowledge and how such knowledge consists of people's attitudes towards life* (Peavy, 2004, 6). Also, one of the essential categories in the development of M. Bakhtin (1984) dialogue is *language*, because with its help formed dialogue and understanding inside it. Another category is a *voice* that represents the specific socio-ideological position, conflicting juxtaposition, which includes the same core of the language with all the changes in the historical development of communication. And another category is *understanding* as a third of the M. Bakhtin (1984) dialogue categories and as post modernist discourse. He recognizes that only talking and making conversation can create mutual understanding and coexistence among participants in the dialogue. At the same time, the text becomes a subject of scientific research; it may not be the subject of dialogue. Only mutual speaking concerns to the subsistence of epistemological principle of M. Bakhtin dialogue. Therefore V. Peavy (2004) cognition can be acceptable that the words are the tools for the construction of life and living. It is important, from any vocabulary of an individual chooses their instruments.

## Conclusions

Dialogical career counselling describe conversation or discussion among the involved actors/individuals of counselling process, where occurs the meeting with other ways of thinking, attitudes and understanding, where appears the following change of identity of the customer's as a help seeker; obtained a new experience and perspective; the transition from uncertainty to certainty in the setting and achievement of the career goals, as well as meaningful life designing; the participants come together on changed thought process and actions. Constructivist approach to career counselling provided the following.

- Rapidly changing socio-economic context and the various dynamic processes in a society that requires every individual to realize himself as a unique self-organizational and self leading personality with the flexibility of thinking, adaptation and the desire to continuously educate for the successful construction and developing their careers.
- The individual's stories of the actual situation of career problems because the way he speaks, talks, writes and creates texts reveal his personal identity interests, needs, values and beliefs of the past, present and future perspective. It can be done in case of listening to the discussion partner and listening to himself;
- Unpredictability and non-linearity of the different career scenarios and modelling of situation because an individual as a seeker acting well targeted and continuously self-human developmental system that interacts with other systems.

In order to act dialogically within career counselling using constructivist approach to secondary vocational education, calls for dialogue or conversation between the student and the trusted adults –

teacher of the group, subjects' teachers, supervisor of practice, vice director and / or school career counsellor - which is based on mutual interactions that encourage students to internal dialogue, focusing on the construction of his personal interest and meaning constructing, as well as to external dialogue that promotes reflection on their learning motivation, job research and professional progress and networking for their careers support.

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