

Beyond Formalism: Building a differentiated career teaching Model for private colleges and universities that aligns with the workplace

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Abstract: Career education in private colleges has long been plagued by formalism, and problems such as homogeneity of courses, lagging content, and single evaluation have weakened the effect of students' career preparation. This study takes the micro-problems in the classroom as a breakthrough point, proposes a differentiated teaching model oriented towards career connection, introduces the OBE result-oriented concept, builds a systematic analysis framework from three core dimensions of goal reconstruction, process reengineering, and evaluation innovation, and forms a cyclically optimized teaching loop. Combining the advantages of the flexible system of private colleges, further explore the specific paths of deep integration of industry and education and embedding of resources between schools and enterprises, and ultimately provide a systematic solution that is both targeted and operational for the career education reform of similar private colleges in China.

Keywords: Private colleges and universities; Career teaching model; Differentiated teaching; Career connection

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Introduction

In recent years, the rate of career courses offered and the allocation of teachers in private colleges have been gradually improved, but students' career confusion has not been effectively alleviated. The neat and standardized career planning in the classroom contrasts sharply with the difficulty of clearly presenting one's strengths in job hunting, reflecting the deep erosion of career education by formalism. Formalism is manifested in three disconnections: the textbook cases are seriously disconnected from the real workplace, classroom planning cannot be transformed into interview competitiveness, and the school's alumni resources remain idle for a long time, resulting in a lack of vivid samples in teaching. The continuous increase in teaching investment has not led to a simultaneous improvement in students' career readiness. The underlying contradiction is that the standardized teaching model is difficult to adapt to the highly differentiated career demands of students in private colleges. Therefore, how to break free from the constraints of formalism and integrate workplace logic into the entire teaching process is the core question of this study. Theoretically, this study introduces differentiated teaching concepts into career education, supported by the OBE outcome-oriented theory, and builds an analytical framework around the three interlinked dimensions of goal setting, process implementation, and evaluation feedback to enrich the localized expression of career education theory. In practice, focus on the front line of the classroom, provide implementable teaching improvement plans, and offer practical references for curriculum reform in similar institutions.

1. Typical problems in career classrooms in Private colleges

1.1 Textbook cases lag behind real workplace conditions

Most of the career planning textbooks currently in circulation focus on traditional industries such as manufacturing, finance, and education, and the job descriptions are mostly centered around the hierarchical management model of large enterprises. But what students see on recruitment apps are emerging positions such as live-streaming operators, private domain conversions, AI trainers, and drone pilots, which also involve remote collaboration, project-based order taking, and flexible switching across multiple platforms. Textbooks present a fixed and unchanging picture of the workplace, while online recruitment platforms show a rapidly evolving and constantly changing real workplace ecosystem. This obvious misalignment leads to a direct problem: Even after students complete their career courses, their understanding of the current professional world is not updated; instead, they are confined to outdated occupational classification systems by the textbooks.

1.2 Classroom planning is difficult to translate into job-hunting skills

There is a common scenario in career classes where students complete the Holland Career Assessment, carefully write down the SWOT analysis report, and then submit a complete five-year career plan. The entire process seems complete, and the relevant documents are also very complete. But when these students walk into a job fair or sit in an interview room and are asked about their core competencies, their responses are often vague and lack focus. They neither precisely correspond to the recruitment requirements of the target position nor have enough convincing details to support them. The crux of the matter is that the training in writing plans focuses more on the narrative consistency of the content, while the interview dialogue requires job seekers to be able to immediately extract their own strengths, respond logically and clearly, and achieve a precise match with the interview context. The gap in ability between the two cannot be bridged simply by completing a planning document.

1.3 Idle alumni resources and lack of vivid samples in the classroom

Private colleges and universities send a large number of graduates to various industries every year. These alumni are widely distributed in enterprises of different sizes and various diversified industries in the region, forming a natural network of career information and practical resources. But in the actual career classroom teaching, alumni resources are rarely systematically introduced into the teaching process. Occasionally, outstanding alumni return to school to give lectures, but mostly in the form of one-way presentation on stage and listening off stage, with no follow-up interaction after the lecture and no deep integration with the course content. More commonly, students have little understanding of the jobs their seniors are doing, the career paths they have chosen, and the real challenges they have encountered in their career development. The career experiences of alumni, which are supposed to be the closest and most credible teaching material to current students, have been left idle and wasted for a long time. This results in students only being able to obtain some general industry descriptions from the Internet, lacking real career samples around them that can be referred to and questioned in depth.

2. Institutional Logic of Differentiated Career Teaching in Private colleges

2.1 The differentiated space provided by the autonomy of running schools

Compared with public institutions, private institutions have greater autonomy in terms of curriculum design, faculty recruitment, and the use of funds. Career courses can adjust their syllabuses without going through multiple levels of approval, and their teaching plans can quickly adapt to changes in industry development. This short decision-making process and low trial-and-error cost leave ample buffer space for exploring differentiated teaching. If a private college wants to add a business practice module or optimize the teaching evaluation method within one semester, it will face relatively less procedural resistance. The flattening of the organization further amplifies this advantage. The communication process between department heads and front-line teachers is simple, and the time cost from proposing ideas to implementing teaching innovations is much lower than that of public universities with complex departmental systems.

2.2 The circular logic of demand diagnosis and resource matching

Differentiated teaching is not a one-time solution. A dynamic cycle system should be established, including the diagnosis of freshmen 'enrollment needs, the intention of major diversion in the third year, and the feedback on employment after graduation. Teaching plans should be adjusted in a timely manner based on the results of each round of diagnosis, and resources should be reallocated accordingly. For example, when students have a higher willingness to pursue a bachelor's degree, add the module of undergraduate major cognition and exam preparation planning. When emerging industries expand in the region, relevant enterprise recruitment data and skill requirements are introduced. The centralized decision-making model of private colleges can respond quickly and adjust perfectly to meet the operational requirements of this circular mechanism.

2.3 Three key dimensions of institutional supply

The flexible curriculum system is the primary support for achieving differentiated teaching. The curriculum of career courses should reserve a certain number of replaceable teaching modules, and different professional groups can incorporate industry-related content that is relevant to their own specialties based on their own characteristics, without the need for a uniform set of fixed teaching plans to be used throughout the school. The flexible evaluation system is the core supporting guarantee, and the assessment method should shift from a single submission of the plan to a comprehensive evaluation of the completion of multi-node tasks, allowing students to present their learning outcomes in various forms such as project reports, interview video analysis, and enterprise feedback forms. The collaborative governance structure provides an effective channel for multi-party participation in teaching, including enterprise representatives, alumni representatives, and heads of secondary colleges to join the teaching steering committee for regular review of the matching degree of the curriculum with industry demands. Only when these three dimensions work together and cooperate with each other can differentiated teaching be elevated from the personal experience of teachers to a sustainable and scalable organizational behavior of the institution.

3.The logical framework of differentiated career teaching models

3.1 Shift from standardized supply to differentiated construction

The core assumption of the logic of standardized teaching is that students' career needs are roughly the same, so the teaching process can be replicated in batches. The reality is the opposite. The student body in private colleges is relatively complex, and there are significant differences in students' career planning: some students plan to pursue a bachelor's degree for further studies, some aim for technical positions, and some tend to start their own businesses or work as freelancers. If career teaching ignores such significant differences, it will inevitably be regarded as an insignificant credit course by students and fail to play a practical role. The core requirement of differentiated construction is to recognize the stratified nature of students' needs, abandon uniform teaching progress and fixed teaching content, and design teaching content and links in a targeted manner around the core career direction of each type of students. This shift is not a simple negation of standardized teaching, but a shift of standards from the input to the output of teaching - the teaching process can be flexible and diverse, but the learning outcomes that students ultimately need to achieve must be clear and definite.

3.2 An analysis of the appropriateness of the OBE concept

The core proposition of outcome-based education (OBE) is to design the teaching process and content in reverse from the expected learning outcomes. This idea aligns well with the core goal of career education, after all, career courses do not focus on memorizing theoretical knowledge, but on developing the professional competence that students can demonstrate in real professional situations. Introducing the OBE concept into career education in private colleges means first clarifying the list of vocational abilities that students should possess upon graduation, and then breaking down the course modules and matching appropriate teaching methods and means accordingly. The clarification of goals itself has the effect of countering formalism. It can force teaching to shift from a vague overview of knowledge to a precise delivery of results. There will be a fundamental shift in the design logic of career courses, no longer with "what has been taught" as the end point of teaching, but with "what transferable vocational skills students have taken away" as the criterion.

3.3 Goal-process-evaluation as a trinity

The effective advancement of differentiated teaching cannot do without the support of a closed-loop system; otherwise, the differences will only remain in local adjustments and it will be difficult to form systematic synergy and long-term effects. At the goal level, based on regional industrial demands and the direction of student employment diversion, set stratified and classified outcome indicators, and clearly define different training priorities for students in the three categories of further education, employment, and entrepreneurship. Stratification is not

labeling but providing growth challenges that are in line with their closest development zones. At the process level, the core is to introduce real workplace scenarios, transforming enterprise written test questions, business records, etc. into classroom materials. Real and rough workplace materials are more valuable for teaching than elaborate and fictional simulated scenarios and can help students adapt to the pace of the workplace in advance. At the evaluation level, build a dynamic learner profile based on process data, abandon one-off assessment, and record students' output at each stage in the growth file to form a coherent and traceable trajectory of ability improvement, so that evaluation can truly play the role of promoting reflection and improvement.

4.Key measures to promote the effective implementation of career classrooms

4.1 Replace outdated textbook cases with career micro-research

Each semester, teachers assign students three core tasks: interviewing three real job practitioners, dissecting the implicit requirements in three job postings, and completing an Open Day observation of a company. Students return to the classroom with first-hand materials they have collected, exchange the information they have obtained in group discussions, and compare the differences in employment standards and job requirements among different companies. The outdated cases in the textbook are no longer the starting point of teaching; the career-related materials independently excavated by students are the core foundation of classroom teaching. This teaching approach can not only directly address the mismatch between textbooks and the real workplace, but also train students' practical ability to obtain and analyze career information and enhance their career awareness.

4.2 Fill the gap in ability through mock interviews and reviews

Transform the second half of the class into a simulated recruitment scene, specifically inviting corporate HR or alumni with rich interview experience to serve as interviewers. Students take turns to participate in the mock interview, while the rest of the students act as observers, recording the logic of the interviewees' answers, body language, and time management in detail. Immediately after the mock interview, go to the review workshop, where typical interview clips are played frame by frame and analyzed to break down the probing intentions behind the interviewers' questions and transform general questions that students can't clearly state their strengths into micro-skills that can be trained specifically. From the career planning book in the classroom to the actual performance in the interview, it is through this repeated practice and precise feedback that the gap in ability is gradually filled.

4.3 Incorporate the list of corporate problems into the classroom discussion

Collect real written test questions, interview questions and business scenario questions that occur during the recruitment process of enterprises, and compile them into a list of questions for classroom discussion. A number of questions are randomly selected in each class. First, students analyze them independently in groups to explore the logic behind the questions set by the enterprises, then try to construct a complete response framework, and finally conduct group evaluations based on the scoring criteria provided by the enterprises. Under this teaching model, students are no longer passive listeners of knowledge but actively participate in thinking and repeatedly practice analyzing and solving problems from the perspective of the enterprise's employment. This can also effectively make up for the hollowing out of teaching content caused by teachers' detachment from the front line of the workplace, making classroom teaching more targeted and practical.

4.4 Activating potential resources by relying on alumni career profiles

Systematically organize the career information scattered among alumni across various industries into searchable and reusable alumni career profiles, which include core information such as job titles, enterprise types, core job contents, career advancement paths, and skill lists required for the positions. These career files are categorized and archived by professional groups, allowing students to access them independently based on their own majors and career intentions. At the same time, teachers, in light of the course progress, select the career experiences of some

alumni as classroom analysis materials and invite alumni who are relevant to the current course theme in a timely manner for online Q&A sessions to achieve real-time interaction. In this way, alumni are no longer occasional guests on the podium, but become the providers of teaching content that continuously provide fresh materials for the class, and students can also obtain real career samples around them that can be questioned and referred to, further clarifying their own career development directions.

5. Conclusions

Starting from the micro problems of career classrooms in private colleges, this study dissects the specific crusts of formalism in teaching practice layer by layer. The study found that the decline in classroom effectiveness is not due to a single factor, but rather a mutually reinforcing dilemma formed at three levels: the slow update of teaching content, the lack of paths for ability transformation, and the insufficient activation of school-based resources. In response to the above problems, the study, on the premise that the institutional flexibility of private colleges can support differentiated exploration, constructed a teaching model with OBE result-oriented as the core and covering the entire chain of goal-process-evaluation, and proposed four action strategies that can be embedded in the daily classroom.

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