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LIFE DESIGN FOR EDUCATION MAJORS: MERGING COLLEGE, CAREER, AND LIFE

RACHEL DURBIN

HONORS PROJECT

Submitted to the Honors College
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Life Design for Education Majors: Merging College, Career, and Life

Introduction

In recent years, Life Design has become an integral component to the Bowling Green State University (BGSU) learning community. The Life Design program encourages students to be mindful and intentional about college and life decisions in order to create for themselves a fulfilling college experience and life by challenging students to find parallels between various elements of their education, such as curricular and co-curricular opportunities. Life Design entails students thinking critically about their future in such a way that fosters purpose and fulfillment in not just a career, but also in life (Bowling Green State University, 2022). Life Design includes a series of mindset changes, or “reframes” as they are referred to in the book “Designing Your Life” by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans (2019), that allow students to use college as a way to grow in all aspects of their life, whether it be academically, professionally, or personally. While it is a new initiative on campus, the origins of the concepts are ancient and allow for a more holistic approach to the college experience that includes more than just taking classes. One of BGSU’s stated missions is redefining student success, which includes promoting life success among their students by fostering meaningful lives in addition to academic success (Bowling Green State University, 2021). Design thinking is a thought process that enables students to create a college experience that is not only fulfilling, but one that also prepares them for the unknown challenges of the future (Bowling Green State University, 2022). In particular, design thinking can help a student in the Education program at BGSU explore careers outside of their major that still align with their values and purpose. Colleges across the country must provide their students not just opportunities to excel academically, but also opportunities to discover and create lives that are well-lived and joyous (Brown, 1972). First-year success

courses, like Life Design at BGSU, have been found to improve the lives of students and lead to growth (Choate & Smith, 2003).

One shortcoming of the Life Design program at BGSU is its exclusion of certain majors and programs. Due to limited funding and resources, Life Design and Design Coaches are only available to certain majors (Bowling Green State University, 2022). Of these excluded majors, Education students do not have access to the University's Life Design resources. This poses a problem for BGSU Education students who may decide they no longer wish to teach in a classroom yet need guidance on how to navigate a life after college in a career outside of their major. They are not familiar with design thinking and the life planning mindsets that are introduced in the Life Design program that can aid in planning a life after graduation. BGSU has a nationally ranked program for Education studies that excels in preparing students for a career in the classroom, yet there are still students who choose to not enter the field despite their teaching and education related coursework (Bowling Green State University, 2022). In general, only 27% of college graduates end in a career that corresponds to their major (Burnett & Evans, 2019). According to preliminary data from BGSU's Adolescent to Young Adult (AYA) Education program, Art Lewandowski, an assistant teaching professor at BGSU's College of Education, states:

From preliminary program viability review data, we are seeing that on average, 78% of the teacher candidates that enter the AYA program with 60 institutional credits, graduate from the program. From this, we could argue that roughly 22% of the students, admitted into our AYA program in the Junior year, leave the program. This doesn't account for those students who begin in EDHD their freshman year and leave the major before program admittance in the Junior year. (personal communication, April 7, 2022)

This data is preliminary data and only accounts for students in the AYA program that stayed in the program up to their junior year. Although it lacks data from other Education programs or other class standings, it still provides evidence that there are students in the Education program at BGSU that decide to leave the program and could benefit from additional career and life planning resources, such as Life Design. Currently, BGSU does not have any programs and resources for Education students who do not wish to enter the Education field post-graduation. Instead, these students enter the workforce with little preparation for a career other than teaching. These students may struggle to find a career that is fulfilling and meaningful without the proper tools and resources, which directly conflicts with the overall mission of BGSU. This paper will address the responsibilities a college has in regard to the lives of their students, the usefulness of life/career planning classes, the tenants of Life Design, and a possible resolution to the current issue that BGSU Education students face without access to Life Design.

Research Questions

For my research, I investigated the role design thinking can play in a student's university experience. There are many components involved in a college experience and its translation into career navigation. I explored the following questions. First, is a holistic approach to learning beneficial in the lives of college students? Second, how can incoming college students make mindful and intentional choices regarding their major and career while utilizing design thinking strategies? Third, how can students apply the knowledge and skills obtained in the classroom to their future career? I researched and presented mindset changes or "reframes" that can help students take a more holistic approach to higher education to include personal reflection and experiences outside of their coursework. I then took my findings and applied them to Education students. I created a Canvas course to expose Education students at BGSU to Life Design and

offer a learning experience that is personal to the life of each student by providing opportunities for practical application of the content to the student's life. I also researched best teaching practices and how some of the elements of Life Design, such as the importance of values, are effective practices. My first and second research questions were investigated through research, and my project is in response to the third question. In summary, my project and research are centered around how Education students can take concepts of Life Design and create a fulfilling college experience and life whether or not they choose a career in a classroom.

Literature Review

The Life Design initiative on BGSU's campus was implemented with the intention of giving students the tools for design thinking for application to their own lives to create consistency with their major and future career in order to achieve happiness and fulfillment (Bowling Green State University, 2022). The program was created to supplement the academic advising available that focuses on ensuring student success in the classroom, while the Life Design program focuses on discovering personal meaning and applying it to experiences during and after college (Bowling Green State University, 2022). The initiative borrows ideas from the book "Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-lived and Joyful Life" by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans. The program allows students to use concepts and mindsets from the book and Stanford's Design Lab to think critically about their college experience and life (Bowling Green State University, 2022). The Life Design program at BGSU is a direct response to the university's mission for redefining student success (Bowling Green State University, 2021).

One specific way BGSU is addressing their mission is through the Life Design classes taught by students' assigned Design Coaches. Classes that promote consistency in life and career have been proven beneficial to college students. Choate and Smith (2003) concluded in a study

on first-year student success classes, that career and life planning classes do in fact improve the personal lives of students' wellness. This supports BGSU's Life Design initiative, but also creates a gap between those students enrolled in the program and those that are not. This gap is the issue I plan to address regarding BGSU's Education students. Johnson and colleagues (2002) found that, "...the career and life planning course, which was based on a holistic trait and factor approach, decreased college students' career indecision and increased their vocational identity and career decision-making self-efficacy" (p.11). Although not required on all college campuses, career/life planning courses help students choose and be more confident in a career choice.

The concept of a holistic college experience is causing universities to act. A holistic approach to education includes the development of career/life skills in addition to creating career/life plans rather than just making a fixed choice regarding occupations, which is the traditional method (Johnson et al., 2002). The main difference is the fluidity of skills that a holistic approach offers students. The best learning environment for college students includes both curricular and extracurricular opportunities to achieve student development and success (Brown, 1972). Design thinking calls for just that: creating a life balanced among work, play, love, and health (Burnett & Evans, 2019). By implementing design thinking on a college campus, universities are satisfying the need for extracurricular development and can take it a step further by applying that extracurricular/personal development to the curricular development of each student. This may be illustrated by an establishment of personal values or the involvement in student organizations that align with those personal values, which can then turn into supplemental learning opportunities for the college major that accompanies experiences to enhance and further future careers.

The idea of merging all areas of one's life to be coherent is not a new concept. In fact, it comes from Greek philosopher Zeno and his idea of stoicism. Stoicism offers the notion that happiness can be achieved through consistency in one's life (Rist, 1977). While stoicism is an ancient philosophy, it is also a backbone of Life Design. Design thinking calls for an evaluation of values and in particular, a confirmation that one's work-view and life-view align (Burnett & Evans, 2019). This alignment comes from thinking critically about values. By providing students an opportunity to discover personal and professional values, a starting point for decision making is formed. When evaluating life decisions, career paths, etc., students can turn to their values to help guide them and provide their life a sense of coherency (Burnett & Evans, 2019).

Identifying personal values is a critical discovery college students must make before entering the workforce. An individual's values are created based on life experiences and effect how that person will act in the workplace (Judge & Bretz, 1992). The work values of an individual are influential when seeking information regarding a job, and the alignment of work values with the organization's values can be more important than pay and promotional opportunities (Judge & Bretz, 1992). When looking for jobs, individuals place merit on the values of the organization. Parallelism in values is a major factor in job choice and workplace fit for the job seeker (Judge & Bretz, 1992). Therefore, it is imperative that students discover their values before seeking a job. If students are not aware or familiar with their own values, they may enter a job or work environment that is not compatible with the individual. Students who are confident in their values can seek jobs from organizations that have corresponding values. In relation to stoicism, an alignment of life and work values can lead to happiness and fulfillment, and the additional alignment to organizational values can provide increased job certainty

(Burnett & Evans, 2019). Additionally, if a student chooses not to pursue a career in Education, they can use their values to make an intentional decision regarding their occupation.

College is an experience and not just the means to earn a degree, but the not all current students in college view their learning in this way. For example, recent generations attend college for its extrinsic rewards, such as career-oriented goals like more earning potential in the future, rather than also seeing its intrinsic rewards, such as self-discovery and growth (Twenge & Donnelly, 2016). Universities are challenged with the task of providing students with mindsets and skills that will prepare and fulfill them for the future personally and professionally.

How can universities, like BGSU, achieve their goal of a holistic college experience? In many different ways.

The first way universities can foster a holistic learning experience is by motivating their students with implementing inquiry-based learning into the holistic curriculum. Inquiry based learning is when students discover meaningful knowledge through the use of asking questions and analyzing answers, which has also been shown to be a more effective method of teaching (Bayram et al., 2013). When inquiry-based learning is used, students have more motivation, are more engaged, and are more personally invested compared to students who do not learning with this style of teaching (Saunders-Stewart et al., 2015). In addition, when paired with technology, such as online learning, inquiry-based instruction can lead to curiosity (Batdi et al., 2018). When prompting students in college to think about ideas outside of academics, such as personal values or life aspirations, an inquiry-based learning approached can be used to encourage motivation that is not already there. Secondly, it is imperative to cater to the needs of the students. Students tend to prefer independent learning and view their peers and instructors as a resource for additional input after trying to solve an issue on their own first (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). For

universities, this means there must be ample resources available for their students but not forced upon them. Finally, another important aspect to know about the current generation in college is the role technology has played and is playing on their lives. There is a sense of comfort and familiarity that comes with technology, so the utilization of it is not only preferred, but also necessary (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Although these aspects may seem like a lot to tackle in one learning experience, they are necessary when creating a learning experience that is catered towards the students. For my applied project, I chose to use inquiry-based learning to ensure that that these learning needs of the students were met.

All of these teaching strategies are effective when engaging college students, but the belief that college is just a means of furthering a career or gaining more learning potential is still a mindset of the current students. If students truly care about career readiness, then a holistic college experience will prepare them more adequately compared to just classes and course work alone. Employers are not just looking for a candidate with a certain degree, they are also looking for soft skills, and problem solving is one of those top skills (Pierce, 2019). A holistic college experience, in particular the Life Design program at BGSU, fosters problem solving and critical thinking skills. It is important to communicate to students that in order to succeed professionally, they also must succeed personally.

At the core of Life Design, and at the forefront of many employers, is the skills of critical thinking and problem solving. There is a relationship between creativity and problem identification (Reiter-Palmon & Robinson, 2009). Problem identification refers to the knowledge of the scope of the problem by the problem solver (Reiter-Palmon & Robinson, 2009). When individuals understand the depth of a problem, they are able to think creatively about a solution. Problem identification is not merely being presented with a problem, but it is the discovering of

the problem (Runco & Chand, 1995). By discovering the problem, the individual is motivated to learn more, thus widening the scope of knowledge of the problem (Runco & Chand 1995). This widened scope can lead to higher creativity in solutions compared to being presented the problem. In relation to Life Design, problems that arise in a student's life and career are not one size fits all, instead they are individual problems must be discovered by each student. While these skills are important for all students and all occupations, they are especially necessary for Education students, in particular, those students who decide they no longer wish to be a teacher. By critically thinking about their career and utilizing problem identification skills, Education students may discover that they do not want to teach in a classroom like they originally thought. By introducing Life Design and the idea of problem identification early in a student's college experience, it may give the student an earlier indicator that they do not want to be a teacher while also providing insight to another occupation they may enjoy. The applied activity portion of this project aims to do that. Problem identification leads to greater creativity that is beneficial in life and in the workplace.

A major component of Life Design is creating your own experience by trying things and increasing opportunities. Burnett and Evans (2019) suggest that dream jobs are not found, but instead, they are created by the individual. Problem identification can aid individuals in creating their dream job by discovering problems with their current job and then solving them in creative ways steer them in the direction of their "dream job." Tims, Derks, and Bakker (2016) found that employees who proactively made changes to aspects of their jobs are more likely to improve job fit and find meaningfulness in their work. When problem identification is applied to the workplace, individuals give themselves the opportunity to creatively alter their job into a fulfilling job. This is important for Education students who decide to teach and those who choose

a different occupation. Education students that go on to teach can make proactive changes in their work to make their job more enjoyable, even if they are not teaching their desired grade level or subject. For those Education students that do not teach, they can use these techniques to discover potential career paths. Once a student realizes they do not want to teach, they can begin trying things and taking advantage of experiences that they may have not done previously. These new experiences can help the student make discoveries about potential occupations.

Additionally, once they find a career that is suitable, they can work to identify problems and try new things to make their work experience even more enjoyable.

Activity

For my activity, I have decided to create an applied creative piece. Currently, BGSU does not have the capacity to allow all students, in particular Education students, to enroll in a Life Design course and have an assigned Design Coach to meet with regularly (Bowling Green State University, 2022). I would like to create an interactive learning experience for the students that do not currently play an active role in the Life Design program. BGSU uses the learning system Canvas as the mode of delivery for all classes. In order to remain uniform with the rest of the university and to promote participation, the learning experience will be created within Canvas. Unlike other BGSU courses, the Canvas course will be a standalone module, separate from the BGSU sponsored shells. This will allow other Education students at different institutions to access the resource, along with providing me the ability to take the course with me to graduate school and beyond to reach a wider audience. The goal of the Canvas course is for Education students to think critically about their major and intended career. Students will examine how teaching aligns with their values, in addition to exploring other occupations, both in and out of the field of Education. This project will act as an introduction to design thinking so that students

can implement concepts without having to attend a class or read the book. In total, the course should take around 2-3 hours to complete.

Methodology

For the applied portion of this project, I have constructed a standalone Canvas course. Thus, it can be implemented into current BGSU classes since the university uses Canvas as their learning platform. Because it is a standalone course, it can also be accessed by people outside of the university for use. While creating the course, I utilized inquiry-based instruction techniques. Especially while using an online learning platform, these techniques were used to cultivate motivation, creativity, engagement, and a personal investment among users (Saunders-Stewart et al., 2015; Batdi et al., 2018). The course is comprised of three modules, all of which ask an overarching question and include reflection questions in the activities to foster deeper thinking¹ (Bayram et al., 2013). I started each module with a question, planned the assessment, and then created the lesson in accordance with the Understanding by Design framework (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). The first module is an introduction to Life Design and its tenants. Much of the content directly corresponds to ideas in the book *Designing your life: how to build a well-lived, joyful life* by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans (2019). In this module, students learn important concepts of Life Design, read an excerpt from the book, and apply the concepts to their own lives. The second is a values-based module to guide students in discovering their personal values. In accordance with Judge and Bretz's (1992) findings on the importance of values in the workplace, the second module focusing on values exploration. The second module guides students through identifying their own life and work values. The final module is a culmination of

¹ See Appendix

knowledge where students are asked to apply concepts of Life Design to think critically about their future and career. Students think about their values and purpose in life and apply what they discovered to create a life plan as a teacher, with a career in Education but not as a teacher, and with a career completely outside of the field of Education. By combining aspects of inquiry-based learning with Life Design and the importance of values, the course allows for personal application to the futures of the students.

Conclusion

The applied portion of this project begins to solve the challenges education students at BGSU face when navigating through a life after graduation. While this project is a start, it is not the end; there are several limitations and areas for further research. One major component of Life Design is collaboration (Burnett & Evans, 2019). Due to the asynchronous design of the course, collaboration and peer interaction is lacking. The absence of peer and mentor communication is the largest shortcoming of this project. The audience for this project is focused on education students, thus, further application and projects could include other disciplines with specialized degrees. One personal limitation of this project was the constant change that occurred throughout the course of the year. The focus, audience, and overall goals were constantly evolving. Because of constant change, I was constrained by time. Finally, in the values discovery activity, there is little account for desired values versus real values for the individuals. In the values discovery module of the course, values are determined based on self-assessment and not actions, which could lead to an inaccurate account of the student's real values as opposed to values they desire within themselves. Implications for further additions to the module could include more in-depth value exploration with assessments to account for one's actions when determining values. Furthering this project could also include interviews from current and graduating students,

discussions with BGSU Education faculty, and observations of this project being directly imbedding in a BGSU Education course. The ultimate goal for this project is the implementation at BGSU within the various Education programs. With the approval of the respective departments, this project would expose students to design thinking who would have otherwise not have the opportunity. Holistically, the goal is to help students think differently about their major and career and be equipped with tools to be successful even if they choose a career outside of the education field. This project is an effort for a shift in the way higher education is viewed by students towards a mindset that merges college, career, and life.

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Appendix



Figure 1: Modules and Overarching Questions



Figure 2: Module 1

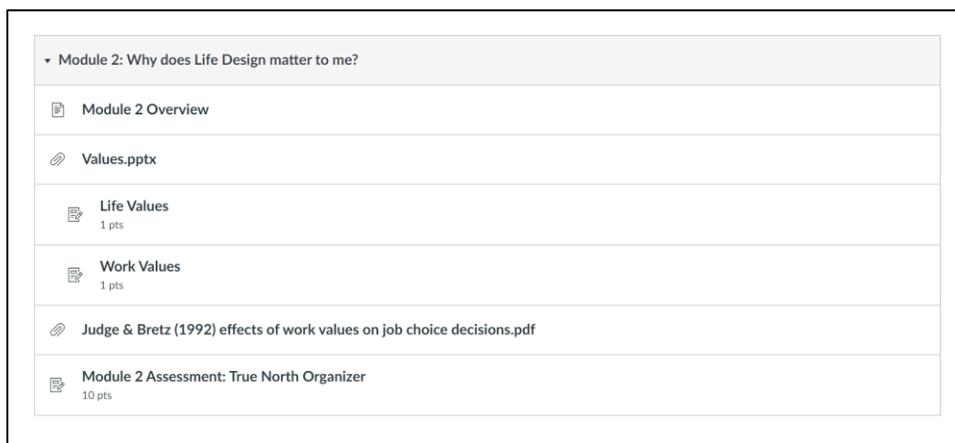


Figure 3: Module 2

▼ Module 3: What does Life Design look like for Educators?	
	Module 3 Overview
	What's Your Why? 5 pts
	Tims et al (2016) job crafting, PJ fit, and meaningfulness.pdf
	Krishnaveni & Anitha (2007) Eductaors' professional characteristics.pdf
	O*NET Quiz
	Reading Guide 5 pts
	Module 3 Final Assessment: Three Plans 30 pts
	Final Quiz
	Additional Resources: Module 3

Figure 4: Module 3