

The Practical Path of Labor Curriculum in Compulsory Education in China from the Perspective of Overlapping Influence Domain Theory

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Abstract: Since the new curriculum reform, labor education has gradually shed its marginalized position in the “five educations,” and the labor curriculum has become an independent course officially separated from comprehensive practical activity courses. Exploring the practical path of labor curriculum in compulsory education in China has become the primary task of labor education in China. Based on the practical situation of labor curriculum in compulsory education in China, drawing on the theory of overlapping influence domains, and from the perspective of collaborative education among family, school, and community, this paper proposes a curriculum practical path of “school-led” family-school-community collaboration and a curriculum practical path guided by “student-centered” sentiment, in order to provide references for the practice of labor curriculum in compulsory education in China.

Keywords: Overlapping influence domain theory; Compulsory education; Labor curriculum

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1. Study background

Labor education is an education that helps students form correct labor views, establish a correct labor attitude, cultivate good labor habits, and hone noble labor sentiments ^[1]. At the beginning of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, China took measures to comprehensively learn from the Soviet Union in the field of education, improved compulsory education, emphasized that school education should focus on the comprehensive development of students, and strengthen ideological and political education for students ^[2]. In September 1958, the state specified that education should be combined with productive labor, making it the first education policy in China. Since then, labor education has occupied a place in the field of education in China. However, the good times did not last long. Subsequently, under the guidance of erroneous ideas, China explored

labor education, making it a tool for class struggle; after China entered the stage of reform and opening-up, education gradually became an important driving force for China's economic and social development ^[3]. In 1977, Comrade Xiaoping Deng pointed out that "regardless of mental labor, physical labor is labor." Continuing this idea, the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee officially proposed the educational policy of "combining mental labor with physical labor." In September 2014, the State Council issued the Implementation Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Examination and Enrollment System, which standardized the comprehensive quality evaluation of high school students and officially included scientific knowledge and labor practice as evaluation indicators. In March 2022, the Ministry of Education released the "Compulsory Education Labor Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)," which officially separated labor education from comprehensive practical activity courses and became an independent course. The document requires schools, families, and communities to collaborate in carrying out labor education ^[4]. Looking back on 70 years of exploration and development, labor education has been increasingly valued in the field of education in China, and has already gained the status of an independent curriculum. Therefore, how to build a labor curriculum for compulsory education has become an urgent problem to be solved in the field of education in China.

This article is based on the reality of labor education in China and the theory of overlapping influence domains, aiming to solve the issue of how to practice labor courses in China's future compulsory education in a multi-subject environment. From the perspective of collaborative education among family, school, and society, it provides references for the practice of labor courses in China's compulsory education.

2. The theory of overlapping influence domains and its applicability

The theory of overlapping influence domains is a dynamic theory that explores the synergistic impact of family, school, and society on education. Overall, there are two models for the theory of overlapping influence domains: internal and external ^[5]. The external model indicates four influences at play in students' growth and learning process: time, family, school, and community. Among them, family, school, and community are important backgrounds and environments in the process of student growth. The three forces can act independently or in combination. In the process of student growth, attention should be paid to the unique influence and values of individual institutions in the family, school, and community, as well as the overlapping influence of multiple parties in different scenarios, which can have different impacts on students. The overlapping influence domain theory points out that as time changes, the age of students increases, and the accompanying academic grade increases, the overlapping influence area of families, schools, and communities on students will change. This influence is highly flexible and does not follow the systematic laws of traditional egalitarianism and proportionalism ^[6]. The internal model is an explanation of the internal operating mechanism of the overlapping parts of the three main bodies of family, school, and society in the external model. The internal model points to the students at the core of the model and explains the impact of family, school, and community on the learning and growth process of students from two levels: firstly, at the institutional level, it explains the overlapping effect or influence between school, family, and community; secondly, at the individual level, the entities that have an impact on student learning and growth in institutions are further refined into parents, teachers, and community educators, exploring the individual level influence on students. In different contexts, the size of the interaction force and the number of participating entities between family, school, and society cannot be fixed. However, schools are professional and institutionalized institutions that exert educational influence and should play their leading role in consultation, communication, and guidance, ensuring the equal status of the

three entities, and building a good relationship of communication and integration with students, thereby helping students develop healthily.

This theory has become an important representative of the overlapping schools of home-school cooperation worldwide^[7]. The applicability of this theory is mainly reflected in the following two points: firstly, it is widely used in the cooperation relationships between families, schools, and communities worldwide. So far, nearly 2,000 schools in the United States have joined the School, Family, and Community Partnership Alliance (NNPS), forming a three-dimensional network of research guidance institutions, states, school districts, and schools^[8], with relatively mature theoretical experience. Scholars in Shanghai, Beijing, and other places in China have also conducted case studies on the relationship between families, schools, and communities in primary and secondary schools, indicating that the overlapping influence domain theory has strong relevance to current compulsory education. The second is that the overlapping influence domain theory clarifies the mechanism of the influence of family, school, and society on student education. The Ministry of Education of China has issued the “Labor Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition),” which requires families, schools, and society to collaborate in carrying out labor education. The theory of overlapping influence domains can answer questions such as “How should labor courses be carried out in compulsory education?” and “How should the three parties of family, school, and society cooperate during the process of labor course development?” The theoretical perspective is highly compatible with practical problem-solving.

3. The practical path of labor curriculum in compulsory education in China

With the development of the times, competition among countries worldwide is not limited to a single economic aggregate, but more competition is significantly tilted towards the talent field. Cultivating individuals with comprehensive development in morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor skills is not unique to China’s talent cultivation goals. Multiple countries around the world have conducted extensive explorations on this topic. Unlike the situation where the first four education programs have long been valued, labor education has always been on the edge and has only been gradually emphasized in recent years. Therefore, the labor curriculum in China’s compulsory education stage is still in the practical exploration stage^[9]. This article hopes to provide references for the practice of labor curriculum in China from two aspects: the curriculum practical path of “school-led” family-school-community collaboration and the curriculum practical path of “student-centered” sentiment orientation.

3.1. The curriculum construction path of “school-led” family-school-community collaboration

- (1) Giving full play to the leading role of the school: The growth environment of students is jointly constructed by family, school, and community. Unlike family and community, schools are educational institutions with characteristics of theoretical, institutionalized, professional, and systematic education. In educating students, they can better follow educational laws and help them learn and grow healthily. Therefore, in the relationship network established between family, school, community, and students, schools should fully play their leading role and provide scientific guidance for communication and exchange between family, community, and students. However, in this process, it should be noted that “leadership” does not equate to “inequality.” The three parties of family, school, and society should take “helping students grow up healthy” as their common vision, establish equal relationships under the principle of equality and mutual assistance, and be cautious of the absence or overstepping of subjects in the relationship network^[10].

- (2) Establishing a collaborative relationship between schools and families: The family is an essential place for students to grow up and an important field for labor education. Unlike the standardized teaching methods in schools, education in the family exhibits a subtle and influential characteristic ^[11]. The daily labor scenes in family life constantly affect the formation of students' values, but there is often a problem of not following the laws of education in family education. Therefore, it is necessary for schools and families to establish a collaborative relationship to help parents become qualified educators in family labor education. Firstly, schools should guide parents to form correct labor values, so that parents can recognize the important value of labor, rather than just treating helping students labor as a heavy task burden. Secondly, it is to guide parents to organically integrate labor education into the daily life of the family, forming a good working atmosphere in the family and subtly influencing students. Lastly, it is important to guide parents to serve as role models. Parents are important and interactive individuals in students' growth, and their words and actions can have a significant impact on students. Therefore, education should not only educate children but also parents. Only in this way can we better enhance the family's concept of labor education and create a happy working life for the family ^[9].
- (3) Establishing a collaborative relationship between schools and communities: Unlike families and schools, communities do not have a direct and significant impact on students. Communities bear the responsibility of providing students with various rich resources beyond home and school during their growth. Some specific labor education needs to be effective in specific scenarios, which requires schools to play a leading role, effectively utilize various resources in the community, establish a mutual aid organizational structure between schools and specific labor bases in the community, and promote the effective integration of various forces in labor education throughout society. We need to expand labor education to real-life labor scenarios, allowing students to grow up healthily in nature ^[12], experiencing a series of growth processes such as planting and growing plants, and learning from a first perspective, achieving the level of "learning by doing."

3.2. A student-centered curriculum practical path guided by the sentiment of "student-centered"

Students should be the center of the compulsory education labor curriculum. Students are individuals in the developmental stage, especially those in compulsory education, who exhibit characteristics such as sensitivity, high emotional fluctuations, and greater influence from others. For them, internal traction is often more important than external driving force. During this period, families, schools, and communities should establish long-term and positive spiritual connections with individual students to help them grow up healthily ^[13]. Similar to knowledge-based courses, labor courses are also more prone to falling into the dilemma of "teacher-centered" or "parent-centered." With the continuous improvement of people's material level, there are countless cases in which children in the family are not exposed to any household chores. In the early stages, implementing labor courses often faces the challenge of parents and teachers who are accustomed to unilaterally "commanding" the teaching process. Therefore, first of all, individuals from the three parties of family, school, and institution should pay more attention to "encouragement" in labor education. Unlike traditional intellectual education, labor education is visual in the short term for students, and for students in the compulsory education stage, this will greatly enhance their enthusiasm and initiative. Secondly, the labor course involves a wide range of areas, and different students excel in different fields. Therefore, families, schools, and communities should provide students with more opportunities to try based on student-centered concepts and personalized teaching ^[14].

The highest goal of labor curriculum in compulsory education is to cultivate students' labor sentiment, and

based on the goal, we need to effectively gather the forces of family, school, and society to help students grow up healthily. A noble labor sentiment is not naturally generated or arises out of thin air at every stage, but requires workers to experience real labor refinement and correct emotional guidance during the labor process ^[15]. The cultivation of labor sentiment is the highest goal of the labor curriculum in the compulsory education stage, which is precisely the cultivation of the highest level of “emotional attitude and values” in the three-dimensional teaching objectives. The cultivation of labor skills is the minimum requirement for students. Without the support of labor sentiment, the application of skills is only task-oriented implementation, rather than enjoying the happiness brought by labor at a higher level. Therefore, families, schools, and society should work together to educate students, help them cultivate a sense of labor in compulsory education labor courses, truly experience the joy of labor, and become socialist successors with comprehensive development in morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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