

Implementation of Life-Oriented Primary School Labor Education Curriculum: Patterns, Challenges and Directions

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Abstract: The implementation of a life-oriented primary school labor education curriculum demonstrates a practical pattern of cultivating morality through labor, educating people through labor and strengthening the country through labor, with characteristics of normalization, integration, and extension. There are difficulties in implementing courses that are not effective, the relationship between labor and education is distant, and the evaluation method is single. It is recommended to enhance the effectiveness of home school collaborative participation in implementing life-oriented courses, strengthen the conjugate relationship between labor and education, and improve tracking and personalized growth evaluation.

Keywords: Labor education; Life-oriented primary school labor education; Course implementation

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1. Problem statement

Labor is how humans create a happy life and a traditional virtue of the Chinese nation. Nowadays, labor education has become an important part of the socialist education system with Chinese characteristics and an important component of the comprehensive development of the education system. Previous research has mainly focused on the historical changes and trends in primary school labor education curriculum^[1], the development and utilization of primary school labor education resources^[2], the construction of primary school labor education curriculum^[3,4] and the development of school-based curriculum for primary school labor education^[5,6]. It involves evaluating the Primary School Labor Education Curriculum^[7], integrating primary school labor education into other subject curricula^[8], and implementing primary school labor education in other countries^[9,10]. There is not much in-depth research on implementing a life-oriented primary school labor education curriculum. Therefore, the research questions raised in this study are:

- (1) What is the implementation status of a life-oriented primary school labor education curriculum?
- (2) What are the difficulties?
- (3) What are the improvement suggestions?

2. Research design

This study adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative research refers to the activity of collecting data through various methods, such as interviews, observations, physical analysis and focus groups in natural contexts, to conduct an in-depth and holistic exploration of research phenomena, construct the behavior and meaning of the research object from the original data and obtain interpretive understanding ^[11].

2.1. Research subjects

The research subjects are 3 primary schools and 7 labor education teachers in P city. To make the research subjects as representative as possible, stratified sampling was first used to select three primary schools in different regions of P city as school samples. The reason for choosing these three schools is that their differences in administrative regions represent the educational structure from rural to urban areas. Secondly, they have life-oriented labor education characteristic courses and rich educational experience. Thirdly, the researchers used convenience and purposive sampling to select 7 respondents. Before researching the three schools, the researchers, with the help of others, contacted the leaders in charge of labor education and teachers engaged in labor education teaching in the three primary schools and provided advance explanations of their visit intentions.

2.2. Research methods

Participatory observation and unstructured interview methods were mainly used. By tracking and observing the implementation of labor education courses in 3 primary schools in P city and interviewing 7 teachers. Each interview should be limited to 30–45 minutes. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher asked participants to clarify their explanations of life-oriented primary school labor education based on the principle of ingestive conversation to establish mutually understandable terminology. Then, the survey went from simple to deep, from the participants' experience and understanding of life-oriented primary school labor education to gradually encouraging reflective answers to understand the real situation of life-oriented primary school labor education curriculum implementation, in-depth analysis of its implementation difficulties and possible optimization suggestions.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Implementation status of life-oriented primary school labor education curriculum

3.1.1. Implementation of normalized courses showcases the cultivation of morality through labor

A survey shows that life-oriented primary school labor education has become a norm in school education and contains an important educational value. Teachers unanimously believe that life-oriented labor education can help primary school students develop labor habits, establish labor awareness and demonstrate the function of labor in cultivating virtues. “‘The Opinion on Comprehensively Strengthening Labor Education in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Schools in the New Era’ proposes to make labor education a compulsory course and stipulates that there should be no less than 1 class hour per week. Since then, various schools have been actively preparing and exploring labor education courses.” (P3) “When it comes to life-oriented labor education, teachers first think of guiding students to participate in daily labor within their capabilities. Taking the primary school where I work as an example, there are various labor courses with local characteristics such as planting, breeding, cooking and embroidery.” (P5) “Life-oriented labor education courses not only stimulate students' interest in participating in labor, but also help primary school students establish labor awareness, develop positive labor habits, work hard, and be helpful.” The virtue of hard work and progress can be seen from this.

Implementing a normalized life-oriented primary school labor education curriculum has become necessary to cultivate the comprehensive and harmonious development of primary school students. It is also an important way to cultivate their labor spirit.

3.1.2. Implementation of integrated curriculum and practice of labor education

The survey shows that life-oriented labor education is not only the norm in primary school labor education but has also been integrated into the teaching of other disciplines. The goal of labor education is achieved through the collaborative efforts of various disciplines. There are not only specialized courses such as labor and technical education, but various schools also try to integrate labor education into courses such as Chinese, mathematics, art and comprehensive practical activities. (P1) Success integration into the curriculum will result in breaking the boundaries of the curriculum, cultivating the love, reverence, habit and enjoyment of labor among primary school students, reflecting the practical wisdom of educating people through labor.

3.1.3. Deepening the implementation of extended curriculum and building a strong country through labor

Labor is the revolutionary spirit that never fades in any era and the fundamental path to national prosperity and strength. The 2022 edition of the Labor Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education points out that “Labor education should be integrated into the entire process of talent cultivation, covering all stages of primary, secondary, and tertiary education, as well as all aspects of family, school, and society, and integrated with moral education, intellectual education, physical education, and aesthetic education”^[12]. Under the guidance of this policy, the integrated pattern of labor education in primary, secondary, and tertiary schools is taking shape, and the implementation of labor education courses that are extended and life-oriented on campus has become the basic model of labor education in the new era. “In order to enable students at different stages of physical and mental development to adapt and master corresponding labor skills as soon as possible, the school has developed and designed step-by-step labor education projects in accordance with the implementation suggestions of labor education curriculum standards. These projects fully consider the cooperation between schools, families, communities, and society, with the aim of promoting students’ comprehensive development in morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics and labor.” (P2)

3.2. Difficulties in implementing life-oriented primary school labor education curriculum

Although current primary school labor education has achieved certain experiences and results, implementing a life-oriented primary school labor education curriculum still presents the following difficulties.

3.2.1. Poor implementation effect of life-oriented courses

The curriculum concept of life-oriented primary school labor education has positive significance in cultivating students’ labor awareness and habits, but its actual implementation effect is not ideal. As for teachers, the faithful orientation of curriculum implementation is accustomed to faithfully executing the intentions of curriculum designers as labor education has become a compulsory labor course. The mutual adaptation orientation of curriculum implementation can adjust and adapt to each other in terms of curriculum goals, content, methods, etc., according to the class or school context. Still, it is easy to make labor education become a formality. The creative orientation of curriculum implementation believes that curriculum implementation is essentially a process in which teachers and students create new educational experiences in specific educational contexts. This concept makes labor education full of challenges and requires high levels of teaching organization ability from teachers and self-management ability from students.

For elementary school students, their labor cognition and ability are limited, their awareness of participating in labor is not strong and their labor habits are in the development stage. They will inevitably have feelings of fear and frustration during the labor experience. Nowadays, children's living conditions are relatively good, and they don't have many household chores to share at home. The labor projects and working hours that schools can provide are very limited, which makes them lack daily labor experience.

3.2.2. The invisible alienation between labor and education

Labor education has existed since ancient times in both formal and informal education. However, the long-term formation of exam-oriented education has led to a separation and even opposition between education and labor, resulting in many examples of some students being unable to live independently without the protection of their parents and teachers. Although current education emphasizes the integration of labor into campus life and classroom teaching and receives collaborative support from various forces inside and outside the school, engaging in "passive labor" or "pendulum labor" to complete tasks is not uncommon. The phenomenon of labor education for the sake of labor or labor to complete prescribed education is relatively common.

In the final analysis, the main manifestations of "labor spirit, labor value and labor literacy" are:

- (1) The labor spirit and labor literacy of primary school students have not yet formed. Their love for labor and positive personality traits in the labor process are not strong, their understanding of labor value is limited, and their knowledge, attitude, and skills in labor are still developing;
- (2) Parents or guardians do not attach enough importance to the value of labor and blindly cooperate with their children to perform or even directly replace them in completing tasks to complete labor tasks.

In this way, although the curriculum design, resource development, and utilization of life oriented primary school labor education are so perfect, the invisible separation between labor and education still exists.

3.2.3. Single evaluation method for course implementation

The significance of implementing a life-oriented primary school labor education curriculum is self-evident. The current popular evaluation method is outcome-based evaluation. Specifically, the school mainly manages and supervises labor education through trace management but lacks substantive guidance, supervision, and evaluation. Teachers continue to use similar methods, such as taking photos, checking in, etc., to evaluate the labor situation of students directly ^[13]. "Most parents actively cooperate with the school to supervise their children in completing tasks within their capabilities, but some parents are still cooperating with their students to complete labor work. Due to the lack of more specific evaluation and guidance from the school, we as ordinary teachers feel very helpless and distressed about these unconscious and even irresponsible parents." (P4)

In addition, from the existing evaluation system, evaluation indicators often focus on whether students have mastered standardized labor skills. At the same time, there is a lack of effective evaluation of students' implicit labor concepts or individual labor skills that they excel at. The kind of labor that erases individuality is an alienated labor that inevitably leads to the one-sided development of human beings. In alienated labor education, people lose their subjectivity and are trained as labor tools. Labor education itself often degenerates into a punitive activity ^[14]. Human beings have the habit of laziness, let alone elementary school students who are still in the stage of forming various labor skills. Therefore, in addition to the explicitly stipulated labor skills, attention should also be paid to the evaluation of elementary school students' internal labor concepts, such as through praise, rewards, role models, etc., to transform elementary school students' implicit labor consciousness into labor behavior and to pay attention to the growth record evaluation of this transformation process.

4. Conclusion and suggestions

Implementing a life-oriented primary school labor education curriculum presents normalization, integration, and extension characteristics. At the same time, it also faces the dilemma of poor implementation effectiveness, alienation between labor and education, and a single evaluation method for curriculum implementation. Therefore, it is recommended to optimize the implementation status of a life-oriented primary school labor education curriculum from the following aspects.

4.1. Enhancing the implementation effectiveness of collaborative participation in lifestyle courses

Schools, teachers, students and parents are the collaborative entities in the implementation of a life-oriented primary school labor education curriculum. Schools should provide operational guidance and supervision for implementing labor education based on actual situations. Teachers should establish an appropriate curriculum concept. Teachers should also flexibly implement the curriculum plan and improve their teaching ability to avoid labor education becoming a mere formality. In addition, they should also pay attention to avoiding excessive innovation and causing labor education to lose control. Parents should raise their awareness of education, fulfill their obligation and responsibility to supervise and guide their children to participate in labor at home, and should not directly take on the responsibility. Only through collaborative efforts between families and schools can schools better cultivate primary school students' labor consciousness and ability.

4.2. Strengthen the conjugate relationship between life-oriented labor and education

The conjugate relationship between labor and education has existed for a long time. Implementing education in labor and conducting labor in education is a necessary part of complete labor education and a necessary measure to bridge the gap between the two. "Making 'labor' a 'labor education' or making 'labor' educational is to establish a conscious, natural and organic connection between general labor practice and the cultivation of moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic qualities"^[15]. Therefore, labor education should be a process of collaborative cultivation of knowledge, intention, and action. Labor should not be ignored due to education, nor should labor alone be without education.

4.3. Improve the evaluation dimensions of life-oriented labor education for primary school students

In response to the drawbacks of existing labor education evaluations that prioritize results over processes, focus on standardized labor skills and neglect personalized labor abilities, it is recommended to develop a process-based tracking evaluation and personalized growth record bag for primary school students' life-oriented labor abilities. One is that process evaluation mainly focuses on diagnosis and improvement rather than selection and identification, which is conducive to implementing life-oriented labor education for primary school students and avoiding "performance" style labor. Secondly, flexible and personalized assessment of labor capacity can help primary school students establish labor confidence and work concepts. Thirdly, students themselves, peers, parents or teachers can be the evaluators, providing rational evaluations from three aspects: (1) service-oriented labor, (2) skilled labor, and (3) creative labor.

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