

Integrating Cantonese Culture into Childhood Food Education

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Abstract: Chinese primary schools encourage children to pay attention to local culture, especially the cultural elements in their daily life. Therefore, childhood food education has been vigorously promoted with an aim to help children experience local culture. Based on literature review and field research, this paper conducts studies on Cantonese culture and childhood food education, examining the importance of traditional local culture on food education. To complement the results from the literature with insights from practice, two action researches were carried out describing childhood dietetic curriculum, which allow verification of the curriculum design guidelines from literature. Based on the feedback from teaching practices, we find that external educational resources beyond school, hand-on learning experience and scene of daily life are key elements of childhood food education.

Keywords: Cantonese culture, food education, children

1. Introduction

Eating is a necessary and most frequent practice in human daily life and food has always played an extremely important role in the entire history of humanity. Food not only feeds individuals on the material level, but also produces local tastes, and imprints the local food culture. As food and food-related activities often encode special cultural meanings[1], we could say that food provides a way for people to understand their local culture, especially for children. In Guangdong, both teachers and artists have already integrated Cantonese culture into childhood food education. Because they know that to the Cantonese people, food is culturally significant, learning the food and food-related knowledge means learning the Cantonese culture.

1.1 Cantonese Food Culture

Cantonese food generally refers to three traditional cuisines in Guangdong: Guangfu cuisine, Hakka cuisine and Chaoshan cuisine[2] which include lots of intangible cultural heritage. Cantonese food is an important component of Lingnan culture, as it not only fully uses the local crops but also informs the territorial economy, local people's daily life and natural environment[3]. According to the identity process theory[4], food culture embodies personal memory and closely links oneself with hometown, helping individuals to improve their adaptability when they are living in unfamiliar environment as well as maintaining their stability of personal identity and self-efficacy in unfamiliar environment.

For the old people living in Guangdong, Cantonese food is the most prominent representative of Cantonese culture, it has well-balanced flavor and is not greasy. Most old Cantonese hold a positive evaluation of traditional Cantonese food because they prefer hand-made, freshly cooked food and they feel it is healthy, affordable and full of human interest. For the young people, they experience the Cantonese food culture in another way. They grow up with eating both Cantonese and foreign food, e.g. KFC, McDonald. For them, Cantonese food strongly relates to family life and is a symbol of local culture. Although the boundary between traditional Cantonese food and modern fast food is not clear now, people could still experience the local culture through culinary trip or attending the food festival.

1.2 Food Education Movement in China

China has seen an increase in food education campaigns in various forms and now the childhood food education is spread widely in China as a national movement[5]. Food education has an effect on the

children's personality and health physically and mentally. Some researchers argued that during the childhood, children are sensitive to the cognition and understanding on food. It is partly because food preferences formed in childhood may have long-lasting effects on their later food choice behavior[6] and partly because food choice as well as eating habit are predominantly learned behavior[7]. Now Chinese children are facing the challenge of nutritional structure imbalance, food safety and food waste, which means food education is needed in primary schools and after-school education. Food education can help children promote their diet structure, have a better understanding of food supply chains, food safety and the negative impact of food waste. Meanwhile food education could help students deeply understand local culture as food strongly related to the local people's traditional life style and cultural geography.

According to the importance of childhood food education. Chinese local government introduced a series of policy documents to promote food education. For example, in Changzhou, all primary schools were encouraged to set up courses around the ten themes of food education, e.g., food and environment, food and culture, food and community, etc. These lessons included traditional teaching, thematic discussion, community activities, experimental exploration, role playing, etc. The Changzhou government hope food education not only become a kind of food health education, but also help students to learn labor skills, learn to enjoy their life through health eating and cultivate the independent character of children as well as cultivate their morality with food.

Food education is more than eating and dietetic education in China. The Education Department of Henan Province defines childhood food education as the cultivation and education of good eating habits, giving food and food-related knowledge from early childhood, as well as the cultivation of artistic imagination and personality. Some researchers have shown that food education course (like nutrition, agriculture and dietetic lessons), could help students to recognize how healthy diet influences emotional well-being and how emotions influence their daily actions[8, 9]. However, as primary school educators usually need to face many demands from different stakeholders, e.g. parents and local bureaucrats, teachers tend to find ways to add dietetic education into the existing schedule. In China, teachers usually take dietetic lessons in labor courses or after-school STEM club.

2. Methodology

As this research focuses on curriculum design, in order to identify the guidelines for food education, the Research through Design(RtD)[10] method has been adopted as it is a practice-based research method focusing on 'making the right things' and this method could help researchers building insight through designerly ways of knowing[11].

According to the RtD research process, this research was divided into four iterative phases (see in Figure 1):

1) Phase One (desk research): Through case studies, literature review and expert interview, qualitative data were collective. Based on these multiple data, we identified some themes of Cantonese food culture which will be used in thematic analysis in order to conclude course design guidelines.

2) Phase Two (data analysis): Based on the themes form literature review and field observation, some course design principles were identified.

3) Phase Three (field study): Two action researches were conducted in order to verify the course design guidelines.

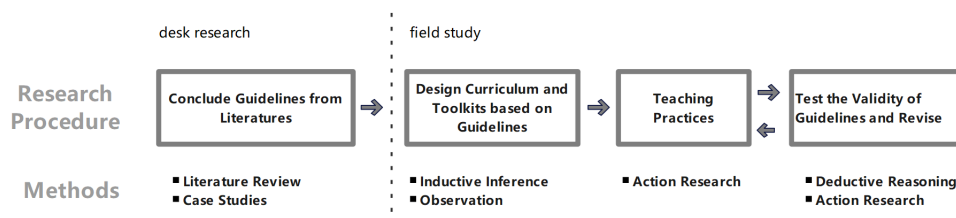


Figure 1: Research process and methods

3. Literature Review

3.1 Childhood Food Education

Food education has been defined as a pedagogy of teaching a broad range of knowledge and skills related to food[12]. The content of food education not only includes nutrition knowledge, but also covers multidisciplinary knowledge, e.g., cooking, agriculture and culinary culture. Food education is necessary for preventing childhood obesity, improving public health and enhancing the relationship between eaters and their living place. Meanwhile, food education could promote fruits and vegetables consumption and make the local food system more sustainable. Most important, food education could reduce the probability that some physiological negative events happen in children who have unhealthy habits. In the field of health promotion and food education, the interest about the integrating culture has arisen during the last decade[13]. For example, integrating local drama to food education in order to promote healthy lifestyle and reduce the percentage of childhood obesity. Recently, many food education teaching method has been developed with an aim of introducing local culture, for example, serious game[14]. Therefore, we can foresee many new pedagogies applied in primary schools in the future to integrate culture to food education.

In primary schools, food education could enhance children's cognitive competence[15]. Through learning food-related knowledge, children know the food name, shape, color, taste, function and other related knowledge. Food education can help children to understand the growth rhythm of crops and seasonal changes, too. Food education can also help children develop good living habits and promote children's socialization. As eating is essentially a process of life practice, food education could help children develop corresponding ability to live, such as independent eating, tableware sorting and even personal diet plan[16]. Food education can also guide children to develop good living habits, such as washing hands before meals, eating on time, it could also help children know how farmers work, understanding the relationship between human productive labor and food. Through food education, children can perceive the culture and ideological significance of food, which makes children have place belongingness for their living place and makes local traditional culture continue to be inherited.

3.2 Teaching Traditional Culture through Food Education

Teaching traditional culture could promote national culture, in primary schools it could cultivate children's national identity and cultural self-confidence. Traditional culture education should take full account of children's cognitive characteristics, emotional needs as well as their personal life experience. Teachers should select suitable traditional culture content for children's, adopt lively, interactively and participatory teaching methods in order to stimulate children's interest and curiosity in traditional culture. If teachers could guide children to actively explore and experience traditional culture, they could cultivate children's ability of appreciating for traditional culture.

Local food culture, together with music, festivals, etc., help residents consolidate their local identity, resist the infiltration and assimilation of foreign culture, giving local residents a stronger identity. For example, in Lapland people divides the sphere of influence according to the way of eating. Therefore, food education could help children know who they are and how the grow. Moreover, for the children living in Guangdong, food education could help them find out the different between Cantonese and other Chinese and understand the national diversity.

3.3 Guidelines for Food Education

Considering the characters of Cantonese food culture, childhood food education lessons need to focus on children's actual life. Teachers should choose the traditional cultural content related to children's daily life and encourage them to express actively. Teachers should help children understand that Cantonese food culture comes from life and there are some inseparable links between traditional culture and modern life. Considering students' interest is the key to the implementation of Cantonese culture teaching, it is necessary to adopt variety of teaching methods, such as games, role playing, crafts, etc., so that children can experience the traditional food culture through interaction. Considering some children lack the initiative to learn, diversified teaching methods could make students learn freely, take the initiative to contact with traditional culture, and help student learn effectively.

Through the literature review and exporters interview, multiple qualitative data have been collected. We import these data to NVivo 12 in order to code and cluster them. Through thematic analysis and

substantive coding based on grounded theory, some educational design strategies were concluded as below:

- 1) Teaching students about the relationship between Cantonese culture, local agriculture, traditional food and public health.
- 2) Serving regionally produced foods classroom teaching and out-school educational programs.
- 3) Engaging students in hands-on learning opportunities through role playing, cooking or farm field trips. In order to support children's hands-on learning, creative and tangible toolkits need to be designed.
- 4) Lessons need to be sensory-based.

4. Food Educational Design

In order to verify the guidelines for childhood food education, two teaching practices have been conducted in Zhuhai, Guangdong. Each course lasted four weeks with 23 children from 7 to 11 years old. These children have not taken any food education lessons before and they have been living in Zhuhai from birth.

4.1 Action One: Double-Layer Steamed Milk

Double-Layer Steamed Milk (DLSM) is a delicious cuisine derived from the Shunde, a village in the south of Foshan. DLSM has some stories, for example: In Qing Dynasty, it is hard to preserve food. A Cantonese named Dong Fu raised buffalo for living. Once, Dong Fu boiled the buffalo milk and unexpectedly found that the surface of the milk formed a thin layer after cooling and the preservation period is long. He tasted the milk and found it is extremely soft and smooth. From that time on, the Dong family were fascinated by this extra layer of "skin" milk, and tried again and again to improve its taste and cooking method. Now the DLSM is the intangible cultural heritage of Shunde which means it represents the local cuisine and culture. Therefore, in the beginning teachers introduced the history of DLSM and its role in local economies.

In the hand-on making session, teachers conducted thematic research around the DLSM, encouraging children to take the initiative to understand the historical and cultural background of DLSM. Then teachers introduced the cooking method and nutritional value of this Cantonese food, as well as its unique regional cultural connotation and dietary health value in different ingredients. After classroom teaching, teachers gave special kitchenware to students and encouraged children to cook their own DLSM. During this time, teachers were guiding children to identify and inherit Cantonese food culture, some famous local food was introduced, for example: Foshan famous snacks, Lingnan vegetables and fruits, Lun Jiao cake, etc. In the end, students shared their experience and make a speech about their understanding of Cantonese food culture.

4.2 Action Two: Zongzi

Table 1: Course arrangement and content

Topic of the Lesson	Learning Tasks	Relevant Knowledge
Learn about Dragon Boat Festival	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Look into the history and culture of the Dragon Boat Festival 2. Learn about traditional etiquette 3. Learn about the local custom 	Cultural geography; History
Learn about Zongzi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Know nutrient component of Zongzi 2. Know the historical story 3. Understand the food-making procedure 4. Master basic cooking skills 	Nutrition; History; Culinary skill
Tell my story	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sharing personal story about Zongzi 2. Draw the storyboard 3. Role playing in the background of Dragon Boat Festival 	Draw; Story telling
Make Zongzi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make Zongzi by hands with classmates 2. Share the learning experience 3. Reflect on the lessons 	History; Culinary skill; Cultural geography;

The Dragon Boat Festival is an integral part of Guangdong's traditional culture. During this festival, people will eat Zongzi which is stuffed with glutinous rice, meat and many different fillings and is wrapped in bamboo leaves. Considering Zongzi is the culture symbol of Dragon Boat Festival, it is an opportunity to help children experience Cantonese culture through teach them knowledge about Zongzi. With this aim, four weeks teaching plan has been made (see in Table 1).

In order to help children to understand the history and components of Zongzi, we designed some study cards which visualized the intangible knowledge (see in Figure 2). These cards show the detailed information about the ingredients of Zongzi, therefore children could use these cards to choose their favorite foodstuffs and make their own Zongzi. It also allows children to work together to find out the taste they like all.



Figure 2: The study cards for learning Zongzi

5. Conclusion

In order to integrate Cantonese culture into food education, the content of curriculum should not be limited to food itself, but should be expanded to local history and modern daily life with an open vision. For teachers, it is needed to make full use of various resources in children's daily life to carry out food education. For example, wet markets and supermarkets could become the carrier of food education as children are familiar with these places so they could share their own experience. Meanwhile, we also note that knowledge visualization[17] is important as the food-related knowledge is complex. We provide knowledge card for children which could reduce their cognitive load. According to our research, we could say that hand-on learning experience, visualized learning toolkits and curriculum content related to daily life are essential elements for childhood food education.

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