

Narrative and Practice: A Study on Strategies for Education for Life Based on Picture Book Reading for Young Children

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Abstract: *Education for life (EFL) builds individuals' awareness of survival, life, death, life emotions and value. Education for life for young children not only initially improves young children's concepts of various aspects of life and lays the foundation for healthy and free growth but also promotes the coordinated development of their body and mind. As an important genre of children's literature, picture books serve as an effective means to conduct education for life for young children. Education for life for young children still has great room for development and exploration. Kindergartens have experienced a series of problems in the process of practicing the concept of education for life. Therefore, based on a summary and review of existing studies and through methods such as interviews, this study explores how to combine picture books and education for life for young children more effectively.*

Keywords: *picture books; teaching with picture books; education for life; preschool education*

1. Introduction

Life is the foundation of education, while education is the cultivator of life. It is clearly proposed in the Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial), "Kindergartens must prioritize the protection of young children's lives and the promotion of their health in their work." Therefore, conducting education for life (EFL) in the preschool stage to help young children establish a correct view of life and foster the awareness of cherishing, loving and respecting life is of great significance for their physical and mental development.

Education for life can be conducted in kindergartens in various ways, and picture books, as a classic genre of children's literature, can be used to reveal the journey of life and the emotions attached to it by presenting to young children the grand and abstract issues such as body & mind and survival & extinction in a colorful way.

However, in the process of education for life for young children, the education for life through teaching with picture books is not being fully conducted due to the influence of various factors. By combining literature and empirical interviews, this study analyzes the pain points and urgent problems faced by education for life for young children at present and hopes to provide optimization strategies and suggestions for young children's education for life centered on picture books.

2. Vitality and Life: Education for Life for Young Children

2.1. Origin of education for life

With the accelerated modernization of human society, economic prosperity is driving the whole society to change with each passing day. However, with the survival crisis solved by developed material conditions, mental imbalance and spiritual emptiness have increasingly become common problems that trouble people. A series of problems arise when education increasingly tends to be utilitarian and instrumental under the requirements of social development and the pace of self-growth and social progress is inconsistent. In response to the misbehaviors of teenagers, American scholar J. Donald Walters first proposed the concept of education for life in 1968. Education for life originally emerged in Western countries as a way to solve problems such as suicide, drugs, violence, sexploitation and emotional disorders.

In Taiwan (China) and Hong Kong (China), education for life attempted to respond to the highly developed material and economic conditions of society and rethink the answer to the question "Why do people live?" The answers helped to save people's spiritual emptiness in an era overwhelmed by utilitarianism and consumerism, to achieve the goal of cultivating free and whole persons. [1] Entering the 21st century, education for life began to be studied and promoted as a formal educational concept by the educational circles in the Chinese mainland. According to Xu Shiping, "Education for life is an activity process of purposeful, planned and organized building of the sense of survival, cultivation of surviving capabilities and sublimation of life value of individuals from their birth to death, to fully demonstrate their quality of life eventually." [2] Xiao Chuan mentioned, "The education for life we advocate is life-oriented education for the freedom and happiness of subjects-of-a-life." [3] Education for life has different definitions in the Chinese mainland, however, its basic content is consistent.

2.2. Definition and value of education for life for young children

The preschool stage is a critical period for personality cultivation, and education for life for young children is particularly important as the first step in education for life. Education for life for young children refers to educating young children and guiding them to initially understand, cherish and love life at the beginning of their lives and learn to appreciate and care for themselves, others and the world around them. It should differ from education for life in primary and secondary schools, with a focus on preserving natural life, nourishing spiritual life, enlightening life consciousness and protecting life safety.

Education for life for young children adheres to children-oriented thinking, fully respects young children, regards them as independent living beings and boldly conducts educational activities without indulging them, to nourish young children's lives with love and freedom. It enables children to experience life and perceive their own life attitudes and emotions.

Education for life for young children is comprehensive. It is a kind of comprehensive educational practice that integrates with multiple fields, very closely associated with young children's daily lives. It helps young children understand life, including their own life, the lives of others and all lives in the whole nature, from aspects of body movement, emotions, social interactions, etc.

Education for life for young children is practical. Education for life deals not with theoretical issues but practical ones. It is a strategy based on living and existing to solve life issues, instead of empty talk that cannot be put into action. Concepts such as "not playing by the reservoir or pool", "not chatting and laughing during meals" and "not imitating the behavior of cartoon characters" do not require complex argumentation and only need to be put into practice.

Education for life for young children can be conducted indirectly. It is not restricted to fixed forms and means and can be conducted indirectly, especially in death education and sex education. In the context of traditional Chinese culture, the words "death" and "sex" are often avoided in conversation and are not directly and candidly explained to children by teachers and parents. However, indirect means in education for life enable young children to acquire this part of knowledge of education for life.

To sum up, the content of education for life for young children is extensive and in-depth and affects young children's emotions and attitudes toward life, living, the world and values. Its complexity requires special organizational forms, and picture books play an extremely important role in education for life for young children because they are concrete, specific and consistent with young children's cognitive level.

3. Stories that Explain the Profound in Simple Terms: Integration of Picture Books and Education for Life for Young Children

3.1. Construction of a system for education for life based on picture book reading

With picture books that contain heartwarming pictures and easy-to-understand stories, young children actively learn and understand knowledge about life, death, safety, love, self, etc. According to Japanese picture book expert Mr. Tadashi Matsui, picture books, as a tool that blends poetry and painting, are a very effective medium for young children's imagination and aesthetic development, not only bringing aesthetics and fun to young children but also serving as an effective strategy to promote their reading interest and ability. [4] This study divides the content of education for life for young

children into the following four parts: "human and self", "human and society", "human and nature" and "death education and sex education" and, with picture books as a medium for conducting education for life, explores the organizational forms, important value and current situation of education for life for young children based on picture book reading.

3.1.1. "Human and self"

Education for life should first let young children learn protection and self-protection, cherish their lives and learn to know and appreciate themselves.

3.1.1.1. Self-cognition

One of the tasks of education for life for young children is to help young children properly know themselves. The exploration of life originates from self-exploration. Education for life for young children is intended to guide young children to realize that "I" am unique, "my" thoughts belong to "myself" and "I" accept and like myself. Where Willy Went responds to young children's curiosity about "who am I" and "where I was from" in a way that explains the profound in simple terms and presents the process of a baby turning from a cell into a life in an easy-to-understand way. The protagonist of *The Story of Ferdinand* is a little bull named Ferdinand, who is not aggressive but likes the fragrance of flowers on the ranch. He refuses to do things he dislikes no matter how the matador trains him, which fully shows the consciousness of individuality and self. In *You're a Hero, Daley B*, the rabbit Daley B has many worries. He has been looking for the answer to "who am I" and has been worried about how he should live and where he should live. In the process of discovering himself, Daley B cannot get rid of worries, but these unique life experiences also make him understand the uniqueness of life.

3.1.1.2. Self-protection

The lives of young children contain infinite potential for growing and surging like the buds of plants and the streams of rivers and seas but are also fragile. Learning to survive and protect oneself is the most practical content in education for life. Only by initially learning the knowledge of protecting life will young children remember the consciousness of cherishing life and understand the preciousness of "life". In *I Won't Go with Strangers*, when the protagonist Lu is waiting for her mother on the sidewalk, a strange lady claims that she lives in the same community as Lu and wants to take her home. Lu eventually does not go with her and loudly rejects her. *Kissing Not Allowed* tells young children that when they are bothered, they can act like the protagonist Lena to follow their own will, protect themselves and bravely say "no" to strangers.

3.1.2. "Human and society"

3.1.2.1. Feeling family affection

Education for life should first let young children feel and discover the love of their family, teachers and peers and experience the most beautiful feelings in the world. The picture book *Guess How Much I Love You* explores what "love" is, with the little rabbit and big rabbit in the story using various things around them to express the extent of their love, showing that love cannot be expressed in concrete things and love is boundless. In *I Still Love You*, Grandma is forgetful, but "I" realize that Grandma has never forgotten "me" when "I" find that the basket Grandma loves the most is still loaded with things for "me". Although Grandma has Alzheimer's disease, love still bonds her and her granddaughter together.

3.1.2.2. Caring for others

The one-day activities in kindergartens are always conducted in a collective, during which, young children constantly communicate with their peers and teachers. Respecting and caring for others is the bond between people. Young children should be taught to care for others and experience the joy of unity and mutual aid, on the one hand; they should also be taught to respect, develop empathy, and perceive and accept the differences from others, on the other hand. In *Extra Yarn*, the protagonist Anna warms people in the cold little town with colorful yarn, and she rejects the duke's high offer for her yarn because a caring and kind heart cannot be measured with money. *Pumpkin Soup* tells the story of a duck, cat and squirrel making pumpkin soup together every day and shows the love and friendship among peers. It tells young children that when they encounter barriers with their peers, solving problems together, helping each other and putting themselves in other people's shoes will make the bond of friendship stronger.

3.1.3. "Human and nature"

It is advocated in ancient Chinese philosophy that humans and the natural environment are an organic whole, i.e., "all people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions". The thoughts of the Hundred Schools of Thought in ancient China simultaneously contain the proposition of harmony and unity between "human and nature". Dong Zhongshu once said, "Heaven is benevolent; it gives birth to everything, teaches them, makes them grow, brings them up and enables them to complete their growth." Humans share the same future with all living beings in nature. "Life" should include all lives in the biosphere, i.e., human life and the lives of all animals and plants in nature. Education for life should not only advocate loving oneself but also loving all life "other than oneself". Humans are a miracle of nature, their survival depends on the natural environment, and human society would not be able to stand without the gifts of nature. Therefore, an important topic in education for life is letting young children be close to nature and discover the beauty of nature from an early age and then be grateful for nature and establish the awareness of caring for the environment.

3.1.3.1. Beauty of nature

Nature is beautiful and broad and witnesses the cycle of sowing in spring, developing in summer, harvesting in autumn and storing in winter. The rise and set of the sun, the waxing and waning of the moon and the change of the seasons constantly continue in nature. Guiding young children to understand the laws of natural development and learn to appreciate nature is one of the tasks of education for life for young children. *How Robin Saved Spring* tells the story of changing seasons. In the endless cold winter, small animals work hard to obtain a ray of warm morning light from Mother Sun, which brings spring back to the world. The vivid story tells the laws of changing seasons and the revival of everything. *A Tree Is Nice* leads young children to see the appearance of a tree in four seasons with a simple painting style and poetic text and showcases the beauty of nature in a sincere and natural way.

3.1.3.2. Caring for nature

Mother Earth nurtures humanity. Humans would have nothing without the natural environment as the cornerstone of survival. Therefore, the idea of "caring for and protecting the environment" should be integrated into education for life for young children. *When We'll Have Eaten the Planet* imagines a day when all resources are exhausted and only money remains on Earth, but it can buy nothing. In this way, it tells young children the importance of protecting the environment. *Miss Rumphius* is a classic picture book on nature education, following the theme of "how to make the world a better place". In the story, beautiful Lupins are the bright color that decorates the world, and it shows that the colorful world is created by such small yet great contributions.

3.1.4. Death education and sex education

3.1.4.1. Parting and passing away

Life is precious because it has a beginning and an end. Parting with loved ones, the aging of pets, the withering of plants... Life and death accompany the process of human growth. As a very unique part of education for life for young children, death education should let young children understand the joy of new life and the moments of farewell in life. When talking about death, parents and teachers should candidly tell young children that birth, senility, illness and death are normal things in the world.

Badger's Parting Gifts tells a story of the eternal existence of the soul after the death of the body. In the story, the badger that the animals respect and love is gone, but he left a parting gift for each friend. He will always live in the hearts of his friends. In *Grandpa Became a Ghost*, Grandpa becomes a ghost after death and comes back to the protagonist Esben. Grandpa says that people become ghosts if they forget something before death, therefore, Grandpa and Esben recall the moments lived together, and Grandpa eventually remembers what he forgot - saying goodbye to little Aspen. Only through farewells can memories last forever. In *The Cat that Lived a Million Times*, the protagonist, a tabby cat, lived a million times and died a million times. He has been many people's cat, and life and death are meaningless to him. Only after becoming a stray cat and meeting his beloved white cat does he understand the preciousness of life and the unwillingness to die. Only love makes encounters and departures in life meaningful.

3.1.4.2. Sex and sex education

Seen from the process of growth and development, children's initial sex exploration occurs before school age, and owing to their curiosity and need for knowledge, children will ask questions to close

people around them, usually their parents. Sexual psychology begins to appear in infancy or early childhood. [5] Sex is somewhat avoided as taboo in conversations in China. As a branch of education for life for young children, sex education for children is often in an awkward position. However, only by understanding sexual knowledge and knowing the concept of gender can young children effectively establish an overall understanding of themselves and the prevention of child molestation be strengthened from young children themselves. It is manifestly unreasonable to ask parents to abandon traditional ideas and bluntly tell young children "what sex is". Therefore, conducting sex education with picture books as a reading medium is an excellent choice, both in terms of media influence and children's psychological development.

3.2. Value and importance of conducting education for life for young children with picture books as a carrier

3.2.1. Picture books being designed as an easily accepted form based on the cognitive level of young children

Piaget divided the cognitive development of children and adolescents into four stages, and young children are in the pre-operational stage during which, the thinking of young children is mainly representative thinking that internalizes objects and actions in their minds by mainly using the symbolic function and substitution effect of symbols, therefore, it is difficult for them to grasp systematic life knowledge. The biggest characteristic of children's picture books is that they combine graphics and text to intuitively provide enlightenment content for young children based on their literacy and information processing capabilities.

As education for life for young children is comprehensive, practical and indirect, picture books have become the best for imparting education for life knowledge to young children among numerous media. Intuitive and vivid picture books easily attract young children, and their simple and childish picture stories and strong visual communication effects achieve a "compelling" effect of expression to hook young children. Picture books contain profound truths in simple and easy-to-understand text and vivid and clear pictures and are storytelling, artistic and educational, making them a form perfect for the cognitive level and thinking ability of young children.

3.2.2. Picture books comprehensively restoring the situations in education for life for young children

When education for life is conducted for young children through picture book reading, direct preaching or discipline should not be given. Except for education for life on "human and nature", the scenarios of safety education, health education and death and sex education are not suitable to be preset with real cases. Moreover, it is not advisable to let young children imagine scenarios of being harmed because they lack life experience, their imaginations are insufficient and they can be shocked by it. Picture books transform many dangerous situations that may happen in the real world into an anthropomorphic world of animals or plants or construct for young children a world close to their lives so that they have tangible feelings.

3.2.3. Picture books concretizing generic life concepts

Education for life ultimately questions, reflects on and obtains the meaning of life. In particular, education for life for young children needs to be conducted with profundity and an easy-to-understand approach. For young children to understand words such as "love", "respect", "awe", "death", "hope" and "life", it requires extensive life experience to explain them, but how can young children understand these kinds of life knowledge when they are young and lack life experiences? The stories in picture books and the true, the good and the beautiful contained in the stories are conducive to young children's understanding of the development of emotions and enable them to correctly understand generic life concepts in education for life.

Picture books create concrete situations with emotions integrated into the stories, and the worlds therein are enriched with the author's deep feelings and thoughts about living and life and provide concrete objects for young children to learn abstract emotional content. These worlds belong to young children, where they can immerse themselves in the stories, feel happy for the characters' happiness and sad for their sadness, grow with their growth in the reading process and eventually obtain the life force the authors want to give to young children.

4. Problems with the Current Situation of Education for Life Based on Picture Book Reading and the Causes

4.1. Problems with the current situation of education for life based on picture book reading

4.1.1. Kindergartens lacking a systematic practice framework and teaching and research mechanism for conducting education for life

Firstly, China has not clearly introduced policies on education for life and education for life is conducted more widely in primary and secondary schools. Education for life remains marginalized in kindergartens at present, and some kindergartens generalize education for life as safety education or health education. Secondly, the kindergarten curriculum already has five detailed fields, and it is not clear whether education for life with picture books as a carrier will be separately opened up as a new field. Teaching materials that combine teaching with picture books and education for life are so scarce that no unified specifications have been formed for the integration of the two.

This study holds that picture books are a static curriculum resource, and the cycle of kindergartens purchasing new picture books is relatively long. According to interviews conducted by the author, picture books for each kindergarten class are "inherited" from the previous class as they move up, and putting aside whether the picture books comprehensively cover the areas of education, from the perspective of the resource update cycle alone, there are few picture book resources in the field of education for life available for selection. These teaching resources that are like a pool of stagnant water will eventually become "furnishings" after children read them countless times, which leads to teachers not conducting education for life many times although they know that picture books are a resource for conducting education for life. Secondly, the form of education for life based on picture book reading is not fixed. Teachers explain electronic versions of picture books on projectors, read picture books before meals or afternoon naps and adopt other forms. Their methods of reading picture books are very random and unsystematic. Thirdly, when teachers use picture books for education for life, they do not have a complete teaching strategy based on picture books and have to forcibly apply the model of traditional picture book reading activities to education for life. Kindergartens currently lack a complete education for life curriculum system in teaching with picture books as well as a sound system for teaching with picture books, making the progress of education for life in kindergartens relatively slow.

4.1.2. Themes selected for education for life picture books lacking breadth and depth

Based on the knowledge system of the five fields of the kindergarten curriculum, kindergarten teachers can correspondingly summarize some education for life knowledge that falls within the dimensions of "human and self" and "human and nature". According to the author's interviews with teachers from a public kindergarten in B City, the teachers are relatively clear about the dimensions of education for life, but they only fill the framework of education for life for young children with the existing knowledge of the five fields.

Kindergarten teachers are mostly concerned with the physical condition and material aspects of young children, and their scope of education for life is only limited to caring for the life safety, etc. of young children. Emphasizing natural life while neglecting spiritual and social life, emphasizing life cognition and health while neglecting life emotions and values and simply understanding education for life as health education, safety education and self-protection education are biased for the construction of education for life for young children.

The significance of education for life contained in picture books cannot be fully conveyed through text and pictures alone but requires teachers to dig deep. Some teachers only focus on expounding the story content through questioning, discussing and retelling in the storytelling process and summarize education for life contained in picture books with only a few sentences, causing young children to be unable to deeply experience the educational content therein. Some teachers regard teaching with picture books for education for life as general picture book reading activities, where young children only pay attention to the plot and lack active exploration and thinking of the stories. This type of teaching with picture books lacks depth and merely achieves superficial effects of education for life.

4.1.3. The form of teaching with picture books being single and overly templated

According to interviews, when kindergarten teachers use picture books, the main method is still teachers reading picture books at the podium and young children listening to teachers explaining picture books. In given situations, young children may easily enter the worlds created by picture books. However, education for life theory covers a wide range, the lecturing method is not effective for all

picture books, and young children have individual differences. Therefore, it is difficult for a single teaching method to make young children maintain their subjective initiative. Teachers focus on cultivating young children's language expression ability during education for life activities by teaching with picture books but do not pay much attention to how young children provide feedback on their learning effects, therefore, young children are in a passive acceptance state in the process of acquiring knowledge. Simply narrating and reading picture books without the aid of models, games, music and other tools restricts young children's creativity and neglects their principal position in teaching activities.

4.1.4. Inadequate conduct of death education and sex education

Chinese teachers and parents often avoid talking about the topic of death education and consider it inappropriate to prematurely reveal the concept of death to young children. Access to death education is far below other branches of education for life such as safety education and health education. However, education for life originated from death education, and life and death are dialectically unified, which is easily overlooked. Avoiding talking about "death" or concealing and deceiving can lead to young children being overwhelmed by fear and sadness when facing death, which then causes them to lose their awe of life and affects their establishment of views of life and death. *Coco* is a classic film about death culture, inspired by the Day of the Dead festival in Mexico. The line "Death is not the end of life; forgetting is" is a reminder of the courage to face death. Young children will not have a comprehensive understanding of life if they don't even want to talk about the word "death". If the meaning of "death" is not understood, how can they understand the uniqueness of "life", let alone a correct view of death?

The objective of the Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3 to 6 Years for health is to "Tell young children not to allow others to touch their private parts." Frequent news reports on child molestation and sexual abuse in recent years have made parents of young children panic, and vicious incidents have caused serious physical and mental harm to young children. Young children do not know how to protect themselves, lack basic judgment of people and have vague gender consciousness. Most kindergartens cannot effectively conduct sex education, and quite a number of parents and teachers are currently unable to describe the names of reproductive organs in scientific terms to young children or teach them the correct methods to protect their private parts. Sex education for children has been in a dilemma of being severely lacking yet urgently needed. According to an interview with a kindergarten class teacher in Q City, young children in the middle class can already say some swear words related to genitals, but their acceptance of real sex education and education on sexual harassment prevention is far slower than the influence of the Internet on them.

The number of picture books on sex education is small and the attention is unevenly distributed in kindergartens, and adults continue to approach sex education as the "elephant in the room". Sex education picture books combine illustrations and stories, however, the phenomenon of "talking about sex with clothes on" still exists. Teachers are not properly oriented to the selection of sex education picture books and are often led astray by stereotypes, victim blaming, and the tendency to put the interests of perpetrators over victims. As a serious topic, sex education can easily have adverse effects on children's values and gender views even with slight concept deviations.

4.2. Causes of problems with the current situation of education for life based on picture book reading

4.2.1. Insufficient understanding of the importance of education for life for young children

As an education concept that has emerged in recent years, education for life for young children has not yet received widespread attention and popularization in the field of preschool education. The kindergarten curriculum already covers five fields, and as a new concept, most kindergartens only integrate the content of education for life into their daily activities. Insufficient attention to education for life based on picture book reading is not only reflected in the absence of a separate category of education for life in kindergartens' curriculum systems but also in the low frequency of teachers conducting such picture book reading activities at ordinary times - even when they do, they mainly do it on kindergarten theme days, traditional festivals and anniversaries, therefore, the conduct of picture book reading activities lacks regularity and cannot form a systematic cycle. Kindergartens have realized the importance of education for life for young children, however, its popularization is not widespread. Picture books as one of the organizational means therein have received very little attention.

4.2.2. Lack of training for teachers in related knowledge and skills

Currently in China, the curricula for normal college/university students in preschool education still have no courses on education for life for young children, therefore, students do not receive systematic training in education for life and have little understanding of its teaching and learning methods. The lack of competence of teachers for young children in this area directly affects the implementation effectiveness of education for life activities and hinders the progress of education for life for young children, which is already in an awkward position.

The characteristics and objectives of education for life activities require teachers to possess certain teaching wisdom when designing and implementing them. On the other hand, teachers' understanding of education for life is often superficial, limited to aspects such as safety, health and diet, without digging deeply into the connotation of education for life activities or paying much attention to the spiritual lives of young children, and they neglect the coordinated development of young children's intellectual, emotional, volitional and practical dimensions.

Furthermore, the literature attainments of teachers for young children also need improvement. Understanding the plot is the most basic requirement: teachers should comprehensively analyze the kernel of picture books, clearly explain and express the hidden relationships and interactions between illustrations and text and accurately grasp the education for life content that picture books intend to express. Only when teachers truly understand education for life picture books and the ideas communicated by their authors can they guide young children to fully appreciate and understand picture books. However, kindergarten teachers barely have opportunities to learn knowledge about education for life due to their generally low initial education level and the nature of their work, in which they are responsible not only for the care and education of young children but also for various tasks such as daily environment creation, hygiene, communication with parents, meetings and lesson planning, which occupies the time for self-improvement.

4.2.3. Influence of traditional thinking

The dross of China's long feudal patriarchal system and traditional cultural concepts can cause people who have not been properly guided to lose their way during the social transformation. Furthermore, during China's social transformation, new and old waves have mixed, and various complex value orientations have emerged. Old concepts are overturned but not completely erased while new concepts are often challenged. The process of social and cultural transformation is inevitably accompanied by a certain degree of disorder.

Firstly, in traditional Chinese concepts, the ideas of "avoiding ominous words" and "using euphemisms" are deeply rooted, therefore, parents carefully avoid mentioning the knowledge of life and death and they even use other words instead when communicating with other adults. Parents and teachers seldom take the initiative to discuss topics of life and death with young children, and when a pet or a loved one passes away, they are still unwilling to communicate with young children and thus miss the best opportunity for education.

Secondly, from ancient times to the present, individuals have been closely connected to politics and society, causing their sociality to far exceed their natural part. People praise those who act bravely for a just cause and sacrifice their lives for righteousness, overemphasize human morality while neglecting human life itself, and involuntarily treat life and death lightly. Humans live in the natural geographical environment before they live in society. If society instills into children the idea of risking their lives to face danger and demonstrating nobility with death, it is anti-life and against humanity. The avoidance of mentioning the word "death" and the upholding of risking one's life to face danger are always contradictory. With such a contradiction, death education will only be increasingly placed in a distorted position. Education for life should question the traditional social ethics and education views that disdain life and return education to life and living.

4.2.4. Influence of education's utilitarianism and instrumentalism

This study holds that the root cause of the insufficient conduct of education for life for young children is the influence of social ideas. The development of social productive forces has led to changes in the course of history, and the increasingly developed society has become focused on efficiency, value and interests. The fast-paced development of the times with the prevalence of utilitarianism and consumerism often neglects the enrichment of the soul and the development of sound personality although it satisfies material needs. As a result of the influence of society, education has been made into a phased process. Social development has led to a conceptual transformation of worldly success and put

increasingly high requirements on people's early acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary for making a living and surviving, leading to the quantification of the education process and the alienation of educational outcomes. Education that is eager for outcomes has transferred the anxiety for success to children. Parents and teachers often forget that they are still young children immature in physical and mental development and that the long-term goal of education is to make them whole persons. The short-term goals of scores and progression and the long-term goals of success and starting a family eventually lead to human alienation. Consequently, the disadvantages of utilitarian education are exposed in society after people are not in the educational stages or even during their university years. Acute problems such as suicide, mental illness, drugs, violence and sexploitation can be traced. These are explicit and concrete consequences of utilitarian education and more the result of confusion, silence and numbness buried deep in people's hearts, which have never been spoken out. People will gradually forget what happiness is and what it means to "live".

Education should never forget to care for life - with life as the origin, to promote the free growth of life. Early childhood education dominated by instrumental rationalism makes the infusion of knowledge and the enlightenment of intelligence its top priorities. To access quality education in the future, it catalyzes a complete production line of instrumental rationalism. As children are sent onto such production lines, education for life is no longer valued.

Society needs modernization, and people in society need modern thoughts. Society changes with each passing day, and people in society affect society with actions and should constantly update their cognition with society's progress. But parents' educational concepts are often formed in the past and their ideas are in transition. As a result, individual thinking is not completely synchronized with social changes and needs. Education for life aims not only to teach students how to survive but also to guide them to understand living, think about the meaning of life and thus pursue a happy life.

Education for life covers not only how to protect individuals' personal safety and establish safety awareness but also, ultimately, how to guide young children to understand and cherish life. People might find the direction to happiness only when they have a clear understanding of themselves, others and society on the basis of examining their own lives. Nowadays, the so-called involution begins in kindergarten, where children are trapped by the utilitarian educational concept from preschool age and parents believe that only by starting to struggle earlier can their children get closer to future happiness. However, happiness is a feeling, and everyone has a different interpretation of happiness throughout their lives. Tomorrow's happiness is unknown while today's happiness is often overlooked by parents and teachers. The pursuit of a happy life necessitates a focus on the individual's current life, to seek and live the life they desire in every moment. If happiness were to be explained from the perspective of English grammar, it would be a "present perfect continuous tense". It can be wonderfully expected but cannot be stored or preset. Therefore, education should not sacrifice today's happiness for tomorrow's.

The biggest difference between humans and animals is "creation". Human creativity has led to the human society today. Survival is only about sustaining and continuing life, while only a wonderful life can shine and recreate the light of life. Therefore, the goal of education for life is to teach students how to survive and, on this basis, guide them toward a happy life.

Education for life is based on love, and if education for life is oriented toward achieving certain goals or completing certain teaching objectives and plans, utilitarianism will become its base. Then, the standard for measuring education for life will become a singular concept - whether the teaching tasks are completed. If education for life becomes so utilitarian, it will only weaken the life consciousness of young children.

5. Optimization Strategies for Education for Life for Young Children Based on Picture Book Reading

5.1. Improving policies so that education for life for young children becomes thoroughly known by the public

Currently, society knows little about education for life for young children. Although education for life has received sufficient attention in primary and secondary schools as well as colleges and universities, specific provisions on education for life for young children are lacking in some current policies and regulations in China. Against this background, this study hopes that the education for life concept will be disseminated to the preschool education stage as early as possible because education for life for young children is the cornerstone of young children's sound physical and mental

development and is indispensable for their lifelong growth and the country's national quality development. This study calls for policies to be introduced in a targeted way according to China's national conditions and by learning from the valuable aspects of education for life in foreign countries and a complete curriculum system for education for life for young children to be constructed, so as to promote the steady development of such education.

5.2. Developing kindergarten-based curricula with picture books and enriching the teaching forms of picture book reading

The quality of education for life for young children is severely affected by the insufficient development of picture book resources, therefore, teachers should take education for life as the core and choose matching picture book resources in the process of conducting education for life for young children based on picture books. A frame of education for life for young children has not been established, and its definition varies across regions and kindergartens, therefore, kindergartens should create a mode of teaching with picture books for education for life based on their own kindergarten-running ideas, to solve the problems of going with the majority and incoherence in teaching with picture books. Furthermore, kindergartens have integrated teaching with picture books with education for life, however, the extended activities are too unitary. Therefore, kindergartens must expand the content of teaching with picture books and seek various forms thereof, such as picture book-based performances and creations, and close combinations of teaching with picture books and the lives of young children in a way full of vitality.

5.3. Enhancing teachers' knowledge, literacy and teaching abilities related to education for life and abandoning traditional concepts

Teachers' literacy in education for life is one of the factors that affect the quality of education for life activities. Teachers should deeply understand the education for life philosophies and connotations contained in the picture books before holding education for life activities by teaching with picture books for young children. Only when teachers have solid knowledge of education for life can they better conduct education for life practice for young children, therefore, they should study related knowledge at ordinary times to deepen their understanding of education for life and see young children in the light of their development.

Education for life in kindergartens should break free from the constraints of education evaluations. Overly structured education evaluations examine young children's learning effects and developmental levels based on cognitive and social indicators, but they sever the integrity of life and one-sidedly emphasize the sociality of life. Evaluation activities are in fact judgment activities based on the evaluating subjects' own needs, and the logic followed by instrumental rationality is incorporating any object into rational calculations centered on the subjects.

5.4. Integrating education for life into daily life

Life and living are closely linked. Education for life is not only a practice strategy to improve all aspects of human life but also enriches people's way of thinking about themselves and society. Life is not constructed but "manifests" in living. Education for life is based on living itself and is eventually to integrate into living. At an early stage of life, young children need to go through a period of eliminating ignorance, and before knowing the world, they should first know themselves and life. Daily life offers countless opportunities to learn to know oneself and life, therefore, kindergartens should create life situations for young children to fully combine their daily routines with the essence of living and to perceive, explore, express and create freely, so as to promote the continuous generation of their overall living experience.

6. Conclusion

Looking back upon the birth and development of education for life, its evolving process is just like the process of human thought construction, transitioning from solving problems from a social perspective to deeply exploring the essence of life. Due to the background in which education for life was proposed, most of its content addresses highly targeted social issues, such as safety education, health education, narcotics control education, AIDS prevention education and environmental protection education. However, education for life has been given new life with the development of disciplines

such as pedagogy, sociology and psychology. Education for life should begin by endowing people with a holistic view of life, worldview and values and let them establish positive emotional attitudes toward themselves, society and nature. In a word, education for life is about guiding people to "live and work in peace".

Education for life ultimately questions, reflects on and obtains the meaning of life. Then, what do preschool education practitioners need young children to learn through education for life? The answer given in this study is - to learn to plant a seed of knowledge about life, death, love and dreams in case they question life and the world after growing up.

Finite life is in constant opposition with the infinite world, however, life's pursuit and life experiences are endless like the world's development. Chasing life is boundless for us individuals because we are always on the way of life forward. Life's end is unknown, and life is everyone's unfinished business, so is education for life. From our birth to our death, education for life and life experience coexist and keep changing, which constitutes the charm of education for life.

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