

The Post-epidemic Era: Reflections on enhancing labour education for young children

Fan Li*

School of Teacher Education, Tianjin University, Tianjin, China

*Correspondence: 328525357@qq.com

Abstract: Since the new era, labour education has become a regular activity in kindergarten education activities, an important part of all kindergarten education activities, and has been the focus of academic circles. In particular, the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening Labour Education in Schools and Universities in the New Era, issued by the State Council of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 2020, emphasized the necessity of carrying out labour education, which once again triggered a wave of concern about labour education from all walks of life in education. However, since the outbreak of the new crown pneumonia epidemic in 2020, kindergartens have had to conduct all their educational activities against the background of the normalisation of the epidemic. Because of the normalisation of the epidemic, many kindergartens only focus on the form of labour education without really grasping the correct way of labour education for young children and the connotation of labour for young children, which has led to the marginalisation, formalisation and utilitarianisation of labour education for young children; and the lack of opportunities, content and activities for labour education for young children under the conditions of the epidemic. This has led to a marginalisation, formalisation and utilitarianisation of early childhood labour education, and a lack of opportunities, content and activities for early childhood labour education in the context of the epidemic.

Keywords: Early childhood labour education, epidemic normalization, educational strategies

How to cite this paper: Li, F. The Post-epidemic Era: Reflections on enhancing labour education for young children. Curriculum & Innovation, 2023, 1(1), 19-24. <https://doi.org/10.61187/ci.v1i1.17>



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed at the 2018 National Education Conference that “we should promote the spirit of labour among students, educate and guide them to advocate labour, respect labour, understand the truth that labour is the most glorious, the most noble, the greatest and the most beautiful, and be able to work hard, honestly and creatively when they grow up” [1,2]. Given the importance of labour education, and in the context of normalisation in the post-epidemic era, kindergartens should pay more attention to labour education and labour literacy of young children. The Guidelines for the Learning and Development of Children Aged 3-6 emphasise that kindergartens should “make use of life opportunities and role-play to help children understand the social services that are close to them and their work, appreciate the facilities and services they provide to everyone, respect the work of the staff and value the fruits of their labour”. Against the backdrop of the normalisation of the epidemic, therefore, the development of early childhood labour education is all the more important, rather than insignificant. The aim of early childhood labour education is to develop a love of work, respect for those who serve everyone, and to appreciate the fruits of their labour and the hard work of working people, so that children can acquire initial labour skills and develop good labour habits.

2. The Basic Meaning and Value of Labour Education for Young Children

In the post-epidemic era, it is clear from the current state of early childhood labour education that there is a certain need and urgency to reintegrate and implement it again.

Early childhood labour education is not only necessary for the early years, but is a sufficient and necessary condition for every child's growth, especially during the special period of the normalisation of the epidemic and the critical period of the new era. Therefore, in the context of the normalisation of the epidemic and the new era, the first rule for the rational implementation of labour education for young children, both in kindergartens and in their families, is that the basic connotation and the great educational value of labour education for young children must be accurately grasped.

2.1. Basic Connotations of Early Childhood Labour Education

Early childhood labour education is a kind of education to cultivate the labour literacy of young children. Huo Liyan proposes that labour education in kindergartens is an educational activity that promotes the acquisition of labour knowledge and labour skills, and the formation of labour awareness and labour habits among young children [3]. Liu Junhao points out that labour education for young children is a comprehensive and integrated education for labour initiation, which is characterised by life and comprehensiveness in content and is comprehensive and cross-disciplinary in form [4].

According to Wu Ling, the aim of early childhood labour education is to guide children to learn simple labour knowledge and skills, to inspire a love of labour and working people, and to help them develop good habits of labour [5]. Ren Minhua suggests that the aim of labour education for young children is not to obtain the fruits of their labour, but to help them develop labour feelings and habits through self-serving labour and labour for the community [6]. Yu Zhiying and Xu Xiaoqin suggest that appropriate goals for early childhood labour education should be set according to the actual physical and mental development and age characteristics of young children, mainly including mastering simple labour skills, developing a good habit of loving labour, cherishing the fruits of labour, and respecting and loving working people [7].

In her analysis of Chen Hechen's thinking on early childhood education, Wu Ling points out that Chen Hechen divided the content of early childhood labour education into two aspects: "participating in simple labour activities" and "getting to know adult labour". The "participation in simple labour activities" includes self-service labour, public welfare labour, and planting and rearing activities, while the "understanding of adult labour" mainly involves organising children to get close to the labourers around them and to understand adult labour [8]. A few other researchers have divided the content of labour education for young children according to age groups, based on the Guidelines for the Learning and Development of Children Aged 3 to 6 (hereinafter referred to as the Guidelines), and believe that the content and level of labour for young children in small, middle and large classes should be different, for example, Xiao Hongmei has proposed specific labour content for children in different age groups [9].

The term 'early childhood labour education' in this study refers to the labour education activities and practices carried out in kindergartens and at home with children aged 3-6 years old, in order to develop good labour behaviour in children.

2.2. The Value of Labour Education for Young Children

2.2.1. Labour education is the foundation and guarantee of early childhood development

Cultivating children's labour literacy is the key to improving their core literacy. Labour education is the basis and guarantee for the development of moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic education, which are both independent of each other and unified. Labour education, as the foundation of the five education areas, is the guarantee for the healthy growth of children. It is therefore a necessary condition for children to have a strong body through work, which will have a huge impact on all aspects of their future development.

2.2.2. Labour education has multiple values for the development of young children

Firstly, labour education is conducive to promoting the physical development of young children. At the early childhood age, Guo Yingtong points out that appropriate work can promote hand-eye coordination, the development of fine motor skills and the development of large movements in young children, as well as exercise their bodies and enhance their physical fitness. Secondly, positive work experiences can promote children's psychological development [10]. In the process of hands-on work, children can experience the fruits of their own labour and feel the pleasure of working. Li Lin points out that labour promotes the development of the young brain, logical thinking skills and concrete figurative thinking [11]. Again, appropriate labour in early childhood can promote their social cognitive development. Hou Chunzai suggests that labour education for young children can foster the quality of "altruism" in young children. Lastly, beneficial work can foster good personality qualities in young children. Lin Xiaoping suggests that labour is good for developing children's independence, sense of duty and responsibility, as well as their spirit of hard work, independence and self-reliance and strong will [13]. In addition, education about work can also promote the development of children's independence and their initiative, including the development of their ability to participate, discover, cooperate, interact and explore on their own initiative.

3. The Current Situation of Early Childhood Labour Education in the Context of Epidemic Normalization

3.1. Marginalization, Formalization and Utilitarianization of Early Childhood Labour Education under Epidemic Conditions

The main reason for this is the lack of awareness of the value of labour education for young children on the part of kindergarten principals and related staff, and the fact that, due to the epidemic, kindergarten principals, teachers and parents have further diluted the value and content of labour education for young children. Firstly, labour education was the mainstay of kindergartens, but due to the epidemic, it was gradually replaced by other activities such as language, painting and handicraft for the safety of children, and labour education-related activities were marginalised. Secondly, even if kindergartens do provide labour education activities and lessons, they do not provide substantive labour education, but rather "just for show", a kind of formal labour education; finally, labour education in kindergartens only serves the utilitarian purpose of providing materials for the kindergarten's own grading. Thus, in the context of the normalisation of the epidemic, labour education in kindergartens is marginalised, formalised and utilitarianised.

3.2. Lack of Opportunities, Reduced Content and Activities for Early Childhood Labour Education in Epidemic Conditions

Work programmes and activities for children at home and in kindergartens. In kindergartens, because of the epidemic, kindergartens and teachers have to take more risks and responsibilities to ensure the physical and mental health and safety of the children, which can significantly reduce the activities and programmes related to labour education for children. Secondly, in families with young children, the epidemic often reverberates and when the epidemic is severe, many families are confined to their homes and adults and children are not allowed to leave their homes, thus greatly increasing parent-child interaction and time spent with children. For example, parental education, how parents should accompany their children and the lack of content in family education have revealed many problems, and most families have children who are the "little princesses" and "little emperors" of the family, with all adults in the family surrounding the children at the same time. The adults in the family are all around the child and worried about the child getting hurt, and have already completed all kinds of household chores, so the child has even less opportunity to exercise. The opportunities for children to experience and educate themselves about work are also greatly reduced. In addition, due to the lack of

educational content in the home, parents do not know how to spend time with their children in person for such a long period of time and have to use “mobile phones”, “tablets”, “TVs” and other electronic products as their children’s “entertainment”. The lack of educational content in the home has led to parents not knowing how to spend time with their children in person for such a long period of time, and having to use electronic devices such as mobile phones, tablets and televisions as “playmates” to keep their children company, causing young children to join the ranks of the “heads down” crowd. As a result, during the epidemic, the content of work education for young children was reduced to a large number of electronic products.

4. Ways to Implement Labour Education for Young Children in the Context of Epidemic Normalization

4.1. From the Surface to the Inside, a Deeper Understanding of the Connotation of Labour Education for Young Children

It is important to understand the value of work education for children in early childhood and not just focus on what exists on the surface. In particular, in the context of the epidemic, we need to pay attention to the value and connotation of labour education for young children, and to carry out appropriate labour education-related activities and practices for young children based on their age and physical and mental development. First of all, all kindergarten staff, from the head teacher to the deputy head teacher to the director of teaching and research to the teachers and the janitor, should actively study the national and governmental regulations on labour education for young children. All kindergarten staff should actively learn about the guidelines and policies promulgated by the state and the government on early childhood labour education, so that they can “have children in their hearts and eyes”. Secondly, teaching and research should be a good example for all of us, so that all kindergarten teachers can analyse and discuss the relevant national education policies and guidelines in depth and understand their meaning. -Through a combination of theory and practice, teachers will be able to lead all teachers to a deeper understanding of all aspects of early childhood labour education. Finally, kindergartens and families are the main places where children live. Not only do teachers need to have a deeper grasp of the content of early childhood labour education, but also parents. Parents are their children’s first teachers, and what they say and do has a deep impact on their children’s behaviour. For example, in a commercial about ‘Mummy washing her feet’, a little boy sees his mother bringing a foot wash to ‘Mummy’s’ ‘mother’. This is why the next scene is about the boy bringing his ‘mum’ footwash. Therefore, the development of children’s labour awareness and habits is deeply influenced by their parents, who should also have a deep understanding of the meaning of labour education.

4.2. From One to Many, Participation in Diversified Labour in Epidemic Conditions

It is important to move from a single form to a diverse one, not just one form of work. Games are not only one of the main forms of activity in kindergartens, but also the most enjoyable activities for children. In this way, labour education becomes a form that children enjoy and love to work. In addition, we should make full use of all kinds of resources to create a realistic and good working environment for children, such as a “doll’s house”, so that children can work in this realistic environment, and their experience will be more realistic and enjoyable. The children will be able to enjoy their work in the community, which is a real ‘small community’, and will be able to enjoy the achievements and pleasures of working. In addition, in the context of the normalisation of epidemics, the use of community resources for child labour education and activities should pay attention to the prevention and control of epidemics and the testing of nucleic acids to ensure the safety of children’s lives as a priority. Finally, it is also possible to create a realistic working environment for children through garden cooperation, home cooperation, garden-enterprise cooperation and so on, so that they can experience the value and pleasure that working

brings to children in this environment and help them to develop good working habits. In the context of the epidemic, children should not be protected, but should be allowed to participate in diversified labour activities, and labour education should be carried out for them in many ways and through many channels according to their actual situation, needs and interests.

4.3. Collaboration between Home and Family to Bring Back the Pinnacle of Early Childhood Labour Education

The home and the kindergarten are the most important places in the life of young children, so work education for young children is a matter of collaboration and cooperation between the home and the family. In the context of the normalisation of the epidemic, parents should actively participate in parent meetings and training activities organised by kindergartens or early childhood education institutions, and should actively promote to parents the correct concept of labour education for young children, so as to prevent parents from forming a kind of “little emperor”, “little princess”, “hand in hand, mouth in hand”, etc. Parents should avoid the formation of such misconceptions about childcare as “little emperor”, “little princess”, “hand in hand, mouth in hand”, etc. In addition, parents should set a good example for their children’s healthy growth and teach them by example, so that they can understand the value and meaning of work and experience the pleasure and sense of achievement that comes from working. Therefore, during the period of epidemic control, the parent-child bonding time between children and parents is greatly increased and parents should be a good role model for their children. Parents should be good role models for their children, for example by doing household chores such as washing clothes, dishes, sweeping the floor, etc., rather than parents spending their days with their mobile phones and watching short videos such as “Shake” all day. Parents should play positive games with their children at home to improve parent-child relationships, let them do some chores alone, or help them to do some chores together so that they can feel the pleasure and achievement of doing chores during the epidemic, and gradually develop good working habits and work literacy in their children.

In addition, kindergartens, as preschools specialising in the training of young children, should actively follow the footsteps of the state and the government and deeply implement their guidelines and contents into kindergarten labour education, so that every teacher and staff member in kindergartens can deeply understand the connotation and value of labour education for young children in the new era against the background of the normalisation of the epidemic, and truly understand and comprehend the changes and innovations in labour education for young children in the new media era. It is important to understand and appreciate the changes and innovations in early childhood labour education in the new media era, and to abandon the erroneous notion that labour education is the cultivation of labour and the corrupt ideas of the past. Secondly, labour education can be infused into other areas of education in kindergartens, or can be integrated with other educational activities. This can be done in various forms, such as competitions, speeches, performances, simulations and so on. Through these activities, children can acquire basic skills and develop a good work ethic and behavioural habits.

5. Conclusion

In the context of the epidemic and the new era, labour education for young children is inevitable, and in addition to this, there is a need to strengthen the curriculum related to labour education for young children. The current marginalisation, formalisation and utilitarianisation of labour education in kindergartens, as well as the reduction in the content and activities of labour education for young children in the context of the epidemic, and the outright absence of opportunities for labour education. Therefore, in response to the issues addressed in this study, three options are proposed for the reference of all sec-

tors: firstly, a deeper understanding of labour education for young children from the surface to the inside. As families and kindergartens are the main places where young children live, both kindergarten teachers and parents should not only see the connotation and value of labour education for young children at the surface level, but should start with policy documents and then study them in depth so that they can deeply understand the value of labour education for young children in all aspects of their lives. Secondly, from one to many, participation in diversified labour in epidemic conditions. Young children's interests are distributed in various aspects, therefore, a single labour education or a single form of labour tends to make young children lose interest. This is why labour education for young children is carried out in a multifaceted, multiform and diversified way. Thirdly, collaboration between home and family has helped to bring early childhood labour education back to its peak. Parents and teachers, as the people who know young children best, should work together to help them develop a more age-appropriate form of work, to develop their awareness of work and active work habits, and to promote their physical and psychological development and healthy growth. Marx proposed that "education should be combined with productive work", therefore, labour education in early childhood has a long and far-reaching significance for the development of young children, not only in the context of the epidemic, but also in the new era of young children, in the process of carrying out labour education should pay more attention to the hands-on activities of young children, so as to The process of work education should be more hands-on, so that children can experience the process of working and develop a love of work.

References

1. Yu, Yayang, Hu, Liyuan. Current status and outlook: a review of research on early childhood labor education in China[J]. Journal of Changchun College of Education, 2021, 37(06): 66-73.
2. Guo Yingtong. Reflections on strengthening labor education for young children in the context of the new era[J]. Education Observation, 2019, 8(12): 27-29.
3. Huo Liyan. Early childhood labor education: connotations, principles and paths[J]. Fujian Education, 2018(47): 16-19.
4. Liu Junhao. The conceptual analysis and practical logic of Chen Hechen's early childhood labor education[J]. Journal of Education (Second Half), 2020(07): 5-10.
5. Wu Ling. An exploration of Chen Hechen's thoughts on labor education for young children [J]. Journal of Anhui Normal University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), 1998(01): 130-134.
6. Ren Minhua. Parents' misconceptions about child labor education[J]. Preschool Education Research, 1994(05): 39-40.
7. Yu Zhiying, Xu Xiaoqin. Labor education for young children in China[J]. Early Education, 1994(Z1): 44-45.
8. Xiao Hongmei. A brief discussion on family work education in early childhood[J]. Science and Technology Innovation Herald, 2010(13): 162.
9. Li Lin. Talking about the significance of family work education to the formation of children's good moral character[J]. Jiangxi Educational Research, 1997(06): 57-58.
10. Hou Chunzai. Early labor education and the development of children's social cognition[J]. Educational Review, 1999(04): 41-43.
11. Lin Xiaoping. A brief discussion on the cultivation of self-service ability and work habits of young children[J]. Preschool Education Research, 2001(05): 64-65.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of BSP and/or the editor(s). BSP and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.