

# The Practical Path of Kindergarten Labor Education under the Concept of Active Education

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## Abstract

As an important part of China's education system, labor education not only has a direct impact on the labor spirit of socialist builders and successors, but also determines their labor value orientation and labor skill level. In the context of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, it is necessary to cultivate a new generation of people with comprehensive development in morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor skills. Starting from young children, cultivating their labor concepts, skills, and qualities has an extremely important impact on their lifelong development. Chen Heqin is a famous Chinese child educator and child psychologist, and the founder of modern early childhood education in China. His concept of "active education" encompasses a systematic and complete idea of early childhood labor education. This article will start from the core purpose theory, curriculum theory, methodology and other aspects of the concept of active education, systematically expound the value and enlightenment of the concept of active education on early childhood labor education. Based on the labor practice of A Kindergarten in Chengdu, it will specifically analyze the "active" elements contained in kindergarten labor education, and systematically explain the important value and practical enlightenment of the concept of active education in guiding kindergartens to carry out labor education.

## Keywords

Chen Heqin; Live education; child; Labor education.

## 1. Introduction

As an important part of China's education system, labor education has always been highly valued by the Party and the government. In order to implement the spirit of the National Education Conference and build an education system that comprehensively cultivates morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor skills, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council have successively issued documents such as the "Opinions on Strengthening Labor Education for Primary, Secondary, and Middle School Students in the New Era" and the "Guidelines for Labor Education in Primary, Secondary, and Middle Schools (Trial)". Under the background of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, labor education has become a key way to cultivate talents at all levels and types of schools. Given that early childhood education is the starting and foundational stage of the entire education system, it is particularly crucial to strengthen the systematic implementation of early childhood labor education. The key to labor education lies in "doing", which is essentially "practice". Mr. Chen Heqin proposed in his philosophy of active education: learning by doing, teaching by doing, and seeking progress by doing. He advocates that students' learning and teachers' education should be carried out in practice, and progress should be made in practice. This article will be guided by the concept of active education and explore more feasible paths for kindergarten labor education practice based on the current situation of labor education in kindergartens.

## 2. The Connotation of "Live Education"

In the first half of the 20th century, Mr. Chen Heqin, based on the situation of the country and the nation, rooted in the national conditions, aimed at children and science, and through long-term exploration and practice, constructed a unique theory of "living education", systematically expounding the idea of early childhood labor education. Today, it still conforms to the current educational philosophy of society and has important significance for the development of contemporary early childhood education, reflecting distinct Chinese characteristics.

### 2.1. Teleology: being a man, being a Chinese, being a modern Chinese

Mr. Chen Heqin established China's first experimental early childhood education institution, Nanjing Gulou Kindergarten, in Nanjing in 1923, and established China's first public early childhood teacher education institution, Jiangxi Provincial Experimental Preschool Teacher Education School, in 1940. During this period, he proposed that the purpose of living education is "to be a man, to be a Chinese, and to be a modern Chinese" after a long and continuous educational practice [1]. Among them, the most general purpose of "living education" is to teach people to "be a good person". He places this purpose at the forefront of all educational work and emphasizes that young children should be taught from an early age and taught well. Chen Heqin advocates cultivating the all-round quality of individuals, and believes that an ideal "modern Chinese" should have the following five qualities: healthy physical conditions, the ability to actively build, the strength of innovation and creation, the awareness of cooperation and cooperation, and the spirit of dedication to society. As an important way to cultivate "modern Chinese", labor education plays an important role in improving people's comprehensive quality.

### 2.2. Curriculum Theory: Nature and Society are Living Textbooks

Chen Heqin opposes excessive reliance on textbook knowledge and the old education of rote memorization. He sees the old education as a "dead education" and the old school as a "prison of knowledge". These "old" things can only create groups of "bookworms". Therefore, Chen Heqin's curriculum theory advocates using nature and the larger society as "living textbooks", abandoning the erroneous concept of "books are omnipotent" in the past, and exploring new, living, and direct "knowledge treasures" for research. It is believed that the curriculum should be combined with nature, the larger society, children's real lives, and the educational content of schools. Chen Heqin proposed the "Five Finger Activities" and roughly divided the curriculum into five categories, including health activities, social activities, scientific activities, artistic activities, and language activities. The "five fingers" of the five finger activity "grow on the palms of children", which is in line with the physical and mental development characteristics of children and the development needs of society. Labor education includes curriculum elements from five major fields, with the development laws of young children and real life as the core, promoting the development of young children in various aspects from multiple directions.

### 2.3. Methodology: Learn by doing, teach by doing, and strive for progress by doing

Mr. Chen Heqin sharply criticized traditional education and teaching methods, believing that they violate educational principles, are fragmented, far from children's lives, and go against their psychological development. He learned from Dewey's experience and advocated for "teaching by doing", placing "doing" first. In his philosophy of active education, he proposed that the methods of education should be: learning by doing, teaching by doing, and seeking progress by doing. In addition, Chen Heqin emphasized that the "doing" of teachers and students is not limited to the literal use of their hands, but rather what we often refer to as "practice". He summarized the teaching process into four steps: experimental observation,

reading reference, publication and creation, criticism and discussion, emphasizing that the school activity venues for young children should be organized according to their living needs and learning interests. The key to labor education lies in teaching young children why they should do it, how to do it, and cultivating their labor skills and habits in the actual labor process.

### **3. The Labor Education Thought and Inspiration in "Active Education"**

Chen Heqin took "active education" as the theoretical basis and systematically expounded the labor education of young children. He highly recognized the educational function of labor education and explained how to give full play to the unique educational value of labor in teaching activities. Chen Heqin proposed that in order for kindergartens to effectively carry out labor education and promote the comprehensive development of young children, they must firmly grasp the purpose orientation of labor education, systematically integrate the curriculum system of labor education, and scientifically master the guidance methods of labor education.

#### **3.1. Starting from teleology, it is determined that the purpose of labor education is to cultivate and shape a complete personality**

The labor education of young children is an educational activity that aims to enable them to purposefully and consciously transform the external world through the joint action of physical and mental strength, personal practice, and hands-on operation, in order to develop labor knowledge, skills, emotions, and habits. The Opinion on Comprehensive Strengthening of Labor Education for Primary, Secondary and Middle School Students in the New Era points out that labor education should be guided by cultivating new generations who can shoulder the heavy responsibility of national rejuvenation. Under the leadership of the Party, attention should be paid to improving students' comprehensive quality to promote their healthy growth. [4]. When implementing labor education in schools, in addition to accurately grasping the value orientation of labor education, students should also be guided to establish correct labor concepts, cultivate their love and admiration for labor, respect their own and others' labor achievements, continuously enhance their high respect for the working people, and cultivate the great spirit of serving the motherland and contributing to society. As Chen Heqin said, the purpose of education is to be a man, a Chinese, and a modern Chinese. The development of children's morality, intelligence, physical strength, and aesthetic sense is closely related to labor education. The development of these abilities is that children learn to solve problems, overcome difficulties, think independently, gain experience, and feel happy in the process of labor through their own labor practice, and ultimately develop their labor emotions and abilities in all aspects. To have a healthy body, one must do it; The ability to build; The ability to create; The consciousness of cooperation; The spirit of service, to become a qualified modern Chinese, with perfect personality.

#### **3.2. Using curriculum theory as a basis, generate a labor curriculum system with complete structure and rich content**

The compulsory course that individuals learn throughout their lives is labor education. Unlike traditional subject based teaching that emphasizes rote memorization, labor education places more emphasis on practice and experience. The concept of "living education" advocates that the natural world and society are excellent living materials, which should enable young children to interact with the natural world, learn through labor, understand and transform the world around them, and achieve multi-faceted development of knowledge, will, and action. As an important carrier for the implementation of labor education, nature and society contain rich and diverse labor resources and forms. The direct experience of young children must be obtained through personal practice that conforms to their physical and mental development characteristics. Therefore, the construction of kindergarten labor curriculum should be closely

related to nature, in line with their actual lives, so that young children can enrich their cognitive abilities and understanding levels through intimate contact with nature and society, be influenced by labor education, and ultimately achieve balanced development of their body and mind.

### **3.3. Guided by methodology, cultivate children's labor value orientation and labor skills**

The teaching in kindergarten is mainly based on games, and gamified teaching is the integration of game elements, mechanisms, and rules into teaching activities, making the educational environment interesting, interactive, and challenging. In gamified teaching, children's subjective initiative is fully utilized, and their interest and enthusiasm for learning are improved through active participation. Active education "emphasizes that the learning of young children and the teaching of teachers should be based on the principle of" doing ". Through the combination of labor and game elements, labor and children's games should be linked into a whole teaching activity, so that young children can gradually acquire corresponding labor knowledge and skills in labor-intensive and gamified teaching activities, gain satisfaction and a sense of achievement in the happy process of labor, and develop good moral character of loving labor and respecting the results of labor. In labor game activities, Chen Heqin advocates that adults should use encouragement to motivate children's labor behavior, but should not interfere too much. Teachers should play a leading role and children's subjectivity should be utilized to guide children's behavior correctly, with positive encouragement as the main approach, so that children can learn independently.

## **4. Practical Ways to Strengthen Early Childhood Labor Education Under The Concept of "Active Education"**

The educational ideas in Chen Heqin's "active education" have significant contemporary significance and practical value for labor education in kindergartens. The core objectives of labor education for young children in the new era, the content of labor courses, and the methods for guiding labor teaching activities are all based on the "active education" ideas, which also have important guiding significance for promoting the comprehensive physical and mental development of young children in kindergartens. Taking the labor education practice activities of A Kindergarten in Chengdu as a paradigm, drawing on the views of "active education" on early childhood labor education, and exploring practical ways to strengthen early childhood labor education in the new era.

### **4.1. Carry out the localization practice of "active education" and create labor characteristic courses**

The development of labor education in kindergartens should fully tap into and utilize the natural and social resources around them to carry out school-based "active learning practice" activities. Chen Heqin believes that nature and the larger society are our living teaching materials. In addition to the knowledge in books, flowers, plants, trees, birds, animals, insects, fish, the sun, moon, and stars can also serve as a treasure trove of knowledge for young children. The customs and habits of various regions, as well as the changes in all things in the world, are also living teaching materials for young children to understand the world. Therefore, kindergartens should pay attention to the creation of campus environment. Every flower, grass, leaf, and tree in the campus has its educational function. The park should be built into a small natural environment, allowing children to freely explore and understand the growth laws of natural objects. At the same time, kindergartens should also integrate with society, create different gamified scenes, and divide functional areas. For example, children can play roles such

as nurses, police officers, and teachers in the role-playing area, so that their cognitive, emotional, and other aspects can develop and they can realize that they are part of the larger society.

Chengdu A Kindergarten allows children to explore the osmanthus flowers in the kindergarten. Firstly, children observe and understand the appearance and color of osmanthus flowers, and then engage in different artistic activities to encourage them to boldly use their imagination for artistic representation. Through personal activities, children have completed various forms of creation such as palm prints and cotton swab drawings. After asking children to show their sweet scented osmanthus creations, the teacher guided them to think about the role of sweet scented osmanthus, led them to collect sweet scented osmanthus through collective activities, and divided them into groups to let them make sweet scented osmanthus rice dumpling by themselves. Finally, let the children discuss how to keep the osmanthus flowers. After sharing their own methods, the teacher asked the children to put their ideas into action. Some children glued the osmanthus flowers to pre cut cardboard to make bookmarks, while others put them in small bags to make sachets. Every aspect of this activity was designed and operated by the children themselves, combining mental and physical labor, greatly enhancing their hands-on and cognitive abilities. The children gained a sense of achievement in this activity.

Throughout the entire activity, the children's need to gain experience through direct perception, personal experience, and practical operation was maximally satisfied. Under the guidance of the teacher, the children approached the osmanthus tree around them and gained intuitive feelings through close contact with nature and personal labor. The children got to know the osmanthus tree, saw the beauty of osmanthus, felt the fragrance of osmanthus, understood its uses, tasted osmanthus cuisine, and retained osmanthus in their own way, accumulating experience and feeling beauty in the rich experience and interesting learning process.

#### **4.2. Integrating five major fields and diversifying the development of labor courses**

In "active education", the five finger activity is used to divide kindergarten education into five major areas, including health, society, science, art, and language. These five areas play different educational functions, and children experience learning in these areas to develop their cognition, abilities, attitudes, emotions, and other aspects. Combining labor education for young children with the five major areas can not only develop their learning abilities and form good work habits, but also improve their self-management level. The implementation of labor education is to cultivate young children unconsciously, rather than overnight. Therefore, teachers should integrate labor education into different areas of kindergarten activities based on their characteristics, in order to achieve good implementation results.

Chengdu A Kindergarten planted pomegranate trees in the park. In September, the children observed that the pomegranate turned red. The teacher integrated labor education into the five major areas of the kindergarten and carried out this activity. Firstly, let the children think about how to save the pomegranate branches that have been bent down by the fruit. The children will present their creations through drawing and share them with other children and teachers. Finally, the teacher led the children to use wooden sticks to support the pomegranate branches and ropes to pull them up. These two efficient and highly practical methods were used to save the pomegranate branches. After saving the pomegranate branches, during the subsequent observation and maintenance, the children found that several pomegranates had opened their mouths. This discovery made the children very curious, "Is the pomegranate broken?" With this question, they went home with their parents to find the answer. Through some popular science materials, the children learned that pomegranate opening its mouth indicates excessive maturity. So the teacher prepared ladders, baskets, and other tools and distributed them to each group in the class, taking the children to pick pomegranates together. After picking, the children were allowed to taste and talk about their feelings.

In this activity, children are thinking about why the branches are bending down? How to save pomegranate branches? Why did the pomegranate fruit open its mouth? At the end of picking pomegranates, one can also analyze and summarize methods. During the process, there was rich imagination, positive communication, sustained focus, and clear expression. Activities were designed around the labor curriculum in multiple areas of the kindergarten. We were delighted to see the growth of the children and truly experienced that the interesting curriculum was in labor life. The lovely children were the true masters of the activities.

#### **4.3. Gather educational resources and strengthen home community connections**

At the National Education Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that "schools, families, society, and the government all have responsibilities to run the education industry well." The "Opinions on Strengthening Labor Education in Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Schools in the New Era" emphasizes the leading role of schools in labor education. As a link between family and society, schools need to clearly define their own, family, and society's responsibilities in the educational process, and effectively integrate resources and responsibilities from these three aspects. The family should play a fundamental role in labor education. Parents are the first teachers of their children, and they should lead by example, set a good example for their children, and actively create opportunities for their children to work, with family members participating together. Society should play a supportive role in labor education. The whole society should attach great importance to labor education for young children, strongly support schools and families, create a good working atmosphere, let children enter the labor site, personally participate in production labor, and let them understand that "happiness is achieved through hard work" and the difficulty of labor achievements. The development of early childhood labor education should fully mobilize resources from all aspects, gather the strength of schools, families, and the whole society, work together in the same direction, and cultivate good labor quality and habits in young children through the joint efforts of the three educations.

In order to strengthen the connection between kindergartens, families, and society, and make full use of various educational resources, Chengdu A Kindergarten has launched a labor education activity with the theme of "Dinosaur Biscuits". The teacher distributed a dinosaur biscuit to each child for tasting and taught them how to make different flavors of dinosaur biscuits. Due to the large quantity, the teacher guided the children to sell the excess cookies. Therefore, the children went to supermarkets and cake shops with their parents to observe. Through field investigations, the children found that the cookies sold had packaging bags or boxes on the outside, and each type of cookie had its own price. The children tried to design dinosaur cookie bags based on the characteristics of the cookies, and designed their own packaging bags. The kindergarten organized two rounds of voting at the class and kindergarten levels to select the final cookie bag design. Afterwards, the children asked the mothers of the family committee to send the design to the Taobao store for production. At the final stage of sales, the children made their own posters, placed exhibition stands, and the kindergarten took them to the community for sale. In the end, this activity received a good response. Kindergartens and society provide practical places for labor, using the big society as a living textbook. Parents also participate in this sales activity with their children. During the activity, children constantly discover new problems, observe, think, and discuss, and constantly try to solve them.

The entire labor process clearly felt the joy of young children participating in activities. They were willing to communicate their discoveries and confusions, and were willing to cooperate with others. The teacher provided appropriate support and guidance, allowing young children

to actively dialogue and interact with people and things in the environment, and gain beneficial learning and development experience through participating in social labor activities.

## 5. Summary

The concept of "active education" is the culmination of Mr. Chen Heqin's educational ideas. It is not only an important component of modern early childhood education in China, but also of great significance to early childhood labor education in the new era. It has made outstanding contributions to the purpose, curriculum content, and guidance methods of early childhood labor education in China. Kindergartens should strengthen labor education for young children, make full use of educational resources from all walks of life, adopt various forms of labor education, integrate the five major areas of kindergarten, create labor education characteristic courses, promote the formation of children's labor emotions, labor qualities, and labor attitudes, and shape their complete personality.

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