Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Social Psychology and Humanity Studies
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.31947

Promoting Prosocial Behavior in Young Children: A Review of Research on Curriculum Design Based on Confucian Culture

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Abstract. Nowadays, early childhood education in China often neglects the cultivation of emotional regulation and social behavior, abilities in children who are in the cognitive development stage. This article aims to design a distinctive school-based curriculum system based on the Confucian concept of "In practicing the rules of propriety, it is harmony that is prized," which adopts games, stories and real-life scenarios to systematically cultivate children's emotional awareness and social collaboration abilities. Its core goal is to guide young children to achieve the educational objective of "He" at two levels: self-care and respect for others. Based on traditional Chinese culture, this curriculum design formulates targeted educational strategies to address young children's emotional and behavioral problems. It teaches the foundation of "harmony" values during the critical period of emotional cognition and character formation in young children, which is of great significance for their healthy physical and mental development and the cultivation of their socialization abilities. It also explores innovative and practical approaches for the characteristic development of school-based curricula in early childhood education.

Keywords: Early childhood prosocial behavior, Confucian culture, Li, He, School-based curriculum

1. Introduction

The contradiction between parents' excessively high expectations for early childhood education and the limited time they have to spend with their children is the main reason why a considerable number of children suffer from problems such as kindergarten entry anxiety, emotional instability and frequent peer conflicts. Huang and Gove mentioned that if parents influenced by traditional Chinese culture lack the time and energy to accurately assess their children's developmental levels before implementing educational interventions, it is likely to trigger emotional anxiety or rebellious behaviors in their children [1]. Suntheimer's team research showed that parents' beliefs about their children were positively correlated with the amount of time preschool children spent learning in kindergarten, while parents' stress was negatively correlated with the availability of learning materials and cognitive stimulation at home [2]. If parents tend to have a utilitarian view of

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education while being stimulated by pressure, the ideal state of home-school co-education will not be directly achieved in the short term [3].

Although the family education problems may stem from educators' misunderstanding of traditional culture, the trend of integrating culture into education has already emerged. This trend is driven not only by parents' growing attention to children's mental health and all-round development [4] but also by the lack of systematic courses on the market that integrate profound cultural connotations with measurable psychological and behavioral outcomes [5]. The State Council, in its Opinions on Implementing the Project for the Inheritance and Development of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture, emphasized the combination of "moral education" and "inheritance of outstanding traditional Chinese culture," promoting the deep integration of outstanding traditional Chinese culture with preschool education, and elevating students' mental health to a key strategic goal. At the same time, this policy also addresses the prevailing problems in kindergartens, such as teachers' insufficient professional competence and the rigidity of curriculum content [6]. This thus provides a favorable policy context for the design of this curriculum. The objectives and content of this curriculum design are elaborated in the following sections.

2. Theoretical basis

2.1. Prosocial development of young children in confucianism

Confucianism provides a complete framework for the social development of young children, with "Li" as the path and "He" as the goal.

Li refers to a set of concrete and perceivable behavioral and emotional norms (e.g., greeting others, sharing, and taking turns), which provides young children with a clear behavioral framework for transitioning from egocentrism to social cognition. Its essence lies in conveying "respect" and "love," enabling young children to develop an awareness of respect and gratitude through imitation and practice.

He represents a dual ideal state pursued in this developmental process: it refers to both the inner emotional peace of an individual (inner harmony) and harmonious and orderly interpersonal interactions (outer harmony). The Doctrine of the Mean states, 'When emotions are expressed in accordance with proper measure, it is called "He",' which reveals that the expression and management of emotions should strive for a suitable and coordinated state.

The dynamic connection between Li and He translates traditional cultural connotations into modern educational practices, thereby providing a clear philosophical roadmap for the progression from specific behavioral norms to emotional and value-based goals.

2.2. Modern psychological theories

Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that children acquire knowledge and behaviors by observing role models and the consequences of their behaviors. In the Children's Hearts and Etiquette curriculum, teachers, peers, and characters in curriculum stories can all act as vivid role models for prosocial behaviors and emotional regulation. The curriculum design includes activities such as scenario simulation and drama role-playing, which not only provide children with observation opportunities but also create alternative reinforcement scenarios. Ainsworth's Attachment Theory points out that the emotional climate during curriculum implementation is equally crucial. A classroom environment oriented toward He is essentially an environment characterized by emotional responsiveness, predictability, and supportive interactions. When

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teachers respond to children's emotional needs in a warm way and guide them to interact with their peers using "Li," this behavior mainly expands children's secure attachment network, helps them feel safe during the socialization process, and makes them more willing to express themselves, cooperate smoothly with their peers, and recover quickly from setbacks.

3. Curriculum goals

The core objective of this curriculum design is to construct a comprehensive curriculum system centered on the principle of "In practicing the rules of propriety, harmony is the most valuable" within a specific time frame. First, it aims to guide young children to understand the connotations of Li as well as daily behavioral norms and ethical principles. Second, it aims to foster three dimensions of harmony: physical and mental harmony, where young children learn to acknowledge their emotions, adapt to the natural world and attain inner balance; interpersonal harmony, where etiquette practice and the concept of non-interference cultivate their awareness of sharing and empathy, thus building an orderly classroom environment; and human-nature harmony, where reverence for Li is extended to all things, and activities such as caring for all living things and cherishing resources sow the seeds of harmony between humans and nature in young children's hearts.

4. Curriculum design

4.1. Design concept and principles

This curriculum is designed to guide young children to experience, understand, and practice appropriate behavioral norms and emotional expressions in their daily lives and games, ultimately internalizing and pursuing inner peace and harmony as well as friendly and harmonious relationships with others. To achieve this "dual goal," the curriculum is constructed following five basic principles: Dual Harmony Orientation Principle ensures that the curriculum design always promotes children's inner emotional harmony (self-care) and external interpersonal harmony (respect for others), achieving the unity of "self-cultivation" and "peace of mind for others"; The Etiquette as the Carrier of Harmony Principle emphasizes that "Li" (behavioral norms) is the practical path and carrier for achieving "He" (a state of harmony), with the learning focus on experiencing the positive emotions and social outcomes brought by such behaviors; The Life Contextualization Principle advocates that the curriculum be rooted in children's real daily life scenarios, seizing educational opportunities from specific situations such as entering the kindergarten, competing, cooperating and sharing, thus endowing learning with direct significance and transferability; Game Experience Principles incorporates core values into activities such as role-playing and rule-based games, allowing children to learn through play and gain insights through doing; Positive Construction Principles views children as active constructors of meaning. Through questioning, discussion and decision-making, teachers guide children to independently discover the value of "Li" and "He", thereby enabling them to actively construct their cognition and behavior with the support of teachers' scaffolding. These design principles ensure that the curriculum is rooted in traditional cultural wisdom while conforming to modern science and educational principles of child development.

4.2. Curriculum content modules and carriers

This curriculum will be divided into two modules(as shown in table 1):

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Table 1. Curriculum content module

Module	Course Theme	Course Content
Module 1	My Emotions and Etiquette	Establish an emotion recognition wall, and use tools such as emotional facial charts and emotion thermometers for daily emotional check-ins and sharing. Teach and practice specific emotional regulation strategies (e.g., the Butterfly Hug Method, Deep Breathing Balloon Technique, Quiet Corner Design), providing children with self-soothing tools.
Module 2	Our way of getting along	Create different scenarios, such as requests, refusals, apologies, and thanks, and learn and practice appropriate language in different situations. Through gamified activities such as "Toy Drift Day" and "Group Unique Material Challenge," experience the win-win fun of sharing and taking turns. Introduce rituals such as the "Peace Table" and "Reconciliation Circle," and use the sentence template "I feel...because...I hope..." to learn nonviolent communication and practice the solution of "harmony in diversity."

In addition to individual course arrangements, 2-3 themed activities are carried out each semester, such as the 'Finding "He" Moments Around Us' photography exhibition and "Building a Harmonious Class Agreement". Miniature "Li and He" practice points are designed for all aspects of the park, including entering the park, washing up, eating, napping, and transitioning between activities, examples include "Silent Restaurant" and "Good Afternoon Greeting Ceremony"; Meanwhile, it integrates learning into area games, creates real-life scenarios for practicing social etiquette, and incorporates themed picture book reading into the curriculum.

5. Curriculum strategy

These design strategies focus on fostering children's physical and mental well-being and social competence through a distinctive curriculum system and a diversified service ecosystem.

The "Children's Heart and Etiquette" curriculum system is distinctive in that it deeply integrates cultural roots with scientific validation. Unlike traditional Chinese studies education, this system transforms philosophical wisdom into children's games and life practices and uses quantifiable psychological and behavioral indicators to prove its effectiveness, thereby establishing a strong competitive advantage.

In terms of ecosystem building, this design focuses on creating a four-dimensional business model of "Core curriculum + Teacher development + Parent support + Community integration" in order to achieve the organic integration of resources. In terms of classroom management, the Taoist philosophy of "wu-wei governance" is incorporated. It trains teachers to guide children's autonomous behavior by creating specific scenarios and minimizing excessive intervention, thus achieving the goal of "governing without governing". This philosophy can effectively support teachers and reduce their professional burnout. Simultaneously, a mental health workshop for teachers and parents is established, which integrates the Confucian concept of "self-cultivation through practice" with psychological knowledge. It guides parents to respect the laws of child development and to integrate the concept of "Li and He" into daily family life (e.g., table manners and emotional communication), helping them establish a scientific parenting philosophy and foster a harmonious parent-child relationship.

In terms of operations, the workshops offer self-cultivation and parent-child activities such as mindfulness meditation and parent-child tea ceremonies, achieving a balance between "tangible products" and "intangible services": products generate initial revenue, while services create continuous cash flow and extremely high customer loyalty. These two elements complement each other, enabling the development of a stable and sustainable business model, and ultimately forming an ecological service matrix centered on teacher certification training, parental empowerment workshops, online community support, and brand authorization.

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6. Challenge

This curriculum design faces three core challenges. First, we must be wary of rigidifying "Li" into mechanical behavioral discipline, and always closely link it with the intrinsic emotional experience of "He" and the outcome of interpersonal relationships to achieve the transformation of "harmony through etiquette"; Second, course requires teachers to transform from traditional rule-followers into coaches of children's emotions and guides to harmonious relationships. This places higher demands on teachers' Confucian cultural literacy and emotional guidance abilities; Third, we need to have in-depth communication with parents to cultivate children's emotional foundation and social skills and resolve the tension that may arise from the diverse values of modern families. At the same time, this study reflects on the design itself, and the key lies in how to achieve a balance between inheriting cultural norms and respecting children's direct autonomy, ensuring that "harmony" is based on children's true understanding and intrinsic motivation, rather than the coercion of external authority.

7. Conclusion

This project systematically integrates the core concepts of Chinese culture into the early childhood mental health development system and adopts a scientific curriculum to anchor the essence of Confucian and Taoist theories in children's mental health. The initial implementation phase focuses on verifying the effectiveness of curriculum design and assisting partner kindergartens in building distinctive educational systems, so that children and parents in the pilot phase can benefit. In the future phase, the focus will be on promoting the "harmony" education concept to a wider range, developing educational models that can be used as a reference, and promoting the preschool education concept of "living in harmony with oneself, others and nature," so as to make a solid and lasting contribution to building an inclusive and sustainable social enterprise.

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