



Implementing Life Education in Early Childhood Education in Taiwan: A Project-Based Learning Approach

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ABSTRACT: Despite the growing body of research on Project-Based Learning (PBL), most studies have been conducted in primary and secondary education contexts. In contrast, relatively limited attention has been paid to its integration with life education in early childhood settings. This gap highlights the need for further empirical and theoretical inquiry into how PBL can be effectively adapted to support young children's moral, emotional, and experiential development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Life education for young children is an important element of education in Taiwan. This kind of education is centered on life care and allows young children to understand the meaning of life and to respect and cherish life. Life education for young children also cultivates kindness and teaches compassion. Young children must develop kindness and be sympathetic to living things around them. The integration of Project-Based Learning (PBL) into early childhood life education not only enhances learners' engagement and the practical relevance of the curriculum, but also deepens young children's perception and understanding of life. When teachers adopt dialogue, inquiry, and reflection as core pedagogical principles, everyday experiences can be transformed into meaningful opportunities for life education. Through such processes, children are guided—often in subtle and implicit ways—to learn to appreciate, express gratitude, and develop a sense of care and compassion. This, in essence, represents the most authentic and profound purpose of life education. The majority of research on Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been conducted in primary and secondary education contexts, with relatively limited attention given to its integration with life education in early childhood settings (Juan, Shih & Kao, 2025; Ministry of Education, 2017; Shih, 2020, 2022a, 2024; Shih & Chang, 2023).

2. Life Education in Taiwan's *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework*

In recent years, one of the most notable developments in early childhood education in Taiwan has been the implementation of the Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Educare Activities (hereafter referred to as the Curriculum Guidelines) in August 2017. The foundational principles of the Guidelines state that “children inherently possess rich developmental potential and capacities for imagination and creativity...” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 3). Furthermore, the educare curriculum is expected to “provide children with opportunities to understand the meaning of life and to experience the diverse cultural phenomena embedded in their living environment...”. These statements reflect the Guidelines’ fundamental stance on nurturing children’s appreciation of life (Ministry of Education, 2017). Although life education is not explicitly articulated within the core competencies, it is implicitly embedded in the objectives of the social domain, which emphasize “approaching nature and respecting life”. Corresponding assessment approaches are also proposed, including observation and documentation, responsive guidance, and analysis and comparison, to evaluate children’s work, activities, behaviors, interactions, and relationships across various lived experiences. In addition, educare providers are encouraged to reflect on whether they “provide children with opportunities to care for plants and animals, and to experience the growth and changes of life” (Chang et al, 2026; Ministry of Education, 2017). Based on the above analysis, the Curriculum Guidelines, while not explicitly labeling “life education” as a distinct component, in fact encompass numerous life education-related themes, which are integrated into its foundational principles, curriculum activities, and domain-based instruction.

3. Three Pedagogical Approaches within Project-Based Learning (PBL)

3.1 Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning is characterized by a series of authentic and complex learning tasks organized around meaningful, engaging, and challenging problems that are closely connected to real-world contexts. Such an approach not only stimulates learners’ intrinsic motivation and active participation but also facilitates the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills through sustained inquiry processes. Furthermore, through collaboration and inquiry, learners develop empathy and demonstrate prosocial behaviors, reflecting the cultivation of altruistic action (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2005; New Taipei City Experimental Education Institution, 2023; Thomas, 2000).

3.2 Phenomenon-Based Learning

Phenomenon-based learning centers on real-world phenomena as the focus of inquiry, thereby transcending traditional subject boundaries and promoting holistic understanding. This interdisciplinary approach enables learners to integrate knowledge across domains and apply their learning to everyday life contexts. In addition to fostering academic development and expressive competence, this approach also enhances learners’ social interaction and collaborative skills (Lonka et al., 2018; New Taipei City Experimental Education Institution, 2023).

3.3 Problem-Based Learning

Both Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Phenomenon-Based Learning (PhBL) are fundamentally driven by problem-oriented inquiry. By situating learners in real-world contexts characterized by ill-structured problems, these approaches engage students in processes where outcomes may be clear, yet the pathways to solutions remain open-ended and exploratory (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). In this context, problems serve as the starting point for learning, and the problem-solving process itself embodies the principle of “learning by doing.” Through self-directed learning, peer collaboration, teacher facilitation, and co-construction of knowledge, learners progressively develop conceptual understanding and practical competencies (New Taipei City Experimental Education Institution, 2023).

4. Reflections: Dialogues Between Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Early Childhood Life Education

The promotion of life education in Taiwan can be traced back to the “Life Education Program for Secondary Schools” initiated by the former Taiwan Provincial Department of Education in 1997. Following the streamlining of the provincial government, the Ministry of Education assumed responsibility for promoting life education and declared 2001 as the “Year of Life Education.” Subsequently, the Ministry promulgated the Mid-Term Plan for Promoting Life Education (2001–2004), which proposed a comprehensive sixteen-year life education framework spanning from elementary school to higher education. However, this initial policy framework did not yet include early childhood education. In the subsequent Mid-Term Plan for Promoting Life Education (2004–2007), the Ministry extensively collected opinions from scholars, school and preschool administrators, teachers, life education-related organizations, parents, and local educational administrators regarding the implementation, effectiveness, challenges, and feasible strategies of life education. Through the analysis and integration of open-ended feedback and questionnaire data gathered from more than one thousand participants, life education at the preschool level was formally incorporated into the policy framework for the first time. In fact, a review of academic literature reveals that prior to 2000, research on early childhood life education in Taiwan was extremely limited. In other words, the research and development of life education for young children in Taiwan has emerged primarily over the past decade or so as a relatively new field of educational inquiry. By comparison, international studies (Brindis, Geierstanger, & Faxio, 2009; Wiley & Ebata, 2004; Xiao, 2009) have tended to focus more on family-related dimensions of life education, such as death education, reducing anxiety and fear of death, establishing appropriate concepts of death, and enhancing the meaning of life. Nevertheless, relatively few studies have specifically centered on young children as the primary subjects of life education. In recent years, with the growing emphasis on holistic development and value-oriented education, an increasing number of scholars in Taiwan have begun to explore the field of early childhood life education from diverse perspectives, including curriculum development, picture-book pedagogy, emotional education, ethical care, and children’s lived experiences. These efforts have gradually expanded both the theoretical foundations and practical dimensions of life education in early childhood education (Shih, 2020; Shih, Wu & Chung, 2022; Wu, 2023, 2024).

The integration of Project-Based Learning (PBL) into early childhood life education not only enhances children’s engagement and the practical relevance of the curriculum, but also deepens their perception and understanding of life. Grounded in constructivist and sociocultural theories, learning is viewed as an active process in which children construct meaning through interaction with their environment and others. Within this framework, PBL provides authentic, meaningful contexts that allow children to explore life-related issues through inquiry, collaboration, and hands-on experiences. Moreover, when teachers adopt dialogue, inquiry, and reflection as core pedagogical principles, everyday experiences can be transformed into meaningful opportunities for life education. Through such practices, children are guided—often implicitly—to develop values such as appreciation, gratitude, and care. These dispositions are central to the aims of life education and holistic development. From a practical perspective, project-based experiences—such as caring for plants, exploring community life, or engaging in collaborative storytelling—enable children to connect abstract concepts of life with lived experiences. These activities not only foster emotional and moral development but also support the integration of cognitive, social, and affective domains of learning. Therefore, integrating PBL into early childhood life education represents a pedagogically meaningful approach that bridges theory and practice, ultimately enhancing the depth and authenticity of children’s learning experiences (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006; Miller, 2007; Noddings, 2003; Piaget, 1952; Shih, 2022b, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978).

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