



Life-Oriented Children's Literature: Its Meaning, Core Content, and Educational Implications

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KEYWORDS: children's literature, life, **ABSTRACT:** Children's literature that centers on life education can help children young children.

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recognize the value and meaning of life, learn to cherish themselves, respect others, and care for the natural environment. Therefore, this article focuses on life-oriented children's literature as a means of examining how life education can be fostered in early childhood. First, it explores the meaning and significance of life-oriented children's literature. Second, it discusses its core characteristics and content. Through this discussion, it is hoped that early childhood educators will gain a deeper understanding of life-oriented children's literature and its potential contribution to young children's holistic development and life education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework* in Taiwan states that the objectives of the Social Studies Domain are to help young children understand themselves through the learning process, explore their relationships with people, events, and objects in their living environments, develop a positive self-concept, cultivate empathy and interpersonal skills, and further learn to care for and affirm themselves, show concern and respect for others, appreciate cultural diversity, care for their living environment, and respect life. These objectives emphasize not only the development of children's social competencies but also the cultivation of their emotional dispositions and values. As an important medium for young children's learning, children's literature can, through story plots, character interactions, and representations of everyday experiences, guide children to understand the feelings and needs of different living beings, thereby fostering attitudes of care, respect, and responsibility. In particular, children's literature that centers on life education can help children recognize the value and meaning of life, learn to cherish themselves, respect others, and care for the natural environment. Therefore, using the reading and discussion of children's literature to guide young children in caring for their living environment and respecting life not only aligns with the objectives of the Social Studies Domain but also contributes to the promotion of holistic development and the cultivation of foundational civic literacy (Hughes, 1978; Ministry of Education, 2017; Shih, 2020a, 2020b, 2024, 2025; Shih & Kao, 2025). In summary, children's

literature that centers on life education can help children recognize the value and meaning of life, learn to cherish themselves, respect others, and care for the natural environment. Therefore, this article focuses on life-oriented children's literature as a means of examining how life education can be fostered in early childhood. First, it explores the meaning and significance of life-oriented children's literature. Second, it discusses its core characteristics and content. Through this discussion, it is hoped that early childhood educators will gain a deeper understanding of life-oriented children's literature and its potential contribution to young children's holistic development and life education.

2. MEANING

Children's literature is designed for preschool children, typically characterized by simple language, rich illustrations, and engaging storylines, aiming to promote children's language development, imagination, moral education, and emotional education. Life-oriented children's literature refers to literary works that center on themes of life care, emotional experience, ethical values, and the meaning of life. Through narrative contexts, character interactions, and emotional storytelling, such literature guides young children to understand and respect life while cultivating empathy, care, and gratitude (Shih, 2020a, 2024).

3. THE ESSENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF LIFE-ORIENTED EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERATURE

3.1 Understanding Life

Preschool curricula emphasize an integrated approach to teaching and learning, typically organized around thematic units rather than traditional subject-based instruction. This curricular characteristic provides early childhood educators with considerable flexibility to integrate life education literature, such as picture books, into various learning activities in a natural and meaningful manner. Drawing on children's everyday experiences and developmental needs, teachers can employ diverse instructional strategies—including picture book reading, teacher–child dialogue, experiential learning, role-playing, and extended inquiry—to guide young children in exploring the origins, growth, and value of life. Through these learning experiences, children develop a fundamental understanding of life while cultivating attitudes of respect for life, appreciation of life, and care for others. Furthermore, the authentic contexts and emotional experiences embedded in children's literature foster the development of empathy, a sense of responsibility, and positive values, thereby promoting holistic development across cognitive, affective, social, aesthetic, and character domains (Shih, 2020a; Shih & Wu, 2018).

3.2 The Origin of Life

Picture books serve as an important medium for life education in early childhood and are an effective instructional resource for introducing young children to issues related to life. Through story reading, guided discussions, and diverse experiential activities, teachers can engage children in meaningful dialogue about life while stimulating their curiosity and interest in exploring the meaning and origin of life. During the shared processes of reading, discussion, and interaction, children gradually develop attitudes of care, respect, and appreciation for life, while also demonstrating positive growth in empathy, sharing, and caring behaviors toward others. In teaching the origin of life, preschool teachers can use picture books to encourage children to reflect on fundamental questions such as, “Where do I come from?” By integrating the theme of “Birthdays” into classroom activities, teachers can guide children to understand the meaning of birth, the significance of birthdays, and the value of life. Teachers may further introduce cultural elements associated with birthdays, such as zodiac signs and the Chinese zodiac, enabling children to understand their own growth, family relationships, and cultural background. Through these meaningful and developmentally appropriate learning experiences, children can gradually develop a basic understanding of the origin of life while cultivating attitudes of cherishing, respecting, and appreciating life, thereby establishing a solid foundation for life education (Shih, 2020a; Shih & Wu, 2018).

3.3 Care for Life

In social interactions, early childhood education should cultivate young Children's capacity to love and care for both people and the environment. Early childhood educators can lead children to develop such caring dispositions through literature-based activities that encourage concern for the people, events, and surroundings in their daily lives. For example, by integrating community-themed cultural literature into the curriculum, teachers can organize activities associated with annual festivals such as the Dragon Boat Festival and the Double Ninth Festival.

These activities may include visiting local nursing homes, participating in school- and community-based programs that support children, and engaging in inclusive community sporting events. Through these authentic experiences, children are encouraged to express care through concrete actions, such as serving older adults by giving them gentle shoulder massages, participating in recreational games together, and offering tea as a gesture of gratitude and respect. Such activities enable children to translate empathy and compassion into meaningful social practice while fostering respect for older generations and strengthening their sense of social responsibility (Shih & Wu, 2018).

4. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Life-oriented children's literature functions not only as a pedagogical medium for fostering young children's language development and aesthetic literacy but also as an important vehicle for transmitting the fundamental values of life education. Through meaningful narrative contexts, character interactions, and emotionally engaging life experiences, children are encouraged to reflect upon the meaning and value of life, cultivate empathy, and progressively develop ethical judgment and moral consciousness throughout the reading process (Nikolajeva, 2014; Noddings, 2013; Sipe, 2008). Grounded in children's lived worlds and everyday experiences, such literature enables children to internalize attitudes of respect for life, care for others, and gratitude. Consequently, it supports their holistic development by nurturing cognitive, affective, social, and moral growth (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978).

5. CONCLUSION

Life-oriented children's literature makes a valuable contribution to the cultivation of children's life literacy and holistic development. By engaging with literary works that embody meaningful reflections on life, young children are provided with opportunities to understand, appreciate, and respect life while nurturing a caring attitude toward other people, society, and the environment. Such literary experiences foster the development of empathy, responsibility, ethical awareness, and positive values, while simultaneously supporting children's physical, psychological, and spiritual growth. Consequently, life-oriented early childhood literature extends beyond its linguistic and aesthetic functions to become an essential medium for life education and character formation in early childhood (Butzow, & Butzow, 1990; Shih, 2024).

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