

The Study on the Curriculum of Elementary School under the Worldwide Curriculum System

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Abstract

Based on the “worldwide curriculum system”, this study observes the curriculum reform of elementary school around the world and provides an international perspective for China’s curriculum reform. The elementary school curriculum of the “worldwide curriculum system” is characterized by the importance of moral education and practice, the priority of instrumental subjects, and the importance of technology and humanities education. This is of great value and significance to the promotion of China’s elementary school curriculum reform.

Keywords

Worldwide Curriculum System, Curriculum Type, Curriculum Category, Course Content, Course Plan

1. Problem

In the era of globalization, all fields of “localization” are facing the competition and challenges of “internationalization”. For example, the internationalization of higher education has been proposed for a long time. In China, how to balance the relationship between localization and internationalization of higher education has always been a hot topic. In the process of cultural transmission, how to break through the restrictions of national boundaries and regions, and promote cross-ethnic and cross-cultural exchanges and integration are the issues that need to be considered in the process of education from localization to internationalization, and internationalization of higher education is an inevitable trend in the development of internationalization of education. Therefore, education must have an international perspective and mindset in order to cultivate the talents needed

for the future society, in other words, the student should be based on local and global, so that they can respect the diversity of cultures and adapt to the variability of the social environment. This gives rise to the worldwide characteristics of the educational philosophy, educational objectives, and learning requirements of the school curriculum, that is, Internationalization of Education. The Internationalization of Education requires a corresponding interaction between the goals of human resources training, curriculum, and curriculum content, which means a change in the curriculum system. This change aims to pursue the common pursuit of modernization, social progress, and equity and justice, it's called "worldwide curriculum system". In Meyer's view, "worldwide curriculum system" is a world-based unit of analysis, which involves two main aspects: first, the value of internationalization of education; and second, the high homogeneity of basic education curricula across countries, which exhibits a similar school curriculum structure. Therefore, this study is based on a "worldwide curriculum system" and takes elementary school curriculum development and reform in countries around the world as the object of study, and conducts observation and analysis with the aim of providing an international perspective for elementary school curriculum reform in China.

2. Analysis of the Elements of Elementary School Curriculum in the Context of "Worldwide Curriculum System"

The elements of the elementary school curriculum in the context of a "worldwide curriculum system" can be discussed in terms of curriculum categories, curriculum structure, curriculum content and curriculum programs, as follows:

2.1. Curriculum Category

McEneaney and Meyer (2000) proposed the structure of "worldwide curriculum system". They analyzed the curriculum of 80 to 100 countries in the world at the basic education level since World War II and found that there were commonalities in the categories of elementary school curriculum under the "worldwide curriculum", as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Elementary school curriculum categories from the perspective of "worldwide curriculum system".

Subject Category	Language	Math	Natural Science	Social Science	Religious and Moral Education Discipline	Aesthetic Education	Physical Education Discipline	Practical Discipline/Vocational Education	Other disciplines
Worldwide Curriculum	Mother Fongue and Foreign Language	Math	Science, Biology, Physics, Chemistry	History, Geography, Citizenship and Society	Moral Education, Religious Education	Art, Singing, Dancing	Physical Education, Physical Education and Health	Handicrafts, Agriculture, Housekeeping, Horticulture	Recreation, Extracurricular Activities, Integrated Subjects, Recess Activities, and Elective Subjects

Table 1 shows that there is a high degree of overlap between the worldwide curriculum and the Chinese elementary school curriculum, with nearly 80% of the subject areas being the same. However, religious and moral education and life lessons such as handicrafts, agriculture, home economics and horticulture are not included in the Chinese elementary school curriculum.

2.2. Curriculum Structure

The structure of the curriculum is “the internal composition of subject and activity courses, integrated and sub-disciplinary courses, elective and compulsory courses, and the adjustment of the relationship between them” (Guo, 2001). The curriculum structure of the “worldwide curriculum system” has the following characteristics: firstly, it emphasizes the activity curriculum, highlighting the value orientation of returning to life. “A common trend of curriculum reform in the world is to return to life—pursue the unity of scientific world and life practice, and the integration of scientific spirit and humanistic spirit” (Xu, 2011: p. 320). The activity-based curriculum emphasizes “learning by doing”, the value and function of practice, the integration and interaction of school, family and society, and the development of concepts such as freedom, equality and democracy in the process of independent learning within the framework of experiential and inquiry-based learning. Secondly, the importance of an integrated curriculum, which, because it is written in accordance with the needs and interests of children’s characteristics, is effective in preventing students from cutting off the internal connections between knowledge, in helping them to maintain a complete picture of the world, and in helping them to make organic connections between knowledge, life and work. Lastly, the selectivity of the curriculum is emphasized. Both compulsory and optional curricula exist in all countries’ elementary school curricula, and the purpose of optional curricula is both to adapt to the economic and cultural development of the region and to emphasize the self-preservation of national cultures. The reason for the similarity in the structure of school curricula is that future societies have similar expectations of human resource requirements, making it common for policy makers in many countries to seek educational solutions when faced with similar economic and social problems.

2.3. Curriculum Content

Nowadays, the content of elementary school curricula in countries around the world, which is means that “accommodates intercultural harmony in the teaching and learning arena, includes an understanding of global knowledge, and allows students to gain affirmation and freedom from equality and difference” (Zhou, 2014). However, basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic remain a fundamental part of the curriculum content. The internationalization of education is, in essence, the worldwide character of educational content. In the case of elementary school mathematics, for example, all countries are adjusting the breadth and depth of the content of elementary school mathematics

while at the same time selecting learning content that reflects the power of modern mathematical development as well as the applied and cultural values of mathematics. The objectives of teaching and learning emphasize both the development of basic computational skills and the development of “problem solving” skills.

2.4. Curriculum Plan

Curriculum plan means “the overall planning of the curriculum, which stipulates the way in which different types of courses are structured with each other, and also stipulates the requirements and proportions of different courses in the management of learning styles, and at the same time, makes comprehensive arrangements for the teaching, productive labor, extracurricular activities, etc. of the school, specifies the disciplines that the school should set, the order of course development and the allocation of class hours, and divides semesters, academic years and holidays”. For convenience, the study examines the worldwide elementary school curriculum plan by the allocation of lesson hours in the curriculum. The worldwide proportion of total school hours allocated to the elementary school curriculum is shown in **Table 2**.

As can be seen from **Table 2**, in terms of common curriculum categories, the “worldwide curriculum” curriculum plans are more arranged in terms of mother tongue learning time.

3. The Characteristics of the Elementary School Curriculum of the “Worldwide Curriculum System”

From the perspective of “worldwide curriculum system”, the curriculum of elementary schools mainly presents the following three characteristics:

3.1. Attach Importance to Moral Education Practice

The curriculum of various countries attach importance to moral education on the basis of emphasizing the learning of basic knowledge, and moral education have penetrated into the learning content of different subjects. Although there are obvious differences in the political system, economic culture and social development of various countries, all countries in the world are proceeding from their own realities, “through moral education courses or religious courses to strengthen the moral factors in the curriculum, deeply study and explore the content, ways and methods of strengthening moral education” (Xu, 2011: p. 327). Foreign character education also reflects the characteristics of international

Table 2. Worldwide ratio of elementary school curriculum plan to master plan time.

Areas of Study	History and Social Sciences	Science	Chinese	Math	English	Physical Education	art	Religion and Morality	Handicrafts, Agriculture, Housekeeping and Horticulture
Percentage	10%	10%	30%	16%	5%	10%	10%	5%	5%

awareness, local integration and holistic education in terms of concept and content. For example, moral and value education, China tends to return to tradition, draw nourishment from traditional culture, and take the 21st century as the tipping point, before that, China's curriculum reform focused on collective needs, subject curriculum, knowledge transfer and selective competition, and subsequent curriculum reform paid more attention to personality development, experiential curriculum, independent inquiry and developmental cultivation (Xu, 2020). However, the United States chooses more religious knowledge, hoping to use religious thought to improve students' moral quality. In terms of curriculum materials, China has introduced a considerable proportion of foreign content, emphasizing learning from western curriculum experience, while the United States pays more attention to strengthening local concepts and developing local curriculum resources. In terms of curriculum value, China emphasizes the expansion of knowledge horizons, while the United States pays more attention to the improvement of course difficulty (Wang & Zhu, 2015).

3.2. Preference for Instrumental Subjects

As can be seen from Table 2, the curriculum set of elementary schools in the worldwide curriculum system is not only focused on instrumental subject education, but also on science and technology education, which is aimed at "solving social problems through the path of scientism and achieving pragmatic purposes", in order to stimulate the dynamics of curriculum reform. However, on the whole, in the national elementary school curriculum under the worldwide curriculum system, instrumental subjects occupy a large proportion of the total curriculum such as Chinese and mathematics, whose purposes are to develop students' survival skills such as reading, writing and communication, the ability to live together with others and the ability to learn further. As far as mother tongue is concerned, the US and UK account for a proportion of above 40% and Japan is also above 27.5% (Qi, 2001). Compared with the "worldwide curriculum system", the proportion of time spent on Chinese and Mathematics in China is relatively small, but it is still higher than other curriculum plans, which reflects the importance given to instrumental subjects.

3.3. Both Science and Technology and Humanities Education Should Be Emphasized

Dale puts forward a "common world-wide educational culture" model according to the content of the curriculum from the perspective of "worldwide curriculum system" (Dale, 2005), which is, the curriculum education in each country is embedded in the circumstance of the world culture or world standards of the whole world system. Elementary school curriculum in every country, to a certain degree, is probably related to the society and culture in which it is embedded. What's more, as a vehicle for human development, there are inevitably common human values in the design of elementary school curricula under different cultural contexts. For example, the *Declaration* of the 44th International Confe-

rence on Education explicitly states that the development of “caring and responsible citizens who appreciate the value of freedom and respect for human dignity and difference in the face of other cultures”, and who learn to work together, to learn to learn to know, to learn to live together with others, etc., is a common worldwide educational culture and a universal concern for humanistic qualities in elementary education worldwide.

In terms of education, “to meet the needs of future socio-economic competition, countries around the world generally attach more importance to science and technology education and regard the strengthening of science and technology enlightenment education as an important part of the curriculum reform of elementary education” (Xu, 2011: p. 327). In lights of the distribution of curriculum content, physics, chemistry and biology respectively share 5% of the elementary curriculum categories in every country. *The America 2061 Plan* suggests that “for whatever reason, nothing in the United States is more urgent than reform of science, mathematics, and technology education”. In the aspect of learning styles, STEAM education is an organic combination of science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics, which is an important way to cultivate practical, innovative and comprehensive talents, and a powerful means to promote curriculum reform in basic education. It is clear from this that science and technology education and humanities education are two indispensable parts of the elementary school curriculum system.

4. Conclusion

In a word, a reasonable understanding of the elements and characteristics of the elementary school curriculum in the context of “worldwide curriculum system” is of great value and significance to our in-depth discussion of the Chinese elementary school curriculum. This reveals that we should think systematically about the issues related to the Chinese elementary school curriculum from the perspective of a worldwide curriculum system. At the same time, we should actively promote the internationalization of the elementary school curriculum, combine localization and internationalization, and promote the Chinese elementary school curriculum to the world stage with a more brand new attitude.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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