



## Inspection of Kindergarten Social Studies Curriculum Based on Civic Literacy Cultivation: A Case Study on China

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### Abstract

This research aims to inspect the cultivation of civic literacy in kindergarten social studies curriculum from the perspective of cultivating qualified citizens. It mainly further explores the objective setting and contents of kindergarten social studies curriculum with case analysis. It has been discovered from researches that teachers tend to prefer the social development of children and cultivation of morality and behaviors in the curriculum target location and influence from Guidelines, Outlines and teaching reference books. It mainly selects a teaching reference book on the basis of the development level, knowledge preparation, interest hobby, etc. of the children, with the assistance of other teaching reference books and utilization of network curriculum resources. In order to accomplish the mission of social studies curriculum, it shall take the social studies curriculum as a comprehensive course, aiming to promote the civic competence and social comprehension of children and integrate the study.

**Key words:** Civic literacy; Civic literacy cultivation; Kindergarten social studies curriculum; Revise typeface

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### INTRODUCTION

Children are the masters in the future world. Attitudes, values and behavioral habits formed in childhood stage will be of enduring influence (OECD, 2012). As a significant carrier of cultivating the civic literacy of children, the basic educational objective is to cultivate good citizens for the future society (ACEI, 2013; Wang, 2006). The social studies curriculum of kindergarten shall be devoted to enlightening children’s consciousness of democracy, comprehension of rights and obligations, identification of basic social values, so that they can grasp the necessary knowledge, ability, attitude and values required in the globalization and multi-element cultural background (Ma & Wang, 2010).

In China, it is widely believed by pre-school teachers that social studies education is quite significant, but it fails to pay enough attention to the practice. Some even think that the time of social studies education can be ‘sacrificed’ in urgent conditions. Meanwhile, owing to the impacts of cognitive level, personal ability, and kindergarten environment on teachers, there may be different interpretations of the objectives and contents in social studies education (Yuan & Wang, 2008). Some teaches will regard the social studies education as common sense education, and social studies activities only help learn about the environment and important festivals, etc. Others may believe that social studies activities may help cultivate good habits and excellent qualities for children and learn about social rules, etc..

In this research, objectives and contents of social studies curriculum in kindergarten are examined from the perspective of cultivating qualified citizens, and current situations and problems in social studies curriculum are analyzed dynamically (activity observation and teacher interview) and statically (teaching case and teaching materials analysis).

## 1. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

### 1.1 Connotation of Civic Literacy

Literacy mainly refers to the knowledge, ability, attitude and values acquired, developed and obtained, and it is a dynamic process focusing on the education and cultivation. Civic literacy is determined by the relation between citizens, citizens and nature, citizens and society, and citizens must have knowledge, abilities, attitude and values (Cheng Youxin, 1996).

### 1.2 Kindergarten Social Studies Curriculum

At present, Chinese academic circle holds different illustrations of Kindergarten social studies curriculum. Zheng and Pang (2001) called it as social curriculum, thinking that ‘social curriculum’ is a course with cultivation of children’s social feeling, attitude, values and behavior quality, and the promotion of children’s social interaction ability as basic contents. Yu (2005) called it as social studies curriculum, thinking that it involves such humanities and social sciences as the sociology, history, geography, economics, psychology, culture, ethics, etc.

According to the Guidance Outline for Kindergarten Education (Trail) (shortened as Outline) (*Ministry of Education*, 2001) and Guidance for the Study and Development of Children Ranging from 3 to 6 years old (shortened as Guidance) (*Ministry of Education*, 2012), the concept of kindergarten social studies curriculum is employed in this research. According to researchers, social studies curriculum shall be an integrated humanistic and social science course, which shall not be responsible for the moral education and social development education, but also focus on the cultivation of civic literacy of children.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

### 2.1 Research Object

In this research, the kindergarten social studies curriculum is studied with case analysis, which usually takes a single and typical target as specific research target. Features of the development changes will be learned through indirect or direct deep and specific investigations (Yang, 2006). In order to make it convenient for launching the study, ‘purposive sample’ method is adopted, and kindergarten that can provide much valuable information shall be selected.

Eventually, N kindergarten is selected as the target of case study. It is a private kindergarten locating in Tianhe District, Guangzhou, with medium development scale and level. It was established in 2001, and now it has ten classes. All of the teachers graduate from normal school for pre-school teachers, and more than 70% have a college degree or above. The kindergarten N is selected for two reasons: on one hand, the researcher

grasps the overall condition of the kindergarten, and has visited the kindergarten for many times. Furthermore, the kindergarten leader and teachers hold an open attitude towards teaching and research, which is favorable for the observations and interviews, so as to search as much research material as possible. On the other hand, Kindergarten N has always been focusing on the offering of social studies curriculum and participated in the study and exploration of social studies curriculum actively.

### 2.2 Data Acquisition Method

The specific methods adopted in this research are shown as follows:

#### 2.2.1 Questionnaire Method

All teachers including the kindergarten leader and directors are investigated in questionnaire method, for learning about the opinions held by teachers in Kindergarten N towards the kindergarten social studies curriculum and civic literacy cultivation. The questionnaire mainly includes two aspects of contents: firstly, teachers’ understanding about civic literacy cultivation, and conditions of launching citizenship education in kindergarten social studies curriculum; secondly, teaching materials used in kindergarten, and the impacts of teaching reference book on the objective and content of curriculum. In this investigation, about 25 questionnaires were sent out, and 25 were recovered, with the recovery rate of 100%.

#### 2.2.2 Observational Method

The purpose of selecting observational method is to observe the ‘dynamic’ material implemented in social studies curriculum directly through the social studies activities in Kindergarten N. The observational time mainly consists of two periods. The first period lasted from March to June in 2013, half day for each week; while the second lasted from October to December in 2013, two half days in each week. It was mainly recorded in paper or video.

#### 2.2.3 Interviewing Method

Interviewing method is the main method in this research. According to the research objective, interviews are mainly conducted from such aspects as the orientation of curriculum objective, settings of an objective, selection of the contents, and teachers’ comprehension of civic education and civic literacy. The interview adopts two forms. One is the short interview before and after the launch of activities, including the design of activities and self-reflection on activities, and the other is a deep interview with each teacher, lasting for 30 to 60 minutes during the lunch break, for understanding about teachers’ comprehension of kindergarten social studies curriculum and civic literacy cultivation.

Eight teachers are selected from Kindergarten N for interview, and it includes two teaching directors. The specific conditions of the interview object are:

**Table 1**  
**Basic Condition of the Interviewed Teachers**

No.	Gender	Educational background	Teaching class	Teaching age
H	Female	Junior College	Teaching director	12
L	Female	Junior College	Teaching director	11
Wu	Female	Undergraduate	Senior class	7
Wa	Female	Junior College	Senior class	8
Z	Female	Junior College	Senior class	2
Y	Female	Junior College	Middle class	8
G	Female	Junior College	Small class	8
LV	Female	Undergraduate	Care-class	3

### 3. RESULT ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. Analysis of the Objective in Social Studies Curriculum in Kindergarten N

##### 3.1.1 Basis of Setting the Objective

It can be discovered through investigations that the comprehension of social studies curriculum in Kindergarten N is mainly based on the Outline and Guidance, but it can be discovered from the observation of social activities and referring of teachers' work plan that teachers in Kindergarten N mainly design the social activities according to the teaching reference book and interest of children. For instance, teacher Y thinks that "Outline and Guidance only provides a direction, and characteristics of children are mainly considered during the specific design of activities. And then, appropriate contents can be selected from the teaching reference book or children's life" (Y131201).

Outlines and Guidance fail to list detailed specific contents of different age groups in the objective, contents and requirements of social studies education, which provide certain space for the creative implementation of social studies education (Yuan & Wang, 2009). However, it also results in the 'piecing-together' situation in the social studies curriculum in Kindergarten N, and teachers usually select contents easy for being implemented from several teaching reference books to design the activities. When teachers are asked about the way of designing social activities (including the setting of objectives), Tacher Wu said that:

At first, we will look at the objective targets on the books, and those that can be implemented and appropriate for children will be selected according to the teaching reference book. After the objective is determined, the contents shall be selected and links shall be designed. (Wu, 131129)

##### 3.1.2 Analysis of Objectives and Contents

###### 3.1.2.1 Objective in the Knowledge Perspective

According to the investigation, teachers from Kindergarten N have different understandings about the humanistic and social science covered in social studies curriculum, and the specific conditions are shown as follows:

**Table 2**  
**Understanding of Knowledge Objective in Social Studies Curriculum**

Knowledge that shall be covered in the social studies curriculum (part)	Selection rate of teachers from Kindergarten N (%)
Common sense of life	100
Common sense of society	100
Geographic knowledge	16
Historical knowledge	12
Economics knowledge	8
Civics knowledge	16
Psychology knowledge	12
Anthropology knowledge	8
Sociology knowledge	32

It can be seen from the above table that teachers from Kindergarten N think that social studies curriculum mainly teaches life and social common senses, but neglects the extensive knowledge of humanistic and social science, which is just the fundamental knowledge, especially the geography, history, economics, etc. required by the informed modern citizens, and it will be favorable for enlightening children in learning about the society from time, space, and economic perspective.

It has been discovered by observing several sets of teaching reference books used in Kindergarten N that objective in knowledge level is seldom mentioned in social studies curriculum in these books, and just like the Outlines and Guidance, the objective mainly gathers in the social emotion, attitude, moral and behavioral habits, etc..

###### 3.1.2.2 Objective in Skills

According to the questionnaire survey, teachers from Kindergarten N hold different understandings about the cultivation of capabilities in early childhood stage, and the specific conditions are shown as follows:

**Table 3**  
**Understanding About the Capability Goals of Social Studies Curriculum**

Capability that shall be developed in infant stage (part)	Selection rate of teachers from kindergarten N (%)
Interpersonal skill capability	100
Ability of participating in the group living	100
Ability of collecting and applying information	40
Communication ability	100
Cooperative ability	100
Critical thinking ability	24
Judging and decision-making ability	40

As shown in the above table, teachers from Kindergarten N pays more attention to the interpersonal communication skills, ability of participating in the group living, communication and cooperative ability, and less attention to the ability of collecting and applying information, critical thinking ability, judging and decision-making ability.

Through the questionnaire survey and interview of teachers from Kindergarten N, it is considered that the opinions of teachers are in accordance with the objectives on Outlines. They think that social studies curriculum focuses on two aspects me the ability training: one is the ability of participating in group living, and the other is the ability of communicating with people.

### 3.1.2.3 Objective in the Perspective of Attitude and Values

According to the questionnaire, teachers from Kindergarten N hold the following opinions about the attitude and values that shall be cultivated in an infant stage and the specific conditions are shown in the following table.

It can be seen from the above table that teachers from Kindergarten N pay much attention to such traditional Chinese virtue as honesty, boldness, friendly affection, optimism, etc. but neglect the attitude and values that shall be held in democratic society, such as democracy, sacred life, care for social affairs, etc..

**Table 4**  
**Comprehension of the Attitude and Values Objective in Social Studies Curriculum**

Attitude and value that shall be cultivated in infant stage (part)	Support rate of teachers from kindergarten N (%)
Democracy	48
Equality	80
Respect	88
Sacred life	32
Honesty	100
Boldness	100
Friendly affection	100
Optimism	100
Active involvement	88
Concern for social public affairs	45

The comprehension of social studies affection, attitude and values mainly gathers in the social affection and basic life attitude of children. Teachers wish to cultivate children into optimistic, willing to cooperate and sharing social members though the implementation of social studies curriculum. In addition, teachers believe generally that objectives in affection, attitude and values shall be penetrated into daily life, and children will develop correct attitude and values in daily trivial.

## 3.2 Analysis of Social Studies Curriculum in Kindergarten N

### 3.2.1 Selection of Social Studies Curriculum in Kindergarten N

The contents selection of social studies curriculum are mainly impacted by two factors, firstly, the guidance of Outlines and Guidance; secondly, teaching reference book selected in the kindergarten. According to the investigations, teachers from Kindergarten N mainly hold the following views.

As for the content selection presented in the above table, teachers in Kindergarten N think that:

Since there are no detailed requirements on the contents in Outlines and Guidance, corresponding activities are usually designed according to the teaching reference books of kindergarten. In these years, since several editions of teaching reference books are tried, and they may have distinct advantages and disadvantages, but they can complement each other in contents.’ (H131129)

**Table 5**  
**Selection of Resources During the Process of Designing Social Studies Activities**

Reference resource	Selection of teachers (%)
Outlines or guidance	56
Teaching reference book	100
Network resource	72

### 3.2.2 Analysis of Teaching Reference Book Selected in Kindergarten N

It has been discovered through the interviews with directors and teachers that the selection of reference books in social studies curriculum focuses more on the convenience in practical operation. Secondly, the richness and suitability of reference book will be considered. Finally, the appropriateness of children will be considered. Furthermore, they think that when there are conflicts between the operation convenience and children’s demands, it can be complemented with other editions of teaching reference book. As for how to select the teaching reference book, teacher L thinks that:

as far as I am concerned, each edition of reference book has both advantages and disadvantages, and mainly two aspects shall be considered during the selection process: firstly, the operability in practical level and the richness of supporting teaching resources; secondly, it shall consider if the course content is appropriate for the practical situation of our kindergarten (including the selection and organizational forms of specific themes)’ (L131130)

Since Outline fails to give detailed illustrations for contents, in the following part, a teaching reference book used in Kindergarten N is taken for illustrating the selection of social studies curriculum. This set of teaching materials set eight classes, including the small, middle and senior classes, about 24 themes. The features of theme construction are shown as follows: it is of local features and it is close to the children’s life, it can inspire the potential of children, provide opportunities for enhancing knowledge and exercising skills, and get prepared for the future life of children.

With the senior class as an example, the specific content framework is shown as in Table 6

Throughout the different editions of teaching reference books used in Kindergarten N, different advantages and disadvantages are discovered. Some editions adopt the themes, and some adopt the fields. It emphasizes on the real life of children, as well as the accumulation of life experience, and themes and contents are arranged according to the ‘environment expansion method’. There are different emphases on the objectives, such as the emotional experience, accumulation of life experience, children’s comprehension of common sense, as well as the cultivation of children’s interpersonal communication skills.

**Table 6**  
**Content Frameworks in Teaching Materials for Senior Class in Guangzhou**

Senior class (I)		Senior class (II)	
Theme	Problem	Theme	Problem
I. Subway	1. What do you think of the subway in Guangzhou? 2. Will you take the subway? 3. Why shall we build subway? 4. How will subway develop?	I. Stationery kingdom	1. What is stationery? 2. Do you use them? 3. How to take care of them?
II. Secret of food	1. Do you know what food is? 2. What is food used for? 3. Where is food from?	II. Drinks	1. Which are drinks? 2. How is drink made? 3. Will drink be healthy for people?
III. Kingdom of insects	1. Which are insects? 2. How do insects live? 3. Are insects our friends?	III. People on earth	1. How many types of skin colors? 2. What kind of jobs is there? 3. Which kind of people needs help? 4. Do you know people's life?
IV. Bridge	1. What kind of bridge do you see? 2. What does bridge look like? 3. What is bridge used for? 4. How does bridge develop?	IV. Houses	1. What kind of houses have you seen? 2. How are houses built? 3. Why shall people build houses?

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Deviations in the Target Location of Social Studies Curriculum

At present, the location of kindergarten social studies curriculum mainly gathers in three aspects: firstly, focus on the cultivation of morality and behavior habits; secondly, focus on the social development of children; thirdly, quite a few teachers equate social studies curriculum to 'common sense' education.

Although it has been discovered in constant practice that teachers have already cultivated and shaped the civic literacy of children consciously or unconsciously, they neglect the cultivation of knowledge, skills, attitude and values required for children's participation in democratic life. The kindergarten and teachers hold a narrow opinion towards of study of knowledge in social studies curriculum, and the horizon is only confined in the range of 'common sense' education. As for the cultivation of abilities, they pay more attention to the cultivation of self-help ability and interpersonal skills and less attention to the cultivation of children's learning ability, social participation ability and critical thinking ability. As for the attitude and values, they pay more attention to the social development of children and less to the democratic values required by the future society.

### 4.2 Narrow View in the Selection of Contents for Social Studies Curriculum

During the implementation of educational activities, Chinese pre-school teacher mainly select the contents of social studies curriculum according to the teaching reference books. When organizing the teaching contents of social studies curriculum, teachers generally consider the adoption of the current teaching reference books based on the development level, knowledge preparation condition, and hobbies and interests, assisted by other teaching materials and utilization of network curriculum resource. Generally, once the specific teaching contents are determined, 'faithful or accurate' implementation orientation will be adopted for the curriculum design of teaching reference book. It can be seen that teaching

reference book is still significant in the content selection and organization of social studies curriculum in Kindergarten N. However, the teaching reference book focuses on the emotional experience of children, and the view of content selection is narrow, and it fails to pay enough attention to the study of social knowledge, learning skills and social participation skills.

### 4.3 Deviations in the Comprehension of Social Studies Curriculum

The educational concepts of pre-school teachers, as well as their comprehension of social studies curriculum and cultivation of civic literacy will impact the launch of practical social studies activities. The pre-service cultivation of pre-school teachers in China shall pay more attention to the disciplinary knowledge and professional skills, but neglect the cultivation of civic literacy. The in-service training also concentrates in the professional morality, knowledge and ability of teaching children, scientific research ability, etc.. Currently, the curriculum contents stipulated in 'national training plan for pre-school teacher' sets the general knowledge plate, which includes the information attainment, art work appreciation and scientific attainment of teachers in kindergarten, suggesting that the in-service training has already started to focus on the cultivation of comprehensive civic literacy of pre-school teachers, but it is far from enough.

## SUGGESTIONS

At first, it shall clarify that as a comprehensive curriculum, social studies curriculum aims to promote the civic ability and social comprehension of children, so as to integrate the study (NCSS, 2008). The curriculum contents require the core concepts and experience extracted from the fundamental humanities and social sciences, and it can be used for determining the scope and sequence of curriculum contents, and connecting the existing knowledge and experience of children, so that they can be cultivated into informed, capable and responsible citizen in democratic society.

Secondly, the effective teaching of social studies curriculum cannot be separated from the support of teachers, and the humanistic and social attainment of teachers play an indispensable role (CfCE, 1994). Consequently, it can be seen from the perspective of pre-school teacher cultivation or the professional development of pre-school teacher that attention shall be paid to the improvement of humanistic quality and strengthening of teachers' study and comprehension of humanities and social sciences.

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