

Practical Strategies for Integrating Psychological Picture Book Teaching Into Mental Health Education for Preschool Children

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Abstract

Psychological picture book teaching, with its combination of vivid images and engaging text, educates while entertaining, effectively promoting the development of preschool children's cognitive, personality, and adaptive qualities. However, integrating psychological picture book teaching into mental health education for preschool children faces practical challenges such as resource selection, teacher competency, and evaluation and feedback. To overcome these challenges, teachers should deeply explore picture book resources and precisely construct a personalized selection system; strengthen their professional competence in psychological picture book teaching and enhance the humanistic and artistic aspects of instruction; and establish a multi-dimensional evaluation system for psychological picture book teaching to achieve scientific feedback and continuous improvement. Children are a unity of mind and body, and psychological picture book teaching inspires their inner world through the beauty of images and text. Only by strengthening children's mental health and bringing it into balance can we achieve harmony and coordination with their physical liberation.

Keywords

Mental health education for preschool children; Teaching with psychological picture books; Psychological picture book.

1. Introduction

In the framework of human's comprehensive development, sound development at the psychological level holds a pivotal position. In the context of the new era, popularizing and deepening mental health education has become an indispensable new requirement in the process of China's educational reform and development[1]. The preschool period is a critical time for human psychological development, and conducting mental health education in kindergartens during this stage can cultivate positive psychological qualities in preschool children. Psychological picture books convey educational content through a combination of text and images, which aligns with the learning and developmental characteristics of preschool children. Integrating them into mental health education for preschool children represents a novel teaching approach[2]. To promote the mental health development of preschool children through psychological picture book teaching, it is necessary to deeply explore and grasp the value of integrating psychological picture book teaching into mental health education for preschool children, fully leveraging the pictorial and textual features and educational characteristics of picture books to shape children's positive psychological qualities.

2. Psychological Picture Book Teaching and Mental Health Education for Preschool Children

Piaget's theory of cognitive development stages points out that preschool children are in the pre-operational stage, during which they can engage in representational thinking in their minds

based on symbolic schemas[3]. Picture books, which are primarily composed of illustrations with a small amount of text, align with the psychological characteristics and thinking patterns of preschool children. They depict a childlike world from a child's perspective and imagination, and their educational value extends beyond promoting the development of language and reading skills in preschool children; they also play an important role in mental health education.

2.1. Mental health education for preschool children

Mental health education for preschool children is an educational activity targeted at children aged typically from 3 to 6 or 7 years old, aiming to promote the healthy development of their psychological, emotional, and social abilities. The preschool period is a prime time for implementing mental health education. The 'Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial)' implemented in September 2001 states: 'While emphasizing the physical health of preschool children, great importance should also be attached to their mental health.' The implementation of these guidelines has led more kindergartens to pay increasing attention to mental health education for preschool children. Currently, the main content of mental health education in kindergartens encompasses five themes: firstly, stimulating preschool children's curiosity and desire for knowledge to promote the development of their cognitive abilities; secondly, helping preschool children learn to recognize and regulate their emotions; thirdly, cultivating preschool children's problem-solving abilities and willpower; fourthly, developing preschool children's social interaction skills; and fifthly, helping preschool children form good behavior habits[4]. The goals and content of mental health education in kindergartens determine the diversity of approaches to implementing it. Offering specialized courses, providing individual counseling, and integrating mental health education into daily life and play are all effective ways to enhance the mental health quality of preschool children and promote their comprehensive personality development[5].

2.2. Picture book teaching in psychology is one of the ways to carry out mental health education for preschool children

Psychological picture books are a form of children's literature that combines text and illustrations, featuring rich colors, vivid images, and storylines that are close to children's lives. They can stimulate children's interest in reading and guide them to actively explore and understand the world. Psychological picture book teaching involves teachers carefully selecting picture book materials and related teaching resources based on the physical and mental development characteristics of preschool children, and using engaging storytelling methods to fully tap into and utilize these materials to achieve preset teaching goals[6]. Research has shown that psychological picture book teaching holds significant value in mental health education for preschool children. On the one hand, there are some difficulties in conducting mental health education in kindergartens, as teachers often resort to didactic methods when explaining abstract and difficult concepts. Incorporating intuitive and concrete psychological picture book teaching into mental health education effectively addresses this issue. On the other hand, psychological picture book teaching can promote the development of preschool children's cognition, personality, and adaptive qualities. Japanese scholar Mr. Matsuyama Naosuke believes, 'Different people can read content that others cannot see in picture books with only pictures, affirming the relationship between picture books and the development of imagination'[7]. Furthermore, scholars Wu Xiaoyan and Zhuang Hongyuan mention in their research, 'Picture book teaching can enrich preschool children's emotional experiences and arouse their enthusiasm for learning'[8]. Therefore, educators should fully leverage the graphic and textual features as well as the educational characteristics of picture books, integrating picture book teaching into mental health education for preschool children to promote their mental health development.

3. The Practical Dilemmas of Integrating Psychological Picture Book Teaching Into Mental Health Education for Preschool Children

The integration of picture book teaching into mental health education for preschool children undoubtedly opens up a novel path for nurturing their mental well-being. With its unique charm, through vibrant illustrations and captivating storylines, it not only stimulates children's interest in learning but also cultivates their cognition, personality, and adaptive qualities in a subtle way. However, while this teaching mode brings numerous benefits, it is essential to acknowledge and delve into the issues that arise in its practical application, so as to better leverage its advantages and enhance the psychological resilience of preschool children.

3.1. Psychological picture book teaching faces challenges of resource scarcity and ambiguity in picture book themes

The insufficiency in the number of picture books and the ambiguity of their themes pose significant challenges to integrating psychological picture book teaching into mental health education. On the one hand, some kindergartens have limited resources of picture books, especially professional ones tailored for mental health education, which are scarce. This results in teachers facing a narrow selection range when choosing picture books, making it difficult to find ones that not only align with the psychological development characteristics of preschool children but also convey the concepts of mental health education.

On the other hand, the themes of picture books are ambiguous, and their quality varies greatly. Some picture books are too simple in content, lacking educational significance, while others may be too complex, exceeding the cognitive level of preschool children. Moreover, the picture book market lacks a set of authoritative and detailed age classification standards, making it easy for parents and teachers to feel confused when selecting picture books and difficult to precisely match books suitable for children of various age groups. At the same time, the themes of picture books are extremely diverse, ranging from simple everyday life stories to complex emotional exploration, moral education, and social skills training. However, not all themes are directly applicable to the goals of mental health education. Although kindergarten teachers have a certain foundation in educational psychology, their understanding of the major themes of mental health education is not deep enough. When choosing picture books, they tend to focus more on personal preferences and likes, and this 'ready-made' approach may not necessarily align with the age characteristics of preschool children[9]. In addition, the artistic expressions of picture books are also diverse, including painting styles, color usage, composition techniques, and so on. These elements not only affect the visual effects of picture books but also directly influence the emotional experiences and cognitive processes of preschool children. Therefore, when selecting picture books, teachers need to consider the aesthetic preferences and cognitive development levels of preschool children, choosing those that can attract their attention and stimulate their emotional resonance. However, this selection is not easy because different preschool children may have different preferences and reactions to different artistic expressions.

3.2. In the process of teaching psychological picture books, teachers downplay the emotional experiences and inquiry-based learning of preschool children

From the perspective of common teaching practices in kindergartens, teachers sometimes inadvertently downplay the subjective experiences and exploratory processes of preschool children in psychological picture book teaching. Firstly, teachers diminish the subjectivity and emotional experiences of preschool children during the teaching of psychological picture books. In picture book teaching, many teachers are accustomed to using the traditional narrative

method, where the teacher unilaterally tells the content of the picture book, while the preschool children mainly listen. Each emotion in the picture book is accompanied by corresponding images and story situations, but teachers may only focus on the transmission of knowledge when explaining, without delving into the emotional experiences behind these situations. Taking the picture book *The Way I Feel* as an example, when teachers explain this book, they may pay too much attention to describing the name and corresponding color of each emotion, while neglecting to interact with the preschool children. For instance, teachers may simply point out, 'This is happiness, it's yellow,' without guiding the preschool children to observe the picture themselves, feel the color and atmosphere of happiness, or encouraging them to share their own experiences or feelings when they feel happy. This one-way teaching method limits the subjectivity and emotional experiences of preschool children, making them passive listeners.

Secondly, there is a lack of inquiry-based learning in the teaching process. Inquiry-based learning refers to the process of encouraging preschool children to actively explore knowledge through observation, questioning, hypothesizing, experimenting, and other means. However, in picture book teaching, on the one hand, teachers may rely too much on preset teaching content and procedures, not providing enough space for preschool children to inquire. For example, when discussing the emotion of anger, teachers could guide preschool children to think about what situations make them feel angry and how they deal with anger. However, if teachers simply give the answer or skip this step, preschool children miss out on a valuable opportunity for inquiry-based learning and cannot deepen their understanding of the emotion of anger. On the other hand, teachers' questioning methods in picture book teaching are often relatively simple and lack depth. They often ask closed-ended questions such as 'Is that right?' or 'Is it this?' These types of questions are difficult to stimulate preschool children's thinking and desire for inquiry, and cannot prompt them to deeply understand and feel the emotions and values in the picture books.

3.3. Teachers' ability to evaluate and provide feedback on psychological picture book teaching needs to be improved

Scholar Chen Hua believes: 'The overall level of evaluation literacy among kindergarten teachers in China is relatively low, and development is extremely uneven. Some teachers lack systematic evaluation training, have insufficient evaluation skills, and outdated concepts.' [10] Psychological picture book teaching not only focuses on preschool children's understanding and memory of the content of the picture books, but also emphasizes changes and development in children's emotions, attitudes, values, and other aspects. However, currently, a unified and clear evaluation standard for psychological picture book teaching has not yet been established. Firstly, when conducting teaching evaluations, teachers often rely on personal experience or subjective feelings, lacking scientific and objective evaluation indicators. This results in the fairness and accuracy of the evaluation results being affected, making it difficult to fully reflect the actual effectiveness of psychological picture book teaching. Secondly, psychological picture book teaching also requires teachers to have a certain level of knowledge in psychology, pedagogy, and the ability to interpret picture books. However, some teachers are deficient in these areas, making it difficult for them to accurately grasp the educational value of psychological picture books and the psychological development characteristics of students when conducting teaching evaluations. This not only affects the accuracy of the evaluation results but also limits the application of psychological picture books in mental health education for preschool children.

Additionally, teachers' feedback on psychological picture book teaching is not timely enough, making it difficult to adjust teaching strategies promptly and affecting the pertinence and effectiveness of mental health education for preschool children. Firstly, the singularity of the

feedback mechanism limits the diversity and effectiveness of teaching interactions. Effective feedback should be a two-way, interactive process that includes not only feedback from teachers to students but also feedback from students to teachers. However, in actual teaching, teachers often only focus on their feedback to students and neglect feedback from students to them, leading to one-way and limited teaching interactions. Secondly, psychological picture book teaching not only requires professional guidance from kindergarten teachers but also needs the active cooperation and participation of parents. When parents cannot obtain timely and effective feedback from teachers, they may have doubts or misunderstandings about the kindergarten's psychological picture book teaching activities. This delayed communication approach will reduce parents' trust and support for the kindergarten's educational work, thereby affecting their enthusiasm and initiative to participate in kindergarten educational activities.

4. Strategies for Integrating Psychological Picture Book Teaching Into Mental Health Education for Preschool Children

Scholar Yuan Weiwei believes: 'Preschool children are young, less influenced by preconceived notions and cultural biases, and are more likely to resonate with humanity, values, and aesthetics, making them more receptive to other cultures. Therefore, picture books become a tool for transmitting social and cultural values.' [11] Therefore, to better integrate psychological picture book teaching into mental health education for preschool children, teachers need to deeply explore picture book resources, construct a personalized selection system that precisely meets the psychological needs of preschool children; at the same time, they should strengthen their own teaching abilities in psychological picture books to ensure educational effectiveness; in addition, an evaluation system should be established to continuously optimize teaching strategies. These three aspects complement each other and jointly promote the comprehensive development of mental health education for preschool children.

4.1. Deeply explore picture book resources and precisely construct a personalized selection system

On the one hand, in terms of expanding picture book resources, firstly, kindergartens need to increase funding to ensure a rich total number of picture books. At the same time, they should actively purchase excellent picture books from both domestic and international sources to enrich the variety and themes of the books, ensuring that the content is close to children's lives and aligns with their psychological development characteristics. Secondly, with the help of modern information technology, digital picture book resources can be introduced, such as using VR, digital twins, and other smart technologies to enhance the interactivity and fun of the picture books, strengthen children's sensory experiences, and create an immersive aesthetic experience atmosphere.

On the other hand, in terms of achieving personalized selection of psychological picture books, firstly, kindergartens can build a learning community for psychological picture book teaching by forming an interdisciplinary teacher team that includes professional teachers in psychology, education, and art to jointly design psychological picture book teaching plans. Regular teaching seminars should be held to encourage teachers to share their picture book teaching experiences, explore innovative teaching methods, and invite experts to provide guidance and training. At the same time, an online and offline learning and exchange platform, such as WeChat groups and online forums, should be established to facilitate teachers in sharing resources and exchanging ideas at any time.

Secondly, when selecting psychological picture books, teachers should pay attention to the suitability, educational value, and fun of the content, ensuring that it matches the psychological

development stage of preschool children. At the same time, they should focus on the emotional expression and transmission of positive values in the picture books to guide preschool children in forming healthy psychology. In addition, teachers should also understand the interests and needs of preschool children and choose picture books that can resonate with them to enhance the reading effect.

4.2. Enhance Professional Competence in Psychological Picture Book Teaching and Improve Humanistic and Artistic Cultivation

Scholars Luo Shilan, Wang Zhi, and Zhang Dajun believe: 'Teachers should enhance their professional competence in psychological picture book teaching. They should deeply understand the characteristics of preschool children's psychological development, put children at the center, and create a rich and safe growth and learning environment for them based on their needs and interests, while guiding children to actively observe and personally experience during activities.' [12]

Firstly, in terms of teaching methods, teachers should abandon traditional rote teaching and adopt interactive teaching methods such as heuristic and discussion-based approaches. By designing rich classroom activities, such as role-playing and picture book theaters, teachers can engage preschool children in active participation and allow them to experience the situations and emotions in the picture books, thereby deepening their understanding and perception of the content.

Secondly, teachers should pose inspiring and open-ended questions to encourage preschool children to think from multiple dimensions, rather than simple true-or-false or memory-based questions. Through follow-up questions and rhetorical questions, teachers can guide preschool children to deeply consider the meaning and value behind the picture books, stimulating their desire for exploration.

In addition, teachers should avoid neglecting the importance of inquiry-based learning. In picture book teaching, they should provide sufficient opportunities for independent inquiry, encouraging children to ask questions and attempt to solve them. Through games, preschool children can learn through practice, cultivating their inquiry skills and innovative spirit.

Finally, teachers should shift from the teaching concept of 'emphasizing knowledge over emotions' and strive to find a balance between knowledge transmission and emotional experience. Therefore, teachers should continuously improve their emotional intelligence and communication skills, learn to listen to students' voices, sensitively capture students' emotional changes during the reading process, and provide positive guidance and support in a timely manner. They should establish a positive classroom atmosphere, encourage students to express their personal opinions, and form a good emotional connection and trust relationship between teachers and students. At the same time, they should pay attention to the emotional changes of preschool children and guide them to express their feelings and experiences in a timely manner. Through strategies such as emotional resonance and emotional sublimation, they can help children obtain emotional satisfaction and growth during the reading process, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of psychological picture book teaching.

4.3. Construct a Multi-dimensional Evaluation System for Psychological Picture Book Teaching to Achieve Scientific Feedback and Continuous Improvement

In response to the issues of inconsistent evaluation standards for psychological picture book teaching and low evaluation literacy among teachers, the primary task for kindergartens is to establish a scientific and systematic kindergarten-based evaluation standard for psychological picture book teaching. To this end, experts in the fields of psychology and education can be invited to jointly develop specific evaluation standards in conjunction with the actual situation

of preschool education in China, and develop corresponding evaluation tools, such as evaluation scales and observation record forms, to provide convenient and effective evaluation means for teachers. At the same time, to improve teachers' evaluation literacy, kindergartens should establish a comprehensive evaluation system training mechanism. By regularly holding training sessions, lectures on psychological picture book teaching evaluation, and other activities, teachers can be provided with systematic evaluation training to help them master scientific evaluation methods and techniques.

To improve the feedback mechanism for psychological picture book teaching, the bidirectionality and interactivity of the feedback process should be ensured. Teachers should actively pay attention to the feedback from preschool children on teaching activities, encourage children to express their opinions and suggestions by observing their performance in activities and analyzing their psychological works. At the same time, teachers should also provide timely feedback to students, acknowledging their progress and achievements, pointing out areas for improvement, and inspiring the enthusiasm and creativity of preschool children.

In addition, to strengthen home-kindergarten co-education and further improve parents' participation and trust in psychological picture book teaching, teachers can invite parents to participate in the teaching evaluation process and jointly pay attention to the mental health growth of children. Furthermore, teachers can use modern communication tools such as WeChat, QQ, etc., to maintain close contact with parents, and promptly provide feedback to parents on the learning situation and psychological development status of preschool children in the kindergarten.

5. Conclusion

Psychological picture books, with their intuitive and vivid illustrations, concise and lively language, and content that resonates with the psychology of preschool children, serve as a bridge connecting preschool children to mental health knowledge. Teachers integrate these picture books into daily teaching through diverse instructional methods such as storytelling and inquiry-based learning, which can stimulate preschool children's interest in reading, foster emotional resonance, and effectively guide them in self-awareness, emotion regulation, and social skill development, laying a solid foundation for building a healthy psychological environment. Looking ahead, with the deepening of educational concepts and technological innovations, psychological picture book teaching is poised to unleash greater potential in mental health education for preschool children. We anticipate providing preschool children with higher-quality and more personalized mental health education services by continuously optimizing picture book resources, enhancing teachers' professional competencies, and refining the evaluation system, thereby supporting their healthy growth.

6. Author Introduction

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