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Practical Exploration of a Miniature Museum Curriculum for Kindergartens Based on Local Resources

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Abstract

The early childhood education of the 15th Five-Year Plan period put forward a curriculum based on children's daily life and the combination of local resources. However, the combination of local resources in the curriculum of kindergartens is still often superficial and formal. Thus, taking Hejin City Second Kindergarten in Hejin City, Shanxi Province as an example, this paper tries to investigate the process of children learning a micro-museum curriculum based on local resources. Research results indicate that the process of children learning a micro-museum curriculum based on local resources can be divided into three stages, which are curiosity, exploration, and expression. Curiosity is the entry point where the spontaneous, real-life questions of children are the seeds of inquiry. The paper finds that micro-museum curricula based on local resources are effective at sparking young children's interest in inquiry, supporting holistic development across a variety of developmental domains, and aiding in the preservation and innovation of local culture.

Keywords

Local resources; micro-museum; children's learning; kindergarten

Introduction

Now, in the "15th Five-Year Plan" period, as China's preschool education steps into the crucial stage of strategic transfer from "access to early childhood care" to "high-quality early childhood care", the preschool curricula are supposed to revisit the real life of children, make full use of local resources, and pursue active exploration by the young learners. However, current practice often results in superficial use of local resources. Converting static regional resources into dynamic curriculum resources rooted in children's life experience and cultural context has become an urgent challenge in preschool education reform. From the perspective of deep learning, excellent curriculum resources should enable children to have sustained and focused exploration on valuable themes (Chen et al., 2025).

In this context, miniature museums in kindergartens have emerged as an effective vehicle for curriculum development based on local resources, attracting growing attention. Characterized by thematic focus, flexible spatial design, participatory processes, and curriculum integration, miniature museums enable children to engage in sustained, meaningful inquiry around significant topics. This study takes Hejin City Second Kindergarten in Hejin City, Shanxi Province, as a case to deconstruct children's learning processes within the miniature museum setting, trace the developmental trajectory of their curiosity, exploration, and expression, and reveal the intrinsic connections between miniature museum curricula grounded in local resources and children's cognitive development.

1. Case Overview and Core Concepts

1.1 Overview of Hejin City Second Kindergarten in Hejin City

Hejin City Second Kindergarten, located in Hejin City, Yuncheng, Shanxi Province, was established in 1996. The kindergarten currently has 21 classes: large, medium, small, and nursery, accommodating approximately 880 children. Upholding the educational philosophy of "Fish leaping to inspire wisdom, resilience nurturing the heart," the school aims to cultivate new-generation children who love their family and country, maintain physical and mental well-being, persevere through challenges, enjoy exploration, and excel in creativity. It actively explores the development of a homegrown curriculum based on local resources.

1.2 What Is a Kindergarten Micro-museum

A kindergarten micro-museum is the classroom-scale implementation of the museum concept, characterized by stronger thematic focus, spatial adaptability, participatory engagement, and curriculum integration than conventional kindergarten museums. It is defined as a theme-based project learning center constructed by teachers and children in a classroom or shared public space—serving simultaneously as a resource collector, artifact display, and creative workshop.

1.3 Curriculum Resources for Kindergarten Micro-museum

Within the context of this study, curriculum resources for the kindergarten micro-museum are defined as an integrated whole comprising materialized carriers, activity-based designs, and dynamically generated experiences developed through the creation of a micro-museum as both a contextual setting and a practical platform. Through educational development and the transformation of local resources, these resources form a dynamic, continuously enriched repository that co-evolves with children's inquiry processes. Museum pedagogy is regarded as an innovative activity in preschool education institutions, with its core lying in supporting children's learning through environmental creation and multisensory experiences (Kudykina & Savchenko, 2022). The core value lies in its ability to directly support and vividly illustrate a curriculum grounded in children's interests and rooted in everyday life.

2. Practical Pathways of the Miniature Museum Curriculum in Kindergarten

2.1 Children Spontaneously Generate Questions Based on Their Interests

This theme is a sub-course under the core theme "Fish Leaping through the Dragon Gate" for the senior class, and belongs to the kindergarten's "Walking Through Our Hometown" curriculum system. The starting point for the "Nine Dragons Temple" theme was not a teacher's pre-designed plan, but rather children's spontaneous discussion after visiting the temple fair.

Their classroom "Question wall" transformed casual chatter into visible research prompts. Children contributed their own questions, which in turn triggered the inquiry process.

2.2 Exploring Through Trial and Error in Hands-on Activities and Social Interaction

When problems arise, the search process begins. Children learn in two primary ways: by continually refining their tests through repeated experimentation, and by accumulating experience through interactions with individuals who have gained social experience.

Repeated trial and error during construction. After visiting the Nine Dragons Temple, the children wanted to

build their own version using building blocks. After their initial attempt, the teacher did not immediately point out what was missing but instead asked, "Compare this drawing with the original artwork. What is missing?" By combining two half-circles of blocks together, they achieved a smooth curve that was just right, creating a satisfying "swallow-tail" effect. The child iterated the model of the Nine Dragons Temple three times, successfully resolving the issue with the swallow-tail roof and accurately reproducing the architectural feature of the "ninety-nine steps" by measuring step heights and counting the number of dougong brackets.

From identifying the problem to finding its solution, children accomplished the whole process on their own. This case demonstrates that when confronted with a construction problem that resembles real-world scenarios, young children can make progress toward solutions through uninstructed trial and error. Adults are not necessary to offer the answers.

The kindergarten invited an expert on ancient trees to address the children's prepared questions regarding the tree's age, bark patterns, and health. Using images and age-appropriate explanations, the expert responded to all queries. Afterward, children touched the bark, examined the patterns, guessed the tree's age, and even classified fallen leaves into old-tree and young-tree groups. The expert visit not only answered specific questions but also equipped children with transferable observational skills. Research has shown that museum education serves as an effective alternative method in early childhood, significantly promoting children's cognitive and emotional development (Ozyilmaz et al., 2017).

What does the teacher actually do all this time? Rethinking the whole process of inquiry, the teacher did not actually "teach" them but "support" the children in making inquiries. From the example above, when facing the situation of how to make the swallow-tail roof, instead of directly giving the answer to the children, she put some questions to them to make them think and compare, and helped them find the method. When the children were stuck, the teacher did not go to help them immediately, but offered some materials and emotional encouragement for them to continue. Only because of the teacher's "no teaching" did the children keep the initiative and autonomy of their exploration. Engage parents to contribute old photographs, vintage farming tools, and folk artifacts as the first collection of local items for a mini museum. Meanwhile, young children visit the Hejin Lü Family Glazed Tile Industrial Park, where they observe intangible cultural heritage artisans firing glazed tiles and try shaping their own imitations using colored clay and pottery.

2.3 Expressing Experiences Through Multiple Representations

Ultimately, children express their understanding through drawing, making things, playing, and acting out roles in various ways. Each child will "tell" about what they have learned in their own distinct manner, reflecting young children's capacity to hold and apply multiple representational frameworks when engaging with the world (Nguyen & McDermott, 2023).

2.3.1 Selective attention in drawing

A few children sketched the scene of an old-fashioned opera; others paid attention to the curvature of the roof eaves or counted every step attentively as they illustrated it. One kid painted a tree that was higher than the temple itself and occupied the entire surface with its branches. There was another who showed the Eight Immortals, who, though they did not appear as gods, the legendary objects they carried were easily identifiable. All the drawings were different, based on the particular emphasis of each child. Drawing projects cognition, not merely art. Children depict what is significant and memorable, then frequently share their reasoning with peers, thereby organizing experience and developing language.

2.3.2 Iterative understanding through building

The Nine Dragons Temple construction underwent three revisions. The first attempt was inaccurate; the second added the curved roof; the third replaced the foundation with a more solid base, achieving the final form. Following every alteration, the kids would step away and examine it, compare it to the reference pictures, and talk about what could be done differently the next time. Upon finishing, they confidently told other people: This is the stage, this is the roof, these are the steps: see, the roof is curved. The verbalization enabled them to restructure their thoughts. The transformation between "not quite right" and "finally looks right" represents the way in which young children slowly begin to grasp the concept of an architectural form, starting by paying attention to general contours, then moving on to the main elements, and finally thinking about the stability of the structure. It is a typical process of conceptualization.

2.3.3 Physical engagement and role-play

Children learned traditional games like Eagle Catches Chicks, Handkerchief Toss, and Fighting Roosters from their grandparents—games once part of temple fair customs—through direct play rather than passive instruction. This active engagement makes cultural heritage tangible and personally meaningful, contrasting sharply with classroom-based lectures. The Eight Immortals tale was approached similarly: children assigned roles, negotiated character relationships and narrative logic, and reenacted the story through play. None of these activities were pre-planned by teachers; children simply painted, constructed, and played, each expressing understanding in their own way. Such diverse expressions serve not only as outcomes of inquiry but also as pathways to deeper understanding, as articulating ideas helps children transform fragmented experiences into communicable knowledge.

3. Characteristics of Children's Learning in a Micro-museum

3.1 Learning is Problem-driven

In the context of kindergarten practice, the starting point of the classroom is not predetermined knowledge points set by the teacher but rather the genuine questions spontaneously submitted by the children. Since these questions are generated by the children themselves, they possess an inherent drive for exploration. As constructivist theory emphasizes, knowledge is subjectively constructed through the resolution of real-world problems. Museum education does not have the characteristics of formal education, but this is not necessary, because in the museum, the learning process itself is more important than the outcomes (Brajčić & Kuščević, 2022).

3.2 Learning is Hands-on

The cultural heritage is not learned by the kids just by listening; rather, they are creating understanding on the basis of actual activities that include building, drawing, grinding grain, and mixing ingredients. The practice provides insight into an abstract culture in a more perceptual way. Through interdisciplinary project-based learning, museums effectively promote the holistic development of children's competencies (Lin, Hsiao, & Lichun, 2019). Young children in this research have operationalized activities like building, drawing, and role-playing to comprehend cultural heritage, which is empirical evidence to support this view.

3.3 Learning Is Social

Social interaction between peers, teacher-pupil dialogue, the advice of experts, and parent role modeling are important social conditions that lead to the enrichment of learning. Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development captures how such interactions support learning, underscoring the educator's critical role in identifying learners' current limitations and providing appropriate guidance to facilitate progress (Xue, 2023).

3.4 Learning Is Multimodal

The results of the inquiry are expressed by children in many different ways. Drawing, construction, role-play, and verbal storytelling are part of the many so-called symbolic systems used by children in interpreting and communicating their view of the world. Research has shown that children's exploration in museum settings is closely related to their ability to reflect on and articulate their learning experiences (Sobel et al., 2022). Each mode of expression offers a window into children's thinking processes.

The value of the micro-museum lies not only in transforming local resources into curricula, but also in offering children a learning strategy driven by curiosity, hands-on involvement, and multimodal expression. This model aligns with the core principles of early childhood education: direct perception, practical operation, and firsthand experience. Following the course implementation, children have deepened their understanding of local culture and improved their inquiry, hands-on, and verbal skills. They have also developed a stronger sense of hometown affection, exploration, and perseverance.

4. Conclusion and Implications

This case study of Hejin City Second Kindergarten reveals that children's learning in a micro-museum environment progresses through three sequential stages: curiosity, inquiry, and expression. Curiosity begins with children's

spontaneous questions; inquiry proceeds through hands-on exploration, trial and error, and social interaction; expression outputs learning through multiple modalities. These stages constitute the primary pathway through which children engage with local resources.

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