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Exploring the Practice of Life Education Activities in Kindergartens Based on Picture Book Teaching

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Abstract

Life education for young children begins with an exploration of the essence of life, aiming to help them recognize and respect life, affirm their self-worth, cultivate a grateful heart, face challenges bravely, and pay attention to and care for themselves, others, and the world. Picture books, which have become increasingly popular in the children's book world in recent years, owe their popularity to their exquisite content and grasp of childhood happiness. No child can resist the temptation of a story. Moreover, picture books carry more than just a story; they offer experiences of beauty, moments of touching emotion, and the joy of imagination. Through research on picture book education and life education activities in kindergartens, this paper analyzes the current status and challenges faced by life education activities in kindergartens and explores appropriate methods and content to integrate picture book teaching into and promote life education activities in kindergartens.

Keywords

Early Childhood Education, Picture Books, Life Education

Life education for young children begins with an exploration of the essence of life, aiming to help them recognize and respect life, affirm their self-worth, cultivate a grateful heart, face challenges bravely, and pay attention to and care for themselves, others, and the world. The implementation of life education for young children includes the content and methods of life education. Picture book teaching and life education are two indispensable aspects of kindergarten education activities. However, the current life education activities for young children face issues

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such as dull and monotonous content and methods. Through research on picture book education and life education activities in kindergartens, this paper attempts to find suitable methods and content to integrate picture book teaching into and promote life education activities in kindergartens.

1. The Connotation and Value Orientation of Life Education Activities in Kindergartens

1.1. The Connotation of Life Education Activities in Kindergartens

The concept of life education has a long history, and its implementation varies due to different social and cultural backgrounds in various countries. In China, life education differs from that in Western countries in terms of connotation, scope, purpose, and promoting organizations. In Western countries, life education is not usually promoted by official or formal schools and focuses on topics such as anti-drug use, prevention of AIDS, staying away from crime and poverty, with psychological and physiological health education, education on life and death, and safety education as its main content. In contrast, life education in China aims to correct the social climate, enhance the quality of life for all citizens, and rebuild social values, with themes that go far beyond those focused on in Australia, the United States, and other places.

Life education has occupied a central position in educational theory since the last few decades of the last century. However, whether it is life education, life education, or education for life, the core of all these concepts revolves around the two concepts of "life" and "education." Moreover, the analysis from different perspectives is only relative, and there is no absolutely clear boundary. Life education for young children is a part of life education. It refers to the education aimed at enabling young children to have an appropriate understanding, attitude, and behavior towards life. Specifically, it means that, based on respecting the developmental subjectivity of young children, through physiological education, psychological education, life education, moral education, and spiritual education, young children can not only understand their own body and mind but also recognize the relationships between themselves, others, society, the environment, and time and space. Ultimately, the goal is to enable young children to learn to recognize, appreciate, respect, and cherish life, achieving healthy development (Feng, 2004). This paper attempts to explore from this perspective, starting with an exploration of the essence of life, to help young children recognize and respect life, affirm their self-worth, cultivate a grateful heart, face challenges bravely, and pay attention to and care for themselves, others, and the world.

1.2. The Value Orientation of Life Education Activities for Young Children

1.2.1. The Need for the Future Development of the Nation and Society

Life education for young children aims to cultivate their recognition and respect for life, which plays an important role in the development of their prosocial be-

havior. Preschool children are the initial reserve force for the future development of the nation and society. Therefore, conducting life education activities for preschool children is undoubtedly a necessary guarantee for the future development of the nation and society. With the development of society, the content and forms of life education are constantly changing, and life education activities for young children face new challenges. Hence, early childhood educators should not only pay attention to the life education of preschool children but also continuously study its connotation, update educational content and forms, and avoid the phenomenon of education becoming disconnected from society.

1.2.2. The Need for the Unique Development of Young Children

Preschool children's bodies are not yet fully developed, and their language, actions, and understanding abilities are not yet mature. Without good life education activities for young children, they are likely to harm themselves or others. Moreover, without life education, young children may not be able to correctly understand themselves, which is also quite unfavorable for the development of their unique personalities. Conducting life education activities for young children can inspire and guide them to understand themselves, pay attention to others, and help develop their unique personalities. Preschool children need systematic guidance from schools to awaken their inner individual and social consciousness.

1.2.3. The Need for the Healthy Development of the Early Childhood Education Cause

Kindergartens are divided into five major areas: health, language, society, science, and art. Life education activities for young children belong to the health domain. Life education activities for young children involve various aspects of the smooth progress of early childhood education work. Effective life education activities for young children can not only promote their good development but also enrich and perfect the teaching content of the health domain in kindergartens and promote the smooth progress of the other four major domains: language, society, science, and art, thereby promoting the healthy development of the entire early childhood education cause.

1.3. The Dilemmas Faced by Life Education for Young Children

1.3.1. Teaching Purpose: Excessive Utilitarianism and Marginalization of Life Education

Kindergartens should be a simple and free paradise for children, but due to the influence of the real environment, utilitarianism has also emerged in kindergarten education. Many parents, influenced by the concept of "not letting children lose at the starting line," have set many adult-oriented courses for their children. Parents rarely take the time to understand their children and do not allow early childhood educators to organize educational activities unrelated to their children's future academic performance. Under the influence of this phenomenon, early childhood educators often set aside the true content of life education, and education that is marginalized, formalized, and utilitarian has become increasingly common

(Yi, 2004).

1.3.2. Teaching Methods: Lack of Proactivity and Weak Sense of Self-Worth in Children

Life education activities in kindergartens are mostly conducted through classroom lectures, and even the few theme-based activities are also affected by too much intervention from early childhood educators, leaving children in a passive position during the activities. It is not difficult to find in kindergartens that children always revolve around the teacher, doing what the teacher likes and saying what the teacher wants to hear. If the teacher does not remind or guide, children generally will not actively think or explore on their own. This phenomenon reflects a lack of proactivity and a weak sense of self-worth in children.

1.3.3. Focus on Children's Natural Life, Neglect of Their Spiritual Life

Under the guidance of the concept of combining care and education, the care work in kindergartens has been put on the agenda. However, care work in kindergartens is not equivalent to life education for young children. Many early childhood educators mistakenly regard care work as life education activities. Therefore, in the education process, they only focus on the natural life of children and neglect their spiritual life. This phenomenon undoubtedly leads to the one-sidedness and singularity of the content of life education activities for young children, which is not conducive to the healthy development of their lives.

1.3.4. Formalization and Conflicts between Home and School

Death education is one aspect of life education activities for young children. However, due to the influence of traditional Chinese culture, parents are reluctant to let their children hear about death and are even less willing to allow early childhood educators to simulate scenes of the death of a child's relatives. Influenced by this cultural tradition, many life education activities for young children have become formalized, superficial, and unable to delve deeper.

2. The Connotation and Value Orientation of Picture Book Teaching in Kindergartens

Picture books, which have become increasingly popular in the children's book world in recent years, owe their popularity to their exquisite content and grasp of childhood happiness. No child can resist the temptation of a story. Moreover, picture books carry more than just a story; they offer experiences of beauty, moments of touching emotion, and the joy of imagination. In picture books, children can resonate, feel themselves, understand nature, and comprehend others.

2.1. The Connotation of Picture Books

Picture books, also known as "picture books", are children's books primarily illustrated with pictures and supplemented with text. They mainly narrate a story, express a specific emotion and theme, and are primarily visual, but they do not place text in a subordinate position. Instead, the story is jointly told through the

interplay of images and text (Pei, 2005). Picture books come in many varieties, which differ based on classification criteria. For example, they can be categorized into masterpieces, international award-winning books, parent-child reading, emotional management, etc., based on different topics, styles, and suitable reading ages and audiences. They can also be classified into biographies, leisure, stories, moral education, and other categories based on topic. Children's picture books first appeared in Europe and have a history of over 300 years. The recognized prototype of European picture books is "Orbis Pictus," published in 1658 by Czech educator Comenius.

2.2. The Value Orientation of Picture Book Teaching for Life Education Activities

The 1930s marked the golden age of picture books in the United States. Picture books rose to prominence in South Korea and Japan in the 1950s and 1960s, with notable creators and theorists such as Miyazawa Ken. Picture book reading began in Taiwan, China, in the 1970s, and due to the recognition of the value of picture books by many people, it sparked a reading craze. Picture book teaching holds significant meaning for the conduct of life education activities.

2.2.1. Cultivating Good Reading Habits and Sensing Life through Reading

Dorothy White of New Zealand said, "Picture books are the first books children encounter in their life journey and the most important books they will read throughout their long reading career. The amount of joy a child derives from picture books will determine whether they will love reading for life." Reading can cultivate one's character and help people recognize themselves, others, and the world through reading and reflection. Picture books are suitable for children and serve as a good medium for them to find themselves and discover life.

2.2.2. Providing Aesthetic Education and Fostering a Love for Life

No child can resist the allure of picture books. The exquisite illustrations and rich content bring physical and mental pleasure to children. Happiness is the foundation of a sense of well-being, and children with a strong sense of well-being can better discover, love themselves, others, nature, and society. In picture book reading, children instinctively experience, awaken, and remember beautiful things, which is the initial stage of aesthetic education for children and the beginning of understanding life.

2.2.3. Activating Children's Imagination and Developing Individuality

The greatest feature of picture books is that they have more pictures and fewer words, and what children can discover from them entirely depends on their imagination. Picture books can activate children's imagination and are beneficial for cultivating creativity. This is because picture books are a special form of illustration that particularly emphasize the intrinsic relationship between text and images, with the two combining to tell the story. In the process of picture book teaching, children need to imagine the content of the story based on the text and im-

ages. This process of imagination is the process of cultivating creativity and also the process of tapping into children's potential. Different children have different potentials, and in picture book teaching, we will find that children with different personalities continuously emerge.

2.2.4. Helping Children Vent Emotions and Cultivating Good Psychological Qualities

Many picture book stories are based on children's real-life experiences, and children can experience the emotions of the main characters in the story and vent their own emotions through reading. Appropriate emotional venting is quite important for the physical and mental development of children. Children without inner frustrations and who can express their emotions reasonably are healthy.

2.2.5. Promoting Social Development in Children

In the picture book The Little House, the endpapers conceal a miniature figure frequently overlooked by adult observers yet readily detected by child readers. Similarly, Little Rat's Little Vest employs a deliberate visual ambiguity in depicting the intermittent visibility of the sea otter's vibrissae and the lion's mane, a narrative device that implicitly cultivates children's observational acuity and inductive reasoning capacities through participatory engagement with textual clues. The picture book "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" uses "If you want to become beautiful and tall, you have to eat a lot like the caterpillar" to guide children to eat more and promote their social cognition. In "Little Rat's Little Vest," it is written, "This is my little car, I'll lend it to you, but don't break it!" which guides children to learn self-regulation and control, as well as helping, cooperating, sharing, and yielding. Additionally, preschool children are in the transitional stage of concrete and imaginative thinking. With the help of images, they can connect scattered language and images, building a bridge for them to enter the world of language. Being able to integrate well into society is one of the goals of life education activities for young children.

3. Practical Exploration of Life Education Activities in Kindergartens Based on Picture Book Teaching

Picture book pedagogy and life education constitute dual pedagogical imperatives within contemporary kindergarten ecosystems. Current implementations of life education for early learners exhibit systemic constraints, including monolithic content delivery and formulaic methodologies. The synergistic integration of picture book-mediated instruction with life education praxis presents a viable pathway toward optimized developmental outcomes, though operationalizing this symbiosis demands rigorous empirical investigation and evidence-based classroom implementation strategies.

Aligned with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) developmental framework, Chinese kindergartens structure curricula through five core domains: Health, Language, Sociocultural Competence, Scientific Inquiry, and Aesthetic Expression. Notably, safety education operates as an

embedded pedagogical continuum permeating the health domain. The "Kindergarten Education Guidance Outline" points out: "Kindergartens must place the protection of children's lives and the promotion of their healthy growth as the top priority in their work." The third article of the health domain in the "Outline" clearly states: "Have preliminary knowledge of safety and health, and know how to care for and protect oneself." The "Guidelines for Children's Development and Learning from 3 to 6 Years Old" further clarifies the purpose of safety education in the health domain. We should prioritize the safety of children, as safety is a prerequisite and guarantee for the development of any ability (Zheng, 2008). Only on the basis of health and safety can children achieve comprehensive physical and mental development.

3.1. The Relationship between Picture Book Teaching and Life Education Activities in Kindergartens

3.1.1. Guidance Strategies for Integrating Safety Education into Picture Book Reading

Picture books are a reading format that children enjoy, and they have a certain subconscious influence on children. In addition to understanding the content of the picture books, children also develop good reading habits, which is beneficial for cultivating their creativity. However, there are some issues in reading guidance in kindergartens, such as excessive verbal didacticism by teachers and a lack of guidance and assistance for children (Yu & Wang, 2010). At the same time, preschool children are in an active and playful stage but lack cognitive abilities, so safety accidents often occur. Therefore, it is extremely important to provide preschool children with preliminary safety knowledge education and cultivate their self-rescue skills. In the guidance process, teachers should not only guide children to achieve cognitive goals but also strive to guide them to apply, analyze, and evaluate, achieving higher-level goals.

3.1.2. Picture Books as a Good Medium for Life Education

Picture books are an excellent medium for life education for young children. Early childhood educators can use picture books to integrate life education into children's daily lives. For example, a thematic study can be initiated using the guidance of a picture book like "Guess How Much I Love You." In the activity, children can gain profound knowledge and experience through active exploration and autonomous communication, which is truly internalized as their own. This method of conducting activities through picture books is more acceptable to children and more natural and unforced. Under the affection of the picture book story, children are emotionally willing to accept the life education theme activities conducted by kindergarten teachers and can efficiently perceive the connotation of life education under the guidance of teachers.

3.1.3. Life Education Activities in Kindergartens Promote the Development of Picture Book Teaching

There are many ways to implement life education activities in kindergartens,

mainly divided into specialized, permeated, thematic, and extracurricular models. Regardless of the implementation method, if early childhood educators can provide effective guidance, it can promote children's picture book teaching to a certain extent. Much of the content of life education activities can be found in picture books. For example, on Mother's Day, thematic life education activities such as "Where Do I Come From" and "I Love Mom" can be conducted. In the activity, kindergarten teachers can actively guide the introduction of related picture books, encourage children to read and understand autonomously. Through the accumulation of experience from previous life education activities, children can better understand the content and emotions of the picture book stories, thereby truly internalizing the content of the picture books as their own (Zhou et al., 2012).

3.1.4. Picture Book Teaching and Life Education Activities in Kindergartens Promote Each Other

Picture books are a reading format that children enjoy, characterized by being vivid and easy to understand. The various implementation methods of life education activities in kindergartens allow children to accumulate experience in practical life (Wang & Deng, 2009). The vividness and imagery of picture books can help children take an interest in life education activities and simplify the content for easier absorption. The experience children accumulate in life education practice activities, in turn, deepens their understanding of picture book stories, creating a mutually beneficial and complementary relationship.

3.2. Implementation Methods of Life Education Activities in Kindergartens

Although conducting life education activities in kindergartens is of great significance, many early childhood educators do not know how to implement them in practical activities. Issues such as dull and monotonous content and methods persist. In fact, there are many ways to implement life education in kindergartens.

3.2.1. Implementation Methods of Life Education Activities

1) Specialized Life Education Model: This model involves specially organizing life education courses to conduct life education activities for young children. Due to the underdevelopment of life education in the field of Chinese education, especially for young children, there are difficulties in establishing specialized life education courses, both in terms of teaching staff and theoretical support (Bi, 2013). Many schools abroad offer courses related to life and death education. For example, in British primary schools, professionals from the funeral industry are invited to talk about their work and what happens after death. They also use role-playing games to help students experience death and the feeling of losing a loved one. However, due to the Chinese cultural tradition of tabooing death, Life and death education is difficult to implement in China and remains a blank in school education. This avoidance of the issue requires our attention.

2) Integrated Life Education Model: This model combines the physical and mental development characteristics of young children with life themes to extract

relevant topics and content for life education (Lin, 2010). This approach is relatively flexible, allowing adjustments to the content and methods of life education based on the development and changes of children, without fixed time and location restrictions.

3) Thematic Life Education Model: Centered around one or several themes of life education, this model designs activity plans with specific objectives. Beyond the classroom, it systematically and planfully conducts life education activities in a continuous manner. The thematic life education model treats children as the subject of research, enabling them to gain cognition through autonomous exploration.

4) Extracurricular Life Education Model: This model makes full use of related ceremonies, festivals, and activity days in kindergartens to conduct life education activities for young children., allowing children to receive life education in their spare time. For example, on Mother's Day, a life education activity such as "Where Do I Come From" can be organized.

3.2.2. Principles for Implementing Life Education Activities for Young Children

1) Principle of Care and Ethics: Simply put, in addition to possessing professional qualifications in early childhood education, teachers must love and respect every child and their choices. They should be aware of their important responsibilities as educators and guide and help children become caring individuals.

2) Principle of Localization and Individualization: While research on life education is relatively mature in Western countries, there are significant differences in national conditions. Therefore, we cannot simply copy Western methods; we must adapt them to the local context and individualize them.

3) Principle of Activity and Real-Life Integration: Preschool children are a special group, and life education activities must take into account their active nature and be closely linked to social life.

4) Principle of Inspiration and Internalization: As pointed out by Montessori, preschool children have an instinctive absorbent mind. Life education activities should utilize this characteristic and employ various methods to achieve internalization of life education.

5) Principle of Respecting Life and Its Value: The implementation of life education activities in the field of Chinese education, especially in early childhood education, is not yet mature. Therefore, the conduct and implementation of life education activities in kindergartens require cooperation from multiple aspects. Firstly, early childhood educators need to transform their educational concepts and establish an awareness of the value of children's lives. For a long time, our educational concepts have been mechanized, treating human education like the standardized production of machines, forcing all children to accept the same educational model and ignoring the diverse personalities of children. As a result, we regretfully find that all children become the same, which contradicts the purpose of education: to promote the healthy growth of children's lives (Liu, 2007). There-

fore, establishing a scientific awareness of the value of children's lives is particularly important, that is, fully recognizing that the healthy growth and improved quality of individual lives are the hallmarks of educational development, focusing on the realization of individual life potential, the healthy fulfillment of life needs, respecting the diversity and uniqueness of individual lives, and emphasizing the stimulation of children's active participation in educational activities, allowing each child to affirm themselves and take control of their own destiny during the educational process.

Secondly, emphasis should be placed on the role of interaction and activities to enrich children's survival experiences and cultivate their life emotions. Survival experience refers to an individual's self-experience and sensibility of their existence and value. Life emotion refers to an individual's conscious joy, immersion, and sympathy, care, and love for other lives and the entire life world. Interaction and activities are important practices in everyone's life. Any quality is formed and manifested through certain interactions and activities. Therefore, early childhood educators can cultivate children's ability to experience survival and their life emotions through interactions and activities. For example, by visiting parks to experience the beauty of nature and the joy and self-worth of helping each other.

Lastly, the combined role of schools, families, and society should be valued. The family is the first school for preschool children, and ensuring the quality of family education is crucial. In addition to understanding necessary early childhood education knowledge, building a good family environment requires close attention to children's dynamics and maintaining close contact with school teachers to achieve unity between home and school. At the same time, the role of the community as a living environment should be fully utilized, allowing school education to enter the community.

3.3. Integration of Picture Book Teaching and Life Education in Kindergartens

Although there are many ways to implement life education activities in kindergartens, picture books can be used as a good medium in any form to integrate and promote life education activities. However, certain conditions are needed for this integration, namely specific themes and suitable picture books. This requires early childhood educators to pay attention to the details of life, collect and record the picture books they have read, so as to be well-prepared. It is well known that life education is an educational practice activity with a clear value orientation and multiple themes. If, from an early age, picture books can instill the kindest, most beautiful, and purest aspects of humanity into children's hearts, allowing them to grow up with compassion, human warmth, and a sense of justice, this would undoubtedly be one of the perfect manifestations of educational value (Sun, 2009).

3.3.1. Understanding Death and Cherishing Life

"Grandpa Became a Ghost" tells the story of a little boy, Esben, whose grandfather suddenly died of a heart attack on the street, leaving Esben very sad. However,

"that night, Grandpa came back," Esben exclaimed with both surprise and joy, "Grandpa, you're back! Aren't you dead?" "I thought I was dead too," said Grandpa. "Oh! I know," said Esben, "you've turned into a ghost!" The picture book makes the topic of death lighthearted. Esben, who has a book about death, says, "If a person forgets to do something in life, they will become a ghost after death," which leads into happy memories. The young and happy, unforgettable, and even boring moments that Grandpa spent with Esben in his youth ease the pain of losing Grandpa. "I remember I forgot something," Grandpa said, no longer smiling: "I forgot to say goodbye to you, my little Esben!" The touching moment arrives in an instant.

3.3.2. Experiencing Family Love and Learning to Be Moved

Love is abstract, and it is difficult to express and understand it. The picture book "Guess How Much I Love You" describes it this way: As bedtime approached, the little rabbit said to his mother, "Guess how much I love you." "I don't think I can guess," she replied. "This much," said the little rabbit, stretching his arms as wide as he could. The mother rabbit had arms that were even longer, and she said, "I love you this much." The little rabbit raised his hands high and said, "I love you as high as I can reach." The mother rabbit raised her hands even higher and said, "I love you as high as I can reach." The little rabbit tried jumping and doing somersaults, but he couldn't reach as high as his mother. As the little rabbit grew tired and looked at the sky, he said, "I love you all the way to the moon." Then he closed his eyes. The mother rabbit kissed the little rabbit, smiled gently, and whispered, "I love you all the way to the moon and back."

3.3.3. Getting Close to Nature and Learning to Care

"Make Way for the Ducklings" is a classic book that won the Caldecott Medal. It tells the story of a pair of wild ducks, Mr. and Mrs. Mallard, who flew to Boston, exhausted, and found a good pond with a small island in a park where they decided to spend the night. The next morning, they found some food in the mud at the bottom of the pond. As they were about to leave to continue their journey, a boat full of tourists came by, and people threw peanuts into the water. Mr. and Mrs. Mallard had a delicious meal and decided to make a nest there. Just as they were happy to have found a place they liked, a boy on a bicycle nearly ran over Mr. Mallard. They felt the place was unsafe, so they decided to look for another home. Finally, they found a place on a small island in the river and settled down. Mrs. Mallard laid eight ducklings there. One day, Mrs. Mallard led the eight ducklings across the city to the pond in the park. It was dangerous to cross the road with so much traffic! A kind police officer, Michael, blew his whistle and ran over to direct traffic to help them cross safely. This touching and caring work allows children to invisibly get close to nature and learn to care.

3.3.4. Valuing Friendship and Learning to Get Along

"My Friend Is for Rent" tells the story of a gorilla who feels lonely but doesn't know how to make friends. One day, he posted a leaf on a tree that read, "I have

friendship to rent, five dollars an hour." This clever gorilla adopted a "rental" approach, not only making friends to play with but also earning money. Coincidentally, a little girl named Mi Mi rode her bicycle by and, having no playmates, rented the gorilla to play with her. Mi Mi taught the gorilla how to play stepping on feet, rock-paper-scissors, and they had a great time. The next day, Mi Mi came again to rent the gorilla's friendship, and their bond grew deeper each day. One afternoon, the gorilla deliberately didn't bring his money pouch or hourglass but instead prepared delicious cookies and waited under the tree for Mi Mi. After waiting for a long time, Mi Mi didn't show up. It turned out she was moving away. Mi Mi left her doll as a keepsake for the gorilla. The picture book uses warm tones throughout, warming the friendship between Mi Mi and the gorilla. The gorilla lies on the ground, resting his left arm under his chin and his right hand on his head, smiling contentedly as he watches Mi Mi do her homework. The colors, composition, and storyline are enough to captivate children, allowing them to truly internalize the essence of the story as their own knowledge.

4. Conclusion

Picture books are not merely illustrated books, nor are they books for learning to read or language textbooks. They are a magical creation that uses the two media of "image" and "text" to spark infinite imagination and provide a happy experience for children. From the perspective of life education, picture book reading is a process where children interact with the books, their peers, and their teachers, sharing emotions, differences, and the joy brought by the mysterious world created by the books. Although life education activities in kindergartens are not yet well-developed, they are a very important part of kindergarten education. Integrating picture books with life education activities in kindergartens is a wise move in the context of the times. To integrate picture books with life education for young children, it is necessary to establish an ecological activity circle centered on cooperation and flexibility and to build an integrated curriculum with experience integration as a support. In this way, picture books can gradually be integrated into the life education of young children, silently benefiting their lives like the gentle rain that nourishes all things.

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