

Life Education: Reshaping Education for the Sake of Life

Jijun Yao

Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing 210024, Jiangsu, China

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” –Maimonides

LIFE is the starting point as well as the primary aim of all educative activities. The essence of education is to create conditions to support the development of individual life, as Montessori (2004) famously said that the purpose of education is to foster the healthy development of force of life in children, and that education is everything that has the potential to boost their vitality. Successful education allows students to grow in an autonomy-supportive environment and learn to appreciate, respect, and treasure life while acquiring academic knowledge. This is the fundamental responsibility of education (Lansdown, 2005). Pointless are the seemingly great accomplishments of the individual who has no idea of meaning in life; likewise, any education that fails to assure the healthy development of individual life is ineffective, no matter how advanced it appears.

Currently, a plurality of nations and regions are witnessing the constant emergence of life-harming issues due to the lack of life education. The unreasonably high penetration of information technology and radical social transformation have catalyzed the proliferation of life-related problems, such as suicide, homicide, violence, drug abuse, obesity, nihilism, and mental disorders, which are exhibiting a growing trend in younger age groups. According to the UNICEF report entitled *The State of the World’s Children 2021*, suicide ranks as the fifth leading cause of mortality among adolescents aged 10–19; Annually, approximately 46,000 youths aged 10 to 19 kill themselves (UNICEF, 2012). China’s *Health Statistical Yearbook (2020)* revealed that the suicide incidence among teens had been steadily increasing in recent years, and it was the second leading cause of death in this age group (after traffic accidents). In the United States, results from a national survey showed the percentage of teenagers aged 12–17 years who experienced a past year major depressive episode rose from 9% in 2004 to 15.7% in 2019; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that suicide rates among adolescents aged 10–14 years increased 100% between 2010 and 2019 (Ruch & Bridge, 2022).

© 2023 Insights Publisher. All rights reserved.



Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License

(<http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed by the Insights Publisher.

In response to these issues, many countries have worked to popularize life education over the past few decades. Life education in America emerged as a countermeasure to life-threatening behaviors such as drug abuse, suicide, homicide, and sexual promiscuity, and has now been interwoven into school and family education. In 1986, the New York City's commission of education approved an innovative curriculum program for family life education, which included sex education, in an effort to help teenagers and young children overcome anxiety and develop a positive attitude towards their bodies. It was mandated that this program should run from kindergarten to high school (Schechter, 1986). As to the UK, its life education began as a reaction to drug abuse among teenagers. The UK Life Education Research Center was established in 1986, aiming to develop among people, especially teenagers and children, a better understanding of the value and significance of life and to reduce the incidence of drug abuse, violent behaviors, AIDS and other social problems. Life education in the UK has formed a coordinated framework engaging the government, community, school, and family and emphasizes youth's pursuit of meaning in life, which has proved significantly productive (Formby, 2011). In 1989, the revised basic education curriculum of Japan stipulated the spiritual pursuit and reverence for life as the pivotal goals of moral education. It also advocated the implementation of "Extra Education" program to educate young people to appreciate and value life and be more resilient when encountering setbacks and failures (Fang, 1990).

Chinese educational researchers began to pay attention to life education in the 1990s. Academics such as Ye (2015) and Feng (2003) endeavored to spread the foreign research on life education in the Chinese educational community and progressively develop life education theories and practical methodologies based on domestic conditions. Subsequently, more research has been conducted in response to practical issues or pressing crises and has won nationwide recognition, contributing to the increasing popularity of life education in China.

This issue of the journal published two articles addressing life education in China. *The Necessity of Including Life Education in Chinese Basic Education Curricula* gave an overview of existing life education research in China and emphasized the significance of life education among Chinese adolescents in the context of prevalence of life-related issues (Li, 2023). *Life Education for College Students: A Case Study of Life Education in Chinese Universities* described problems with current college life education in China such as immature life education curricula, inadequate life-education subject matter, and absence of life purpose among college students, pinpointed the underlying causes, and made pertinent suggestions for improving life education in higher education institutions (Suo & Zhou, 2023).

Due to the relatively late start of life education in China, there is a lack of impactful theories, publications, and journals in this regard. More insightful research on the curricular design and instructional practice of life education is necessitated. In publishing the two studies, we aim to promote widespread debate on the implementation of life education.

References

- Fang, D. (1990). An overview of the revision of skills and homework education syllabus for Japanese junior secondary school students and the new syllabus. *Curriculum, Teaching Material, and Method*, 1990(8):40-43.

- Feng, J. (2003). Supporting the balanced development of life: Core concepts in the Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (trial). *Studies in Preschool Education*, 2003(3):20-22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1007-8169.2003.03.029>
- Formby, E., Coldwell, M., Stiell, B., Demack, S., Stevens, A., Shipton, L., & Willis, B. (2011). Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education: a mapping study of the prevalent models of delivery and their effectiveness. Department for Education. 2011. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/4152175.pdf>
- Lansdown, G. (2005). The evolving capacities of the child. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2005.
- Li, J. (2023). The necessity of including life education in Chinese basic education curricula. *Science Insights Education Frontiers*, 17(2):2733-2740. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15354/sief.23.re250>
- Montessori, M. (2004). *The Discovery of the Child*. Aakar Books. 2004.
- National Health Commission of China. (2020). *China Health Statistical Yearbook (2020)*. Beijing: Peking Union Medical College Press. 2020
- Ruch, D. A. & Bridge, J. A. (2022). Epidemiology of suicide and suicidal behavior in youth. In *Youth Suicide Prevention and Intervention: Best Practices and Policy Implications* (pp. 3-12). Cham: Springer International Publishing. 2022.
- Schecter, S. (1986). The New York City school system's family life education program. *Journal of Community Health*, 11(1):54-57. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01341637>
- UNICEF. The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind Promoting, Protecting and Caring for Children's Mental Health. UN. 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021>
- Walters, J. D. (1997). *Education for Life: Preparing Children to Meet Today's Challenges*. Crystal Clarity Publishers. 1997.
- Ye, L. (2015). *Innovation and Breakthroughs: Principles of Education Based on "Life and Practice."* East China Normal University Press. 2015.
- Yuan, S., & Zhou, L. (2023). Life education for college students: A case study of life education in Chinese universities. *Science Insights Education Frontiers*, 17(2):2741-2749. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15354/sief.23.re261>

Correspondence to:

Jijun Yao
School of Educational Science
Nanjing Normal University
Nanjing 210024
Jiangsu
China

E-mail: yaojijun_njnu@163.com

Conflict of Interests: None

Doi: 10.15354/sief.23.co112