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An Analysis of the Value of Informal Learning in Primary Schools

Yunyun Xie

Guangxi Normal University, Guilin 541000, Guangxi, China.

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Corresponding author: Yunyun Xie, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin 541000, Guangxi, China.

Abstract

Informal learning is a distinctive approach to education that is not an innate ability but rather a skill that must be developed through training and practice. It focuses on meeting actual demands, enhances the learning process through practical activities, encourages continuous growth through reflection, and stimulates further motivation by producing tangible results. This approach can complement formal education and introduce a variety of learning methods. In primary education, fostering the ability to engage in informal learning can significantly benefit students' lifelong learning journeys. This study examines the value of informal learning and advocates for a balanced integration of both formal and informal learning in primary education. The goal is to create a more diverse, flexible, and effective learning environment that promotes the holistic development of students. Additionally, this paper discusses the negative consequences of formal learning dominating the educational experiences of primary school students. It emphasizes the importance and value of prioritizing informal learning and offers practical recommendations for implementing informal learning strategies.

Keywords

Informal learning; Primary school; Practical activity

Informal learning refers to the process of knowledge transfer by learners through non-teaching activities in informal learning time or place (Xi Yaying, 2022). Unlike formal learning, informal learning emphasizes the sociality and culture of individuals in the learning process (Zhou Kun, Li Benyou, & Yang Xiaoping, 2020). In the learning scene of primary school, formal learning often occupies the main position, while the value of informal learning is often ignored (Yang Dengwei & Yang Xiaoping, 2019). The rapid development of the Internet and the change in social environment bring opportunities for informal learning, highlight advantages, broaden ways for students to acquire knowledge effectively, and further improve students' autonomous learning ability. From the perspective of pedagogy, the characteristics of autonomy, flexibility, and non-structure of informal learning coincide with the principles of autonomy, openness, and practicality advocated by the current curriculum (Korcz Natalia et al., 2021), and all kinds of phenomena warn educators of the value and significance of further formal informal learning.

1. The hidden danger of talent training brought by formal learning "monopoly"

Formal learning refers to the systematic learning process that takes place in the classroom under the teacher's planning (He Xinxin, 2022). With the rapid development of the times and the prolonged school hours of primary school students, the formal study of "monopolizing" primary school study life will bring a series of hidden dangers:

1.1 Programmed learning process

Students' learning activities in formal learning are organized and planned by teachers, and the learning effect is also evaluated by unified standards, with strong teaching objectives (Dang Xinling, 2023). This kind of learning form pursues the efficient transfer of knowledge, and the standardized teaching strategy of continuous iteration will bring the simplification of the learning form and the proceduralization of the learning process.

1.2 Learning content solidification

In formal learning activities, learners' learning content is uniformly planned by teachers (on the one hand, national textbooks are used as the formal learning content of schools, on the other hand, local courses and school-based courses will supplement the national textbooks). Under this background, the promotion of formal courses is often based on teachers' understanding of textbooks, lacking the supplement of informal learning, and the knowledge accepted by students is easily limited by teachers' cognition.

1.3 Weakening of learning interest

Learners in formal learning environments are often in a passive position, who are the recipients and executors of learning plans in the process of knowledge transfer, and the evaluators of learning results, which is not conducive to developing students' subjective initiative and autonomous learning ability and lacks learning stamina.

2. The value of informal learning in primary schools to children's growth

Informal learning is a form of learning initiated by learners, self-regulated and self-responsible, which does not only occur in school classrooms (Chen Liang, 2022). With the extension of students' school time, informal learning will bring more vitality to students.

2.1 Learning patterns are richer

Informal learning mode is very important for cultivating students' keen awareness of questions. It encourages students to discover and dare to ask questions independently in the learning process, and this learning mode can often significantly improve learning efficiency. At the same time, informal learning also promotes the improvement of students' problem-solving abilities. By interacting with others, students' communication and teamwork skills are strengthened, which in turn enhances their self-confidence and sense of accomplishment in learning and lays a solid foundation for students' all-round development. Informal learning enriches the learning experience in its diversified forms, which is similar to activities such as investigation, inquiry, social service, professional experience, and design and production covered in comprehensive practical activities. They complement traditional subject knowledge imparting and skill teaching and jointly broaden the model boundary of learning and teaching.

2.2 Boundless learning content

Because of its flexibility, informal learning transcends the limitations of time, place, and resources and greatly broadens the field of learning. Students can freely explore their interests from various channels such as life, social practice, and books. In the digital age, networks and social media have become the rapid generation and convergence platforms of knowledge, experience, and wisdom, which has contributed to the phenomenon of "collective wisdom" (Bechtold Rachel et al., 2022). Against this background, infinite resources, which rely on the Internet for informal learning, has realized the comprehensive unbounded learning content, allowing students to roam freely in the vast ocean of collective wisdom. According to students' different cognitive levels, combined with students' thinking ability, we should try our best to tap students' strengths. In informal learning, according to the differences in students' abilities, learning tasks are stratified, and successful experiences are emphasized. Finally, evaluate the stratification, consolidate the exploration effect, and effectively promote the individualized development of students.

2.3 The learning process is not driven by utilitarianism

Informal learning skillfully uses cultural elements in an informal environment to stimulate children to create knowledge. This process is full of dynamics, opportunities, and social cooperation. In the informal learning environment, students explore independently based on their personal interests, which reflects a high degree of spontaneity and initiative and is

full of positive motivation. By following their inner preferences, students not only enjoy the fun of learning but also deepen their self-awareness and gain satisfaction and pleasure in the process, thus enhancing their sense of self-worth and sense of accomplishment. In this kind of free exploration, students are not bound by clear learning goals, and learning becomes utilitarian. Growth often comes from internal feelings and unexpected gains in the process, rather than the achievement of preset goals (Wu Yue, 2020). Therefore, the evaluation of such learning does not focus on the results, but on the value of experience. Just as the comprehensive practical activity curriculum advocates process evaluation, the journey of informal learning and its accidental achievements bring learners spiritual richness and a sense of accomplishment, far exceeding the simple accumulation of knowledge.

2.4 Sufficient learning motivation

Informal learning is rooted in human instinct and is an original and spontaneous behavior pattern. In the current digital age, students' access to information is extremely rich and diverse, which goes beyond the boundaries between traditional books and classrooms. Using the network platform, they can not only explore the mysteries of nature in depth but also visit museums virtually and even ask experts in various fields for advice directly. This diversified learning style greatly broadens students' knowledge horizons, and at the same time stimulates their learning enthusiasm and exploration desire. Students deeply realize that learning is not limited to specific time and space, but feasible at any time and place, and the strategies and methods to solve problems are full of infinite possibilities. Creating more informal learning spaces for primary school students, in which they can start, manage, and learn independently, is not only a continuation of the spontaneous exploration spirit in infancy but also an effective exercise and enhancement of their independent exploration ability and consciousness. Stimulating and maintaining this intrinsic learning motivation can not only motivate students to actively engage in learning and exploration, but also establish a solid cornerstone for their lifelong learning and development.

3. The implementation path of informal learning in primary schools

In primary school campus life, different courses provide a broad space for informal learning because of their openness, autonomy, integration, and generative characteristics. At the same time, non-curricular time such as after-school delayed service should also encourage students to engage in informal learning, promote informal learning to integrate into the daily life of primary school students, realize the balance and complementarity with formal learning, and enrich the learning experience.

3.1 Point to the actual needs of students

Students' needs are diverse and extensive, covering life, development, and interests. Focusing on informal learning to meet the multi-dimensional needs of individual students not only conforms to the nature of informal learning autonomy, but also builds a strong internal driving force for students to continue to invest in learning, and also closely fits the trajectory of students' personalized growth and promotes the unique development of each student. Pupils aged 7 to 12 are at the age of strong curiosity and desire to explore, and their life experience mainly comes from the intuitive experience of daily life. Ingeniously integrating subject knowledge and problem exploration into daily life scenes can make students naturally absorb new knowledge in a relaxed and pleasant informal learning environment. Through the seamless connection between knowledge and life, this learning method not only enhances students' interest in learning but also profoundly embodies the unique value of informal learning activities in stimulating students' potential and deepening knowledge understanding.

3.2 Based on learning and practical activities

Practice is a bridge between the subjective and the objective, which transforms the world based on cognitive purpose and promotes harmony and unity between them (Zhu Zhiting & Hu Jiao, 2022). In this process, students constantly explore and solve problems through practice, at the same time, they breed new questions and push informal learning forward. The core concept of comprehensive practical activities encourages students to actively participate in practice, experience and internalize values, and at the same time flexibly respond to actual needs and dynamically adjust the details of activities, so as to deepen the learning level and make the learning journey more in-depth and fruitful (Korcz Natalia et al., 2021). Therefore, the school should become the core position to promote students' informal learning, devote itself to extending the period of informal learning, and carefully construct a vibrant informal learning space. This design aims to turn every corner of the campus into a stage for students to explore knowledge, so that learning is no longer limited to the traditional

framework, but integrated into every moment of daily life. The "realistic" learning environment refers to the actual place where teaching activities are carried out by means of on-site lectures, while in the current "internet plus" vision, most places that support non-face-to-face learning activities by means of network and multimedia are also called "virtual" learning environments. The "real" learning environment can better enable students to acquire knowledge through direct experience, and the "virtual" learning environment can switch the learning time and learning place at will. These two kinds of learning environments have their own advantages and limitations in cultivating students' learning abilities, so we construct a learning environment of "virtual and real integration" to connect them. In this way, students can obtain resources related to the learning theme through a personalized learning environment, avoid going astray in a large number of noisy network information, help improve students' learning efficiency, and effectively support the development of online joint research learning activities. Through the integration of learning environment, we can make up for their respective limitations and deficiencies, and provide the most effective and efficient environment for students' learning, so as to meet the needs of learners at different levels.

3.3 Stimulate excitation with output

Informal learning tends to be independent and personalized. Therefore, it is difficult for the traditional standardized assessment to fully reflect the multi-dimensional features of students' growth, nor can it effectively stimulate their enthusiasm for in-depth exploration (Guo Yuanxiang & Shu Dan, 2019). Therefore, more platforms should be provided for students to display their informal learning achievements, and through the process of "output", such as language expression, thinking presentation, and aesthetic presentation, it can be used as an important reference for evaluating students' development. This qualitative comprehensive evaluation is not only feedback to the learning effect, but also a positive incentive to future learning. In these exhibitions and performances, students not only consolidated the achievements of informal learning but also changed from the receiver of knowledge to the creator, especially on multi-output platforms such as classes, schools, and networks, which further stimulated their motivation and enthusiasm for informal learning.

With the rapid development of society, the demand for high-quality and compound talents is growing day by day, and learning has become an indispensable part of life. Facing this trend, we need to deeply reflect and reshape education and explore the infinite possibilities of learning. Through summary and reflection, we redefine the essence of education and devote ourselves to building an environment that supports students to learn anytime, anywhere, and without boundaries. Under the background of "Internet Plus", informal learning mode is like lighting the fire of wisdom for students, opening the window to the vast knowledge world, and teaching them self-learning and continuous progress. This transformation not only expands the learning field to a "learning ecosystem" that crosses national boundaries and integrates all walks of life but also endows each student with the identity of a "free learner" and encourages them to explore the ocean of knowledge in a more natural and flexible way, thus opening a new dimension of educational development. To sum up, it is very important to rebalance informal learning and formal learning in primary school, and their complementarity can significantly enhance the effectiveness of "cultivating people by virtue". Although informal learning faces challenges in practice because of its autonomy, flexibility, and non-structure, its unique advantages provide rich exploration space for in-depth practice and research, which is helpful for us to better understand and use this learning model.

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