

A Study on the Value Implications and Path of Implementing Mixed-Age Regional Games for Young Children

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Abstract: Mixed-age regional play is a significant aspect of preschool education, with great importance for children's physical and mental development. Unlike same-age regional games, mixed-age regional games offer unique benefits and can promote the development of children's social behaviours to a certain extent. Therefore, the active development of mixed-age regional games can help improve the educational character of children's games.

Keywords: Mixed-age education; Regional games; Educational value

As the reform of the kindergarten curriculum continues to progress, kindergartens are gradually recognizing the benefits of mixed-age education. This form of early childhood education organization focuses on the generative nature of activities, the autonomy of young children, and the naturalness of the educational ecosystem. This approach promotes the holistic development of young children in terms of physical, cognitive, and social aspects by facilitating social cooperation, cognitive conflict, and behavioral. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation status of mixed-age education, questionnaires and visits were conducted. ^[1]The findings revealed that current mixed-age regional play activities in kindergartens still have issues such as inadequate attention to regional mixed-age games, irrational environment settings, and improper placement of regional materials. These issues limit the successful implementation of the application. ^[2]Therefore, kindergartens should utilise the resources available on campus and conduct mixed-age educational activities to promote the overall development of children's morality, intelligence, physicality, aesthetics and labour.

1. Implications of the value of mixed-age regional games for young children

Mixed-age regional play activities aim to provide a natural environment for children's physical and mental development. The activities are designed to encourage interaction with peers, promoting self-knowledge and self-development through play. At the same time, these activities can enrich their social-emotional experiences, cultivate their learning initiative, and lay a solid foundation for their overall development.

1.1 Mixed-age area play activities have positive significance for the development of children's self-knowledge

Mixed-age areas offer a natural and realistic play environment for young children's peer interactions. This diversity of social experiences helps to expand young children's cognitive scope and social interaction skills. Secondly, in mixed-age environments, differences in experience levels may lead to cognitive conflicts among young children. However, such conflicts can provide valuable learning opportunities for young children, as well as opportunities for experience sharing and cooperative inquiry. Therefore, the design and implementation of mixed-age regional play activities can provide useful opportunities to promote the holistic development of young children at cognitive, social, and emotional levels.

1.2 Mixed-age regional play activities for young children enhance their social nature and enrich their social emotions

The implementation of mixed-age education can enhance the positive emotional experience of young children effectively. Mixed-

age education is closer to the natural and real educational ecological environment.^[3] Mixed-age education provides a valuable platform for cultivating correct interpersonal attitudes and skills, including good social behaviours such as caring, sharing, taking turns, and humility, through interactions between children of different ages. This not only broadens young children's social contacts but also promotes the development of healthy personalities. Therefore research has shown that children in mixed-age regional play exhibit more pro-social behaviours compared to their peers of the same age in the classroom. Due to the differences in ability and experience levels of young children, the mixed-age ecological environment is more conducive to young children finding their own social roles, thus promoting the formation of rich social emotions.

1.3 Mixed-age regional play activities for young children provide diverse learning experiences

Children gain direct experience through observation and imitation in a mixed-age environment, which provides them with an authentic and natural place to learn. Children not only acquire information from their peers of the same age, but also gain more learning opportunities through interaction with peers. The mixed-age ecological environment offers children the chance to exchange experiences and explore cooperatively through peer interaction. This is due to the cognitive conflicts that arise from differences in experience levels. Interacting with children of different ages provides them with diverse learning experiences, which broadens their cognitive and social development.

2. Principles of mixed-age regional play activities for young children

2.1 Balance the holistic and individualized nature of young children

Mixed-age regional game activities have the characteristics of accommodating the dual requirements of comprehensive development and individual differences, as proposed by the teachers. This type of activity breaks through the limitations of class and age. Such teaching resources provide a wider and more authentic environment for young children. When organizing activities, teachers should pay attention to all children, as well as individual differences and the uniqueness of each child. Ensures that each child can achieve their distinctive development based on their original level during play.

2.2 Respect for the autonomy and independence of the young child

Respecting the autonomy of young children is an essential aspect of their individual character traits. Therefore, mixed-age regional play activities are based on the value of children's perspectives. The focus is on young children's diverse experiences, perceptions, and understanding of the world around them.^[4] Young children are independent individuals. However, it is important to note that respecting young children's autonomy doesn't mean simply letting them go. Rather, it requires teachers to observe, accompany, and guide them. Therefore, from the perspective of young children, teachers should provide equal play opportunities and encourage them to make their own choices.

2.3 Supporting the generative and integrative nature of play

Generativity and integrality are essential components of mixed-age regional games and are crucial for ensuring their success. In the daily lives of young children, they are exposed to information that is characterized by integrality and perceivability. Teachers should accurately understand the goals, contents, and methods of children's activities in mixed-age areas. This will enable them to combine the mixed-age area environments with children's individual characteristics, meeting their needs for diversified exploration. Furthermore, mixed-age play areas should offer a variety of tasks and activities to pique children's curiosity and interest. Teachers can create thematic games that are tailored to the developmental needs and experience levels of children of different ages. This ensures that children not only experience new challenges but also face them in mixed-age regional play activities.

3. The implementation strategy of mixed-age regional games for young children

Autonomy, differentiation, and generativity are key features of this activity for young children. When designing regional environments, it is important to consider both the promotion of children's subjective initiative in play and the differences in their physical and mental development levels.

3.1 Create a mixed-age environment and free regional play

The role of the environment as an educational resource for kindergartens is crucial. Proper spatial organization and density can help maintain children's emotional stability and positive mood^[5]. Therefore, to effectively support the development of mixed-age regional games for young children, teachers should create an autonomous and free play atmosphere. This aims to promote the coordinated development of mixed-age children's external hands-on manipulation and internal mental activities through effective interactions between children and the environment^[6].

Site planning in the garden should consider arranging classes of three age groups. It also simplifies teacher observation and

guidance, ensuring safe and orderly mixed-age games. Secondly, to enhance their participation, teachers can place community dollhouses, children's kingdoms, supermarkets, and other games that are suitable for young children in the corridors or activity rooms. Finally, teachers can create a harmonious and orderly atmosphere for the game by making clever use of music resources, such as Orff music. Skillful use of music can help teachers save energy and time, and better utilize the hidden educational value of music.

3.2 Providing hierarchical materials to meet the diversity of interaction

The key to improving the quality of regional games is to provide diversified play materials. Firstly, the selection of play materials should be targeted and consistent with the developmental level. Selecting materials within the developmental zone of young children is an important material basis for effective play. Mixed-age regional games require less structured materials, taking into account the different ages and developmental levels of children, teachers should use as many simple, realistic and functional materials as possible. Second, mixed-age regional games need to include a rich amount of materials to meet the needs of children's play, so as to increase interaction and communication among children, and expand the depth of the game. Third, kindergartens should provide diversified materials for mixed-age regional games to ensure that children have enough choices of games. Finally, teachers can make full use of the natural resources in the garden to carry out games. Therefore, teachers should use natural materials in mixed-age regional games to promote the coordinated development of young children's hands and brains.

3.3 Conducting educational evaluation to enhance the educational nature of the games

Teachers' evaluation should use behavioural observation as a basic tool and use the existing resources in the park to create relatively free mixed-age environments, fully explore the cognitive, behavioural and emotional continuity of young children's content, and create a multidimensional spatial field of vision to meet the needs of young children's own comprehensive and integrated development. Children's evaluation is mainly expressed in their self-recording. This approach can reflect the extent to which the mixed-age educational activities met the children's developmental needs, as well as the confusion the children felt and the help they expected to receive during the activities. Parents' evaluations mainly reflect their subjective feelings and perceptions of the mixed-age play activities. Finally, the teachers should synthesize the evaluation information from different areas.

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