Misunderstanding and Rational Regression of Interest-Oriented Classes for Preschool Children

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Key Words: preschool children; interest-oriented classes; children's center

Abstract: Interest-oriented classes are a series of training classes organized by educational institutions with the aim of developing and improving children's interests, which are beyond the reach of education activities in kindergartens. However, parents of preschool children actually have misunderstandings on interest-oriented classes. For the interest-oriented classes chosen by parents, the aims of classes focus on the interests of parents, the contents place emphasis on knowledge and technique training, the kinds of interest-oriented classes are too many and very complex, and these classes tend to education in advance. To realize the rational regression of Interest-Oriented Classes for Preschool Children, it's necessary for parents to treat interest development and the selection of interest-oriented classes rationally on the basis of children's need, and to weigh the types and of interest-oriented classes. Beyond that, it's necessary to regularize the management, and improve the philosophy and quality, of interest-oriented classes.

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the improvement of universal education consciousness and people's living standards, interest-oriented classes for preschool children present a popular trend. Under the guidance of educational ideas, such as "Hatching Dragons" and "prevent children from losing at the starting line", more and more parents sign up all kinds of interest-oriented classes in order to develop children's multifaceted hobbies and specialties to enhance social adaptiveness of children. How about the facts? A survey of China Education Daily pointed out that preschool children cannot afford the burden of interest-oriented classes[1]. What provokes us to think is whether taking interest-oriented classes is parents' interests or children's interests; whether interest-oriented classes stimulate the children's potential or put more emphasis on the mastering of knowledge and skills; and whether interest-oriented classes bring children fun or pressure. Therefore, this paper analyzed misunderstanding of parents of preschool children on interest-oriented classes from the intent of preschool children's interest-oriented classes, so as to seek a road of rational return for preschool children's interests-oriented classes.

2. Real intention of interest-oriented classes for preschool children

Interest-oriented classes are a series of training classes organized by educational institutions with the aim of developing and improving children's interests, which are beyond the reach of education activities in kindergartens [2]. The understanding and positioning of "interest" determine the actual nature of interest-oriented classes. "Interest is an psychological disposition of an individual to seek to know certain things or engage in certain activities. It's presented as an individual's selection attitude and positive emotional response for something or engaging in certain activities. As the basis of activity organization, "Interest" should be children's real needs and from the heart of themselves [3]. As parents pay more attention to early education, taking interest-oriented classes has become a very important option for preschool children education. Interest-oriented class for

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preschool children should be able to meet the interest needs of children and promote the health development in all aspects of children, such as intelligence, quality, emotional attitude and values, eventually promoting the development of children's potentiality.

Why interest-oriented classes should respect children's interests? In the very late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Francis Parker proposed "All education activities center on children." in *Talks on Pedagogics*, which integrates education activities (including subjects, courses and methods etc. of education) into an entirety around children. Parker repeatedly stressed "self-activity", believing that some spontaneous activities of infants indicate that they have started learning all the learned knowledge in the universe by the light of nature. "Infants are able to start learning because they cannot help themselves, whose nature is driving him[5]." Therefore, the core elements of classroom teaching are paying close attention to each student's mental state in order to determine the materials and conditions which should be provided immediately. Although Parker put forward this judgment under the specific background of discussing what shall be centered on during course organization, he promoted a continuous development of "child-centered" theory exploring personal growth of children, enabling people to realize that "loving, respecting and safeguarding the bodies and souls of growing children" is the most import thing in education. Parker made further efforts to enable people to realize the central position of children in education, highlighting the natural tendency and interest of children. *Guidelines on Learning and Development for Children Aged 3 to 6* has reaffirmed the core ideology in the *Guideline and Kindergarten Education Program Guidelines (for Trial Implementation)*, i.e., "children development based" and "enable the personality development of each child". This inspires us that we should follow the rules and characteristics of children's development, respect for individual differences of children's development, and focus on all-round and harmonious mind and body development of children in the education of preschool children. Thus, the real intention of interest-oriented classes for preschool children must be based on child development, respect for children's needs, and adapt to the characteristics of children's personality.

3. **Misunderstanding of interest-oriented classes for preschool children**

The real intention of interest-oriented classes is the respect for the interest need of children, fostering children's multi-aspect abilities, promoting children's development in an all-round way morally intellectually and physically and motivating the development of children's potentials according to children's personality characteristics. However, interest-oriented classes for preschool children has missed the origin goal of education and lost required functions in realistic education, transforming into the burden and pressure of preschool children. This transformation originated from adults' misunderstanding of interest-oriented classes for preschool children.

3.1 **Interest-oriented classes for parents' interest—misunderstanding on objective dimension**

Interest-oriented classes for parents' interest are classes selected by parents in accordance with their own interest or practicality principle, who believe the classes they selected are good for children. For example, parents are interested in playing the piano, but they have no chance to play the piano or miss the chance to learn to play the piano for some reason. They pin their hopes on their children without considering children's will, always requiring their children to learn piano. Otherwise, parents believe that their children may master a professional skill good for their future development after taking interest-oriented classes in music, art and so on. Therefore, these parents select interest-oriented classes with strong practicality for their children. A survey on a kindergarten in Lanzhou City by Gao Jin found that eighty percent of kids participate in interest-oriented classes interested by their parents. What interest-oriented classes the kids take and what content they learn are arranged by their parents. The kids rarely involve in selection, they almost have no options of their own [6]. The motivation of interest-oriented classes for parents' interest is good. But the purposes of these interest-oriented classes are deviated from children's center of interest so many times. These classes dissimilate that they center on parents' requirements and impose parents' will.
on children and rarely pay attention to children's own desires and needs. During the reinforcement learning under the requirement of "what your parents do is all good for you", children cannot generate real interest at all, or children cannot enjoy any fun as these interest-oriented classes are very boring. Children feel painful to learn under the pressure from parental expectations. They often have feelings like boredom and helpless. It is obvious that once the children taking interest-oriented classes for parents' interest are unable to experience real interests. These classes become emotional tortures for them.

3.2 Interest-oriented classes for knowledge and skills -- misunderstanding on content dimension

Interest-oriented classes for knowledge and skills focus on imparting knowledge and skills to children in order to make preparations on knowledge for children to enter a higher school. For example, kindergarten-primary school connecting classes focusing on learning pinyin, English letters and simple arithmetic operations, and all kinds of Mathematical Olympiad training. These classes are aimed to enable children to adapt the study in primary school better and have a good performance. Interest-oriented classes for skills such as painting classes and sports classes are designed to enable children finish homework of arts and physical education curriculum in primary school better and get awarded marks of specialized options in junior high school entrance examination. Relevant survey shows that more than 80% of children in Beijing, Shanghai and other cities are busy "learning artistic skills", 87% of which started learning artistic skills before the age of 5[7]. Cheng Xiulan pointed out in the Study of Contemporary Nature of Preschool Education that most current courses of interest-oriented classes are those with the value orientation of various primary school curriculum[8]. There is a wide variety of interest-oriented classes. But, course contents essentially originate from traditional art disciplines (such as instrumental music, painting and dancing) or teaching subjects in primary school (such as mathematics, pinyin and reading). The aim of interest-oriented classes for knowledge and skills is to enable children to adapt the study in primary school better. However, it dissimilates that the purpose of children to take interest-oriented classes is to get good grades. The internal motivation of children to learn is getting lower slowly. If the acquirement of knowledge and skills inside the classroom is constantly expanded under the requirement of "all for grade improvement", the academic burden of children will be aggravated. The interest developed by interest-oriented classes, which are simple and boring repetition of knowledge and skills, is not children's actual interest. These classes not only holds-up a lot of extra-curricular time for children, but also lowers the learning motivation of children, bringing physical and mental stress to children and making children feel that learning is very hard and tiring.

3.3 Interest-oriented classes with too many varieties -- misunderstanding on variety dimension

Interest-oriented classes with too many varieties are various classes that parents select for their children blindly without considering the benefits or other things children can get through interest-oriented classes. The selection of these interest-oriented classes is caused by parents' vanity and group psychology. It is a comparing mentality of many parents, who see that others' children have taken interest-oriented classes, and think that if their children do not take interest-oriented classes, the gap between their children and others' children will be larger, and they will lose faces. They select so many classes to ensure the variety of interest-oriented classes their children taken is no less than other children without considering children's practical situation. A survey by China Education Daily pointed out that more than 60% of preschool children take more than one interest-oriented classes, 70% of which take classes for 1 to 2 times each week, and 30% of which take classes for 3 times. The guiding ideology of interest-oriented classes with too many varieties is conformity, i.e. "it is better to learn than not to learn". However, children are actually too busy to deal with various interest-oriented classes and lose free activity time of their own. If children blindly take various interest-oriented classes not interested in under the guidance of erroneous thought "the more, the better", they may suffer all kinds of pressures and struggle to cope with
classes. They cannot find their own interest. This may lead to children's dread feeling on interest-oriented classes and learning-weariness, which may result in primary school phobia that children are unwilling to receive primary education and sit in the classroom.

3.4 Interest-oriented classes for head start

For interest-oriented classes for head start, children are forced to take various interest-oriented classes that are beyond their level of physical and mental development when they are unfit for learning some hobbies. For example, let children at the age of 2 - 3 learn roller skating to improve children's body balance capacity, or let children at the age of 3 - 4 to improve children's body flexibility. In fact, taking those interest-oriented classes is of little benefit for younger children, but may bring harm to children's body. Because those interest-oriented classes are entirely contrary to the mental and physical development of children, and actually "spoil things by excessive enthusiasm". Lev Vygotsky, an educationist from the Soviet Union, pointed out that "Everyone knows that if we feed an infant like feeding a child at the age of 7, the influence playing a good role for 7-year-old child may have contrary effect on children at another age." Jean Paul Piaget, a famous child psychologist, also pointed out that stretching children beyond their natural level artificially is akin to training animals to perform acrobatics in a circus troupe, which has no benefit for children's normal development and may result in a retardation in long-run development. The idea of interest-oriented classes believes that the earlier the interest is developed, the better children are. They are misled by the wrong view "don't let your children fall behind at the starting line". Parents haven't understood the education of children must rely on children's physical and psychological maturity level. Physiological process is a process of natural maturity. Children's education shall be carried out according to their level of natural maturity and actual receptivity, and their individual differences shall be taken into full consideration. The education in advance of maturity schedule is meaningless and inefficient. If the learning requirement for children is beyond the corresponding physical development level, the learning efficiency is much lower.

4. Rational regression of Interest-Oriented Classes for Preschool Children

For parents' misunderstanding on interest-oriented classes for preschool children and the educational ideas and quality of class running of all kinds of interest-oriented classes today, on one hand, the original functions and effects of interest-oriented classes haven't been exercised; on the other hand, children are suffered harmful effect because of losing game time and childhood. At the same time, people's understanding of interest-oriented classes polarizes into two positions: either let their children take various interest-oriented classes to develop in an all-around way, or believe interest-oriented classes have little benefit for children and let children take no class. Based on this, the rational regression of Interest-Oriented Classes for Preschool Children is analyzed from the following aspects.

4.1 Respect for the needs of children, and treat the development of interest and selection of interest-oriented classes rationally

Vasyl Sukhomlynsky once said: "Only if children have 5-7 hours of free time to use according to their own wishes every day, they can become a clever and full-developed person. It's just an empty word to talk about development in an all-around way and emphasize cultivating hobbies and innate capacities without considering children's free time\[11]\." It is obvious that we should respect for the needs of children, and treat the development of interest and selection of interest-oriented classes rationally. To some extent, development of interest and selection of interest-oriented classes supplement each other. The aim of selecting interest-oriented classes is to discover and develop children's interests in one aspect. It's helpful for parents to choose interest-oriented classes suitable for children if they lay emphasis on interest development of their children in family education.

Firstly, to treat the development of interest and selection of interest-oriented classes rationally, it's necessary to realize that developing preschool children's interests cannot be accomplished in an
action, which is affected by multiple factors such as the cognitive development of preschool children, the concept of family education and the emotion relationship between family members and children. Therefore, the development of preschool children's interests is a long-term process. During this process, parents shall try to select a few interest-oriented classes according to children's cognitive development firstly with main purposes for children to feel and experience and help them find their real interest. Then, parents can select suitable interest-oriented classes to develop children's interests in some way furtherly in accordance with children's true feelings and indicators of interest. Secondly, the effect of interest-oriented classes cannot be exaggerated, and the development of preschool children's interests cannot rely entirely on interest-oriented classes. Interest-oriented classes play a certain role in the transformation of children from widespread interest to center interest and the stabilization and sustainability of children's center interest. Interest-oriented class is just an approach to develop children's interests. For example, interest-oriented classes on arts are beneficial for children's artistic sentiment, intellectual development, imagination and creativity. In fact, the more important factor that interest-oriented class can really stimulate and develop children's long-term interest is the integrated development of children's self-quality. "Children's own instincts and ability provide material for all education and indicate the starting point." Thirdly, it's necessary to recognize that family and parents are also the influence factors to develop and simulate children's interests. Children's initial interest is emerged in family life. Parents are children's first teachers of growth, and the formation and development of children's interests is certainly affected by family members. Parents' influence of correct education concepts and education behaviors promotes a wide, stable and positive development of children's interests. Active interaction and communication among family members and children contributes to emotional communication and help family members, especially parents, understand children's interests and development. In addition, parents are necessary to create conditions to stimulate children's interests. Parents should provide an environment rich in material and spirit and create an atmosphere conducive to children's active discovery and exploration through a variety of ways and forms as far as possible, in order to guide children to learn to appreciate music, art and literature works and really enable children to feel the beauty and create the beauty in life so as to influence children's sentiment. In free time, parents should arrange traveling and visiting activities to bring children into zoos, museums and science museums to help children get rich experiences. In family lives, parents shall promote the development of children's interests through activities to broaden children's horizons and expand children's content of socialization. In conclusion, parents shall treat the development of interest and selection of interest-oriented classes rationaly on the basis of respect for children's need. They shall especially realize that they cannot impose their own aspirations on children and inappropriate educational attitudes and methods will nip children's interests in the bud.

4.2 Weigh the variety and quantity of interest-oriented classes according to children's physical and mental characteristics and personality differences

In Emile, Rousseau said, "Every age, every station in life, has a perfection, a ripeness, of its own." "Mankind has its place in the sequence of things; childhood has its place in the sequence of human life; the man must be treated as a man and the child as a child." It's obvious that the trade-off of what and how many interest-oriented classes to take should be based on preschool children's characteristics of physical and mental development and personality difference. Firstly, the quantity of classes is neither the standard measuring the number of children's interests nor parents' something to boast about. Therefore, the quantity of classes is not more is better. How many classes preschool children should take depends on the development of children's real interest and characteristics of physiological and mental. For example, when children's real interests haven't been discovered, parents may take children to visit and experience a few kinds of interest-oriented classes according to children's practical situation and interest preference. Then, parents can select 1 to 2 interest-oriented classes in which children have fun based on children's on-site experience and
personality characteristics. These interest-oriented classes are not always for the interest children want to develop because children's interests are changing during growing process. So, how many interest-oriented classes is not the problem to confirm and worth entanglement. Secondly, interest-oriented classes selected are not restricted to interest-oriented classes for knowledge and skills or interest-oriented classes for the adaptation of primary education. Interest-oriented classes shall break away from education activities in kindergartens and primary schools. They are not classes extended from classroom teaching in schools, but institutions for stimulation and training of children's real interests and needs. So, choosing the type of interest-oriented classes should take into account children's personality. For example, some children who are inborn active and like to move back and forth may select operational classes such as handwork classes and scientific experiment classes; some children who love sports and have good physical coordination may select exercise classes such as swimming classes and roller skating classes; some children who have good ability of feeling colors may select art classes. Parents' respect for children's personality will help the development of children's interests and potentials. Thirdly, when to start taking interest-oriented classes is a question related to what and how many interest-oriented classes. Taking interest-oriented classes is not sooner rather than later. The time to start taking interest-oriented classes shall be considered to respect for children's characteristics of physical and psychological development. In short, parents should decide when to take one or more interest-oriented classes with what content based on the children's own characteristics. They cannot violate law of physical and mental development. They shall realize that the practice violating law will eventually bring harm to children.

4.3 Regularize the management, and improve the philosophy and quality, of interest-oriented classes

The survey of China Education and Science Research Institute shows that 87% of parents endorse children to participate in interest-oriented classes, of which the proportion of children in top classes, middle classes and bottom class of kindergarten taking interest-oriented classes are respectively 76%, 61.3% and 46.4%. It is obvious that interest-oriented class is a well-recognized approach for developing children's interests by parents. Therefore, the philosophy and quality of interest-oriented classes are particularly important for the development of children's interests. Firstly, the philosophy of interest-oriented classes in society shall take the development of children's interests as a starting point, and shall not regard taking more interests as their main purpose. Interest-oriented classes around knowledge and art shall not be established constantly for catering for parents' requirements on children's achievements. Children will spend too much spare time on these interest-oriented classes not interested in, which is a cruel thing for children. We should borrow from the experiences of foreign countries to establish various types of interest-oriented classes that not only attach importance to the development of intelligence and artistic ability, but also develop children's emotional intelligence and actual operation ability. Sina Education Channel has introduced some unique interest-oriented classes in USA, such as leader training class, referee training class, food class, auto racing class and child-animal training, which are worth learning. Second, interest-oriented classes shall not value theory learning over practice activity, and shall not value knowledge infusion over game activities. The Guidelines on Learning and Development for Children Aged 3 to 6 has such educational suggestions as "children's beneficial direct experience and perceptual knowledge accumulated during getting in touch with things and phenomena in nature and life shall be supported. For example, parents may let children perceive the diversity and uniqueness of living things and the process of growth, development, reproduction and death through outdoor activities, visit and inspect and activities of planting and feeding; provide rich materials and appropriate tools for children to support them to explore and feel the characteristics of common substances and materials and structural features of objects. Chen Heqin said, "the direct use of games is only for pleasure, but the indirect use is very large, because it can develop children's body and mind, nimble children's feelings, having benefits for children's lives." Interest-oriented
classes benefit for children shall be those emphasizing on practice and teaching through lively activities. Thirdly, the quality of interest-oriented classes varies greatly. The teachers' abilities and conditions for conducting classes of some interest-oriented classes may not reach the standard. Parents do not quite understand that, and select unqualified classes blindly for children under a flourish of trumpets from the responsible persons of interest-oriented classes about their quality of interest-oriented classes. Therefore, relevant departments shall standardize the management of interest-oriented classes and assess the ideas, conditions, conducting courses and qualified teachers of interest-oriented classes. Only the eligible interest-oriented classes are allowed to do business. In sum, the enhancement of management and supervision and the improvement of the philosophy and quality of interest-oriented classes have great benefit for the development of children's interests and the motivation of their enthusiasm for study.

Vasyl Sukhomlynsky stated that, "our childhood is the most important period of our life, which is not a preparative period for our future life, but actually a bright, unique and non-reproducible life period." We should allow children to enjoy their childhood, rather than forcing them to sacrifice this life period to their parents and their own "uncertain" future. Therefore, parents shall select interest-oriented classes for their children rationally.

Acknowledgment
Project supported by MoE Humanities & Social Sciences Foundation for Youth (17YJC880044).

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