

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

**DEWEY'S PROPOSED TEACHING METHODOLOGY IN THE  
CONTEXT OF ECE**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This article explores the teaching methods proposed by Dewey in the context of early childhood education (ECE), focusing on their impact on teacher assessment and evaluation. The study also examines challenges such as balancing structured evaluations with the dynamic and flexible nature of Dewey's pedagogy, and suggests strategies to support teachers in implementing and reflecting on this approach effectively.*

**Keywords:** *child-centered pedagogy, Dewey teaching methodology, Early Childhood Education, teacher assessment.*

**INTRODUCTION**

John Dewey was a famous American educator who paid great attention to the nature of children's learning. He believed that the essence of education is growth. Traditional education ignores the nature of students, does not take into account their needs and interests, and treats them negatively. "Dewey believed that children must be taught to understand social issues sensibly and not be required to face social problems prematurely, unlike college students or adults" (Ye & Shih, 2021). The role of education is to promote the corresponding development of students' instincts. Before children learn, educators need to change the learning environment so that the social and school atmosphere is more conducive to students' independent exploration and learning. The place of learning is not necessarily the classroom, and activities can be held outdoors as much as possible to combine students' practical activities with theoretical knowledge.

In the context of ECE, Dewey's educational thinking abandons the "old three-center theory" of traditional educational thinking, which is "teacher-

centered," "textbook-centered," and "classroom-centered," and switches to the "new three-center theory" of "child-centered," "activity-centered," and "experiment-centered." In other words, kindergartens should establish a student-centered teaching perspective, and the identity of teachers should also be switched from "central" to "guide" or "helper" when children are learning, guiding students to learn actively and thus cultivating their ability to analyze and solve problems. This means that the teacher's curriculum uses teaching materials to reduce the learning method of knowledge transmission, but instead needs to develop teaching content that suits the progress of each student based on their differences, so that each student can fully engage in thinking during the learning process, thereby achieving success and progress in their studies and allowing students to experience the joy of learning.

**METHOD***Research Design*

This study used an experimental qualitative interview method. The researcher conducted

individual interviews with two kindergarten teachers to understand their understanding and evaluation of the Dewey teaching method based on their teaching experience.

### *Participants*

The participants are two kindergartens from Xingcheng, Liaoning Province: Liu Chang, 26 years old, has five years of teaching experience. And Gu Wei, 31 years old, has 11 years of teaching experience. They come from different kindergartens and have given their consent before the content of the interview was released.

### *Measurement*

The study used qualitative interview data as its main measurement tool. The content of the interviews focused on the participants' views and evaluations of the Dewey teaching method, with a particular emphasis on their teaching experience and the challenges they faced when implementing the method.

## **RESULTS**

According to Casey and Kunzast (2020), the authors both affirm Dewey's teaching philosophy and raise some concerns. They affirm Dewey's approach of encouraging children to solve problems independently and achieve self-directed learning through cooperation and experimentation. They believe that this approach to self-directed learning can improve children's thinking and social skills. However, the authors also point out that allowing children to take full control of the learning process in complete accordance with Dewey's learning theory will make the role of the teacher less prominent. They argue that in the current teaching environment, teachers should still be the main body of teaching and create an environment suitable for students to learn independently. Dewey's "student-centered"

teaching methods should be adjusted according to the individual characteristics of children and the teaching theme.

In Simpson and Jackson's (2021) book on Dewey's teaching ideas, the authors also point out that Dewey's teaching ideas need to be reformed. They believe that Dewey's educational ideas were proposed in a specific social context at that time: the economic crisis at the time made the education model very mechanical and isolated. Dewey's idea was to

integrate education into the social system to achieve a more comprehensive quality education. However, current educational methods are already richer than those at the time, which makes some of Dewey's educational methods no longer applicable in today's classrooms due to differences in educational backgrounds. The authors point out that Dewey's educational ideas are desirable, such as exploring the nature of education and cultivating students' ability to learn independently. However, in order to adapt to current teaching needs, timely improvements should be made.

However, some researchers believe that Dewey's educational ideas are very much in line with the requirements of today's society and do not need to be reformed. For example, Dewey believes that it is very important to cultivate children's critical thinking skills, because critical thinking can help children to more fully understand the key points of an issue and come up with effective solutions. Due to the age characteristics of children, they may initially lack the ability to solve problems and be unable to view issues more comprehensively. To ensure that children develop critical thinking, they should be given the opportunity to practice it in their daily lives and develop the ability to think independently. As O'Reilly et al. (2022) point out, it is very important to cultivate children's critical thinking in their early years. Dewey's educational thinking puts forward the importance of critical thinking and makes cultivating children's critical thinking a classroom goal, which is consistent with the requirements of the 21st century for children.

## DISCUSSION

According to interviews with teachers, the Dewey approach is not widely used in Chinese kindergartens. Moreover, many teachers do not have a thorough understanding of the Dewey approach. One reason for this is that the Dewey approach is difficult to implement in practice because it is very idealistic. For example, when teachers encounter children who have learning difficulties or are grumpy, how should they guide these children's interest in learning? Because the Dewey approach is difficult to implement, it is not a teaching method that teachers are willing to choose in the classroom. As Nohl (2024) points out, Dewey's pedagogical ideas are based on the ideal premise that children are willing to learn, and the goal of life and curriculum meeting the needs of each child is difficult to achieve.

I believe Dewey's educational philosophy places too much emphasis on the subjectivity of children and the environment, and ignores the importance of the teacher. In fact, a good teacher-student relationship is conducive to learning activities. We must admit that Dewey's pedagogical concept is no longer applicable in today's teaching environment, and we need to purposefully inherit his core ideas. However, we cannot deny the important role of Dewey's teaching methods in modern teaching methods. "I would say that Dewey's understanding of the learning process and the relationship between its three parts helps to highlight how the learning experience is shaped by the interaction between contextual factors and human behavior." (Holdo, 2022)

## CONCLUSION

Although some people think Dewey's idea of developing new teaching materials based on the principles of quick indirect experience and internalization of teaching materials is too idealistic and difficult to achieve, this does not

prevent Dewey's educational thinking from being of great reference significance. I believe that Dewey's curriculum theory reflects the characteristics of students' interests, needs and free personalities. It enables students to acquire experiential knowledge and gives rise to activity-based curricula. It achieves a close connection between education and life, school and society.

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## DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

LI HANFEI does not work for, consult, hold shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this manuscript, and has not disclosed any affiliations other than those stated above.

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