



Analysis of Differences of the Death Education in China and the United States

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Abstract. The paper commences by examining the current situation of death education in China and the United States. In China, the author selects three places as examples: Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. On the other hand, the paper chooses death education of American and figures out the origin of Death Education. Through the comparison between the death education system of China and USA, the paper emphasizes the significance of improving of the education system, developing scientific understanding of death education and enhancing the social support. Death education is a crucial component of comprehensive education. It can alleviate the fear and social disapproval associated with death by equipping individuals with information and tools related to the subject. Plus, this can ultimately result in a more candid and robust discourse on mortality in society, promoting increased tolerance and comprehension of the unavoidable. Therefore, integrating death education into various educational contexts can help individuals develop greater emotional resilience and a more profound understanding of the human experience.

Keywords: Death education, Comparison between China and America, Analysis of Current Situation.

1 Introduction

Death education is an educational approach that imparts knowledge about death to individuals, fostering and improving their capacity to manage and navigate death-related experiences. It also aids in the development of rational and accurate perspectives on the concepts of life and death.

Death education has its roots in the mid-20th century and emerged as a response to the lack of formal education and support for individuals dealing with death and grieving. Regardless of the advancements in modern medicine, mortality remains an inevitable reality for human beings. Some industrialized nations, such as the United Kingdom, Japan, Korea, and others, promptly adopted the United States' pioneering implementation of death education. This resulted in the development of a more sophisticated and organized death teaching model in Taiwan and Hong Kong, which we can also learn from. Death education in mainland China is currently in its first phase of investigation and lacks a comprehensive and developed educational framework.

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Therefore, it is crucial to implement death education throughout our society, based on the principle of respecting life.

2 Current Situation of Death Education in China

2.1 Current Situation of Death Education in Hong Kong, China

In the early 1980s, Hong Kong, China, was already implementing death education activities, such as hospice programs and grief counseling, influenced by similar initiatives in other countries. Scholars in Hong Kong actively promoted and educated the public about death, encouraging positive discussions and conducting surveys on attitudes towards death. Their aim was to foster a positive outlook on life, emphasize the value of life, and strive for a better quality of death.^[1] Furthermore, many tertiary institutions in Hong Kong include death education and training in their curricula. Humanities programs often integrate this education, which primarily focuses on topics related to death and the quality of life. Typically, general education incorporates these programs.^[2] A few years ago, the Chinese University of Hong Kong introduced a general education course on death and immortality led by Dr. Tao Kwok-cheung, has since expanded to include off-campus community philosophy courses. Lingnan University has also launched a similar course, further advancing the spread of death education beyond students and into the wider community. This comprehensive and multi-faceted approach is contributing to the overall development of death education in Hong Kong.

2.2 Current Situation of Death Education in Taiwan, China

Following the introduction of the concept of death education in Taiwan, a life education system was developed that has death education as its central focus while also integrating the unique aspects of the local traditional culture. The implementation of the death education system in Taiwan initially focused on medical schools, specifically addressing end-of-life care and life-and-death-related matters. Over time, this system was extended to non-medical schools across the country. The curriculum primarily emphasizes three key aspects such as “promoting students’ mental health development,” “facilitating students’ scientific understanding and management of death,” and “clarifying the significance of individual life.” These components aim to equip students with the necessary skills to confront and navigate life’s challenges and hardships more effectively. The main focus of the program is to enhance students’ mental well-being, provide scientific understanding and coping strategies for death, and emphasize the importance of individual life. These aspects aim to equip students with the ability to effectively face and overcome challenges and difficulties in life.

Currently, there are 41 schools in Taiwan, such as Tunghai University, Yuan Ze University, and Fu Jen University, that provide a range of courses on life and death education. These courses cover topics such as “Death Problems,” “Sociology of Death,” and “Psychology of Death.” The creation of an autonomous department of life and death studies at Taiwan’s Nanhua University has played a significant role in

advancing the field of death education. This department provides teaching, training, and research opportunities at both the bachelor's and master's levels. [3]

2.3 Current Situation of Death Education in Mainland China

Unlike Hong Kong and Taiwan, China's interior areas initiated the implementation of death education later, faced more opposition, and progressed at a slower pace. In the late 1980s, mainland Chinese researchers translated and published works on death education from foreign nations. This drew the attention of mainland Chinese academics to this emerging educational concept and practice, marking the inception of death education in China. Traditional Confucianism in China holds the belief of "valuing living while despising death" as its understanding and attitude towards death. This cultural concept has had a significant impact on the Chinese population, leading to the general perception of death as a taboo. [4]

As a result, there is a shortage of articles on death education, as well as a lack of organization and consistency. Reports on the teaching and study of death education in schools are scarce, and the implementation of death education is nearly stagnant. In 2020, there will be a notable increase in suicides, violent injuries, and other harmful incidents among college students and teenagers in mainland China. This has brought attention to the public's lack of understanding of life's purpose, apathy towards life, and various social issues. Consequently, many researchers have recognized the growing significance of death education in China. Researchers are becoming more aware of the lack of death and life-related education at colleges and universities, which is a weakness in the field of ideological and political education. As a result, there is a growing focus on death education.

Simultaneously, there has been a growing demand for college students to possess a comprehensive understanding of death and the knowledge and skills related to death care. This has led to an increase in research and exploration in academic journals regarding the content, objectives, and teaching methods of death education. [5] Furthermore, some scholars have proposed the integration of death education as a life-long learning process and advocated for its promotion by all individuals. [6] Nevertheless, the field of death education in Mainland China is still in its early stages and lacks sufficient theoretical research and practical implementation. This calls for further investigation and exploration by researchers.

3 Current Situation of Death Education in the United States

The United States is widely acknowledged as the leading country in the field of death education, having built and promoted it in a thorough and well-structured manner. This accomplishment has been achieved through a comprehensive educational system that includes primary, secondary, and university levels of education. Death education originated from the examination of necrology in the early 1900s. The formal acknowledgment and advancement of it occurred in the United States throughout the mid-to-late 20th century. [7]

Currently, colleges and institutions in the United States provide a diverse selection of courses that specifically focus on death education. Based on an ongoing investigation done between 1975 and 2005, there has been a notable rise in the frequency of lectures and short courses focused on death instruction. There has been a significant increase in the proportion of institutions that provide separate courses on death education. Moreover, there has been a rise in the proportion of students who are enrolling in educational institutions that provide courses on death education throughout the same period. It states that in 2005, a significant majority of pupils, precisely 96 percent, got instruction in schools that specialize in death education. Furthermore, almost every medical school in the United States provides curricula pertaining to death instruction. [8] Furthermore, primary and secondary schools in the United States have actively promoted the inclusion of death education.

4 The Significance of Developing Death Education in China

Death education in China is an area that is gaining attention and development. Its significance lies in helping people face death head-on, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the value and meaning of life.

4.1 Improving the Comprehensiveness and Standardization of the Education System

China's education system is gradually introducing death education, with some universities offering related courses, which positively contributes to the comprehensive development of students. This initiative aims to help students better understand and cope with death, ultimately preparing them for the inevitable losses they may face in life. By addressing this taboo topic, students can develop emotional intelligence and resilience, leading to improved mental health outcomes. Additionally, death education can also help students appreciate life more fully and foster a greater sense of empathy towards others who may be experiencing loss. Overall, integrating death education into the curriculum can better equip students to navigate the complexities of grief and bereavement in a healthy and constructive manner.

4.2 Developing the Scientific Understanding of Death

Death education can help people, especially children, form a scientific understanding of death, avoiding misconceptions or fears due to a lack of proper guidance. Death education can help people, especially children, form a scientific understanding of death, avoiding misconceptions or fears due to a lack of proper guidance. By providing accurate information about the biological, psychological, and social aspects of death, death education can promote healthy coping mechanisms and reduce anxiety surrounding the topic. It can also encourage open conversations about death and dying, leading to a more informed and accepting society. Through death education, individuals can learn to appreciate life more fully and understand the natural process of

death as a part of life. By normalizing discussions about death, people can develop a greater sense of empathy and compassion towards others experiencing loss.

4.3 Establishing Strong Social Support

Through education, a social support system for the dying and their families can be established, providing better hospice care services. This can lead to improved quality of life for those facing end-of-life issues, as well as increased emotional and psychological support for their loved ones. Additionally, education can help reduce stigma surrounding death and dying, promoting open conversations and acceptance within communities. This can ultimately lead to a more compassionate and understanding society that values end-of-life care and respects the journey of those nearing the end of their lives. Education can empower individuals to make informed decisions about their own end-of-life care preferences, ensuring that their wishes are respected and honored.

4.4 Meeting Real-World Needs

Given the progress of society and the increasing number of elderly individuals, death education plays a crucial role in improving the general public's capacity to deal with death. In addition, it offers techniques for managing grief and bereavement, which is crucial for preserving mental well-being in a society that is growing older and where individuals may encounter several instances of loss. By encouraging proactive preparation, death education can mitigate the financial strain on families and healthcare systems caused by unforeseen expenses related to end-of-life care.

4.5 Breaking Cultural Taboos

Death has traditionally been considered a sensitive and forbidden topic in Chinese society. Nevertheless, death education serves to dismantle this societal taboo and foster transparent and beneficial dialogues. Furthermore, it promotes candid discussions regarding mortality and the process of dying, facilitating families and people to communicate their desires and choices for care during their latter stages of life. Death education empowers individuals by providing them with knowledge about their rights and options, enabling them to make well-informed decisions on their care, such as advance directives and palliative care.

5 Conclusion

Through a comparative analysis of death education in China and the United States, it becomes evident that there is significant potential for improvement in this area inside our country. Aligned with our cultural and social context, the progressive implementation and advocacy of scientific, systematic death education can assist students in acquiring a proper comprehension of death, cultivating a rational mindset and psycho-

logical adaptability towards the end of life, and enabling them to develop a more comprehensive understanding of life. Consequently, they will learn to appreciate every phase of life.

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