

# Tao Xingzhi's Thought on Children's Labor Education\*

Huang Shiyu, Xiao Jumei  
Huzhou Normal University, Zhejiang, China

Tao Xingzhi's thought of children's labor education contains rich connotations, that is, to practice labor education in life practice, to realize labor education in "hand and brain growth," and to strengthen labor education in acquiring true knowledge. Through labor education, we can not only enhance children's moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and other ideological qualities, but also give enlightenment to the development of children's labor education today: bring labor into the curriculum system, carry out extracurricular labor practice activities, and strengthen family labor education.

*Keyword:* Tao Xingzhi, children's labor education, hand and brain grow together

## Introduction

Tao Xingzhi is a great educator and thinker of the Chinese people. His thought of children's labor education runs through all aspects of life education and educational practice and becomes an important part of life education theory. Facing the educational background of promoting children's all-round development and "Five Education Integration," labor education cannot be ignored in children's education system, and plays an increasingly important role in children's physical and mental development. Therefore, it is of great significance to deepen the influence of labor education on morality, intelligence, physique, and beauty, and to promote the further development of children's labor education activities.

## The Connotation of Tao Xingzhi's Thoughts on Children's Labor Education

### Practice Labor Education in Life Practice

Tao Xingzhi put forward that "What kind of life you live, what kind of education you receive; and the life of labor, that is, the education of labor" (Tao, 2008). Labor is the magic weapon of human survival, social life depends on labor. Labor education will also be rooted in life. Marx said, "All social life is practical in nature" (Selected works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin of the CPC Central Committee, 2012). Labor life is practical and labor education based on labor life should also be practical. What is limited to books and speech teaching is not really labor education. It can be seen that labor education should be based on life practice, and labor education divorced from life is "no work" and "no gain."

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Huang Shiyu, undergraduate, School of Teacher Education, Huzhou Normal University.

Xiao Jumei, Dr., associate professor, Teacher Education College, Huzhou Normal University.

### **Realize Labor Education in the Process of “Hand and Brain Grow Together”**

In the process of educational reform, Tao Xingzhi found that “There are two kinds of diseases in China, one is ‘soft hand and soft foot disease,’ and the other is ‘stupid head and brain disease’” (Tao, 2008). Scholars will only study hard, just want not to do. Workers and farmers will only do it with rough hand and rough feet, just do not want to do. Thus, he advocated the realization of “hand and brain grow together” in education and the best way to connect hands and brain is to do it by hand. In Tao Xingzhi's school, male students carry water for cooking and female students pour toilet. Through these labors, they are willing to take out their hands first, and then think about how to do it in the process of doing it, and then gradually realize that the mind helps the hand to create, and the hand helps the mind to think.

### **Strengthen Labor Education in Acquiring True Knowledge**

Tao Xingzhi's thought is just like his name, which emphasizes that “action is the beginning of knowledge” and “action is knowledge,” which relies on practice to obtain true knowledge. To engage in labor is undoubtedly personal practice, to find problems in labor, to find solutions, to form a theory that is to obtain intimate knowledge, and finally to use theory to guide other actions in the future. This is the relationship between practice, knowledge and practice, and the goal of labor education. The article “Action is the Beginning of Knowledge” mentions: “We give a speech on the principle of eight hours’ work to a group of young people who have no working experience in a machine factory. It is just like a wind in the wind” (Tao, 1985). In the same way, in the process of education, it is better to guide children to experience labor in person. In the relationship of “action knowledge,” the “action” is the first, and in the labor education of children, labor practice is the key.

## **The Value of Tao Xingzhi's Thoughts on Children's Labor Education**

### **Set up Morality Through Labor**

The difference between labor education and traditional education is that it should teach people how to behave. Under the influence of traditional labor concepts, such as “those who labour with minds govern others, those who labour with physical strength are governed by others,” children will mistakenly think that only those who labour with minds can become masters of human beings. Therefore, through labor education, children can experience the hard work and hard won fruits of labor in practice, and enjoy the sense of achievement brought by labor, guide them to respect and love labor, and then help them to establish correct labor values. Tao Xingzhi attached great importance to real life and regarded it as the whole of life. Through doing down-to-earth work in the process of labor, children can understand that life needs to be based on the actual life, cannot be ambitious. In life, people need to cooperate with each other. Collective labor can improve children's ability of cooperation, cultivate empathy and “collectivism” consciousness, and guide children to be willing to contribute to others and society.

### **Gain Wisdom Through Labor**

“Labor on labor” emphasizes the combination of physical labor and mental labor, that is, thinking while doing. Under the traditional education, most of the children are immersed in reading. The separation of “teaching” and “doing” makes the knowledge unable to be applied to practice. On the contrary, in labor education, on the one hand, children can learn a lot of common knowledge and skills of labor that cannot be learned in textbooks, make up for the lack of “four bodies are not diligent, every grain is not divided,” so as to

promote the brain to think better. On the other hand, they will also face many practical difficulties and need to find different solutions. To a certain extent, they have trained their logical thinking ability. This is to help the mind cultivate innovative thinking. At the same time, the new ideas generated in the mind are put into practice, which is the creative ability of the brain helper. Only the organic combination of the two can realize the mutual growth of hand and brain. Children's interests and talents can be explored through labor by observing what they are more willing to do and are good at. Only when children can comprehensively examine their own interests and potentials can they grow their wisdom in the most suitable way.

### **Strengthen the Body With Labor**

"From primary school to university, after 16 years of education, one is equivalent to a smoker who smokes opium; one cannot pick one's shoulders, one cannot lift his hands, his face is yellow and emaciated, and he is very weak" (Tao, 2008). Tao Xingzhi's words are the most true portrayal of the process of children's growth and education. In the context of exam oriented education, children take high marks in exams as their own responsibility, almost losing the opportunity of outdoor activities, and their physical fitness is also gradually declining. In addition, with the continuous improvement of living standards, children grow up in the greenhouse with warm winter and cool summer. As time goes by, their bodies will lack the most basic ability to adapt to the natural environment. However, labor can give children the opportunity to go outdoors and get close to nature. Lead children to work in the rural fields, in the sowing and transplanting, water carrying and fertilization activities, sweat, and exercise, in the "face the loess back to the sky" environment to promote the improvement of body functions and then improve the whole person's spirit.

### **Educate Beauty Through Labor**

In the cognition of many children, labor is to do some dirty and tired work, which cannot be connected with beauty. But "Xianghu teaching do seminar notes" mentioned: "Cooking is a kind of art life. Do a thing, draw a picture, and write a word, if you can masturbate people, it is called 'beauty.' Is it an art that a good meal can make one's own family happy and comfortable, and can also make others happy and comfortable?" (Fang, 1951, p. 16). It can be seen that the beauty of labor is among the pleasures brought by the fruits of labor to themselves and others, and the higher the degree of unity of labor process and results, the more beautiful (Ju, 2018). Everyone hopes that their efforts in labor are directly proportional to the results of labor. Therefore, in children's labor education, we should pay special attention to the affirmation of labor results, so that they can enjoy the pleasure, and then feel that labor is a wonderful thing from the heart. The primary problem of aesthetic education is to educate children about "What is beauty." In children's eyes, one aspect of beauty is to be clean and tidy, and it is inevitable that they will dirty themselves when they work, which has become a factor in their resistance to labor. Let children participate in labor, while enjoying the beauty of labor results, make them understand that labor is the most glorious, and that all workers who are willing to contribute have the most beautiful soul.

## **The Enlightenment of Tao Xingzhi's Thoughts on Children's Labor Education**

### **Bring Labor into the Curriculum System**

In order to practice Tao Xingzhi's thought of "unity of teaching and doing," it is undoubtedly an effective way to set up school labor education curriculum. In the "opinions on comprehensively strengthening labor education in primary and secondary schools in the new era," it was also pointed out that "labor education

courses should be set up, and compulsory courses for labor education should be set up in primary and secondary schools” (2020). For the lower grade children, the opening of labor courses should be based on manual courses. Handwork class follows the principle of teaching first, and then doing it to realize the unity of teaching and doing. In this process, children independently think about the production method and process, and give their own unique idea, which not only improves the hands-on ability, but also cultivates creativity. For senior children, the teaching content of labor course can be specific labor practice activities on campus, while teaching and doing. For example, water, fertilize, harvest, and other agricultural activities in the school plantation; clean up and beautify the campus environment although the contents and forms of labor courses can be varied, under the pressure of examination, most of the so-called “labor courses are mere formality.” Therefore, it is necessary to make clear the performance evaluation system of labor curriculum. On the one hand, it can make children pay more attention to labor education curriculum; on the other hand, it can also promote teachers to improve lesson preparation and teaching.

### **Carry out Extracurricular Labor Practice Activities**

Tao Xingzhi mentioned that “roads, alleys, villages, factories, shops, prisons, battlefields, all places where we live are places where we can educate ourselves” (Tao, 2008). To lead children out of the campus and into the society and make full use of social education resources, we can create more colorful labor practice activities for them. The school and the rural farm establish a cooperative relationship; leading children to watch the process of farmers’ labor and experience the agricultural labor, feel the hard work and the joy of harvest, so as to cultivate the habit of saving food. Through visiting the factory and participating in part of the labor, we can feel the rapid development of industrial production and realize “science and technology creates a better life.” People from all works are carrying out different labor activities, so that children can enter the occupation experience early, understand the significance and value of social labor, and establish a correct concept of professional labor. In addition, children go deep into community, nursing homes to participate in volunteer services. In the care of others and selfless dedication to feel the unique charm of labor. Extracurricular labor practice activities provide a broader world for children’s labor education and deepen in contact with the society.

### **Strengthen Family Labor Education**

In Chinese families, children are often regarded as the first. Parents dote on their children and basically do all the housework, which makes the children lack of labor opportunities and become unable to work. Under the influence of parents’ long-term household chores, children will have a kind of inertia, and gradually develop into unwilling to work. “Some of them added food, and others made beds and folded quilts. When I was a child, I still did some things, but they do not do some things now, which will be great in the future” (Tao, 2008). Tao Xingzhi’s words reflect that “ten fingers do not touch the spring water” is not the most conducive way for children’s growth. Therefore, family labor education means that parents should let their children learn to do housework. Washing clothes, washing dishes, and cooking are the life skills that every child must learn in the process of growing up, which is of great significance to the cultivation of independent ability and sense of responsibility. Only by being grateful and appreciative of their parents, can they truly appreciate the hard work of their parents. Too comfortable family life is easy to create a child who likes leisure and dislikes work. Actively carry out family labor education, so that children can be a positive and enterprising person with a sense of responsibility in the future.

### Conclusion

In a word, Tao Xingzhi's thought of children's labor education has a profound practical significance for the cultivation of children with all-round development of morality, intelligence, physique, beauty, and labor, and guides the reform and implementation of labor education. However, to truly implement these ideas, schools, families, and society need to play their respective roles and unite to promote children's growth.

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