

The Application of Bai Ethnic Folk Art in Kindergarten Curriculum: A Case Study of Dali, Yunnan

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Abstract: Dali, a region inhabited by the Bai ethnic group, has a rich and diverse cultural heritage that has given rise to vibrant Bai folk art. Kindergartens located in areas with distinct ethnic characteristics should emphasize the development and utilization of local cultural resources. Folk handicrafts such as batik, weaving, Bai songs and dances, Bai residential architecture, and traditional painting and decoration are excellent resources for kindergarten curricula. Resources collected should be screened and curated to align with the physical and mental characteristics of young children. It is essential to create a unique environment in preschools that fosters an immersive experience for children. By expanding thematic activities, children's understanding and expression of the folk arts of the Bai ethnic group can be enriched. Integrating these activities with the five core developmental areas will facilitate a balanced approach to education. These methods can serve as a reference model for integrating various folk cultures into kindergarten curriculums.

1. Introduction

Dali is located at the northwest corner of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, covering an expansive area of more than 30,000 square kilometers. The Yunling and Nu Mountains of the Hengduan Range run through the region. Dali is one of the earliest cultural birthplaces in Yunnan, where, as early as the Neolithic period, the ancestors of ethnic groups such as the Bai and Yi peoples lived and thrived, giving rise to the famous bronze culture and rice culture. The Bai people are the indigenous ethnic group of Dali and the main ethnic group in the region. Known for their hardworking, kind, and intelligent nature, the Bai people have developed various forms of folk arts over long periods of labor and daily life. This rich folk art tradition provides a solid foundation for early childhood education, facilitating the transmission of culture through children's interactions with symbolic media such as language, lines, colors, rhythms, and shapes. Preschool curriculum is a key vehicle for early childhood education and should shoulder the responsibility of preserving and passing on ethnic culture. Therefore, kindergartens located in regions with a strong Bai folk art atmosphere should incorporate the diverse and rich folk arts of the Bai people into their curriculum.

"From a cultural perspective, preschool curriculum should represent the finest of human culture. It embodies the cultural accumulation of humanity or a specific group, rather than being limited to the immediate experiences of individuals. It should be suitable for young children. Even the most outstanding culture cannot shape children if they cannot experience it." [1] Although Bai folk arts have a long history and are highly diverse, not all of these arts are suitable for inclusion in

preschool curricula. When selecting folk arts for integration, several basic criteria must be considered: the selected folk arts should represent outstanding examples with rich cultural and educational values; they should be simple, practical, and offer opportunities for active participation by children, sparking their interest; they should be consistent with the local context, making it easier to find and collect resources; they must be relatively safe; and the activities should be feasible given the kindergarten's available conditions[2]. Based on these criteria, the author believes the following types of Bai folk arts can be considered for inclusion in the preschool curriculum.

2. Selection of Folk Crafts with Distinct Local Characteristics—Tie-Dyeing, Weaving, and Embroidery

Tie-dyeing, weaving, and embroidery are the most representative folk crafts of the Bai people, with a long history and unique cultural significance. Tie-dyeing, also known as "shao xie dyeing" in ancient times and colloquially referred to as "zha hua bu" (flower-patterned cloth), is an ancient handcraft of the Bai people. In the Bai ethnic areas of Jianchuan, Heqing, Eryuan, and Dali, tie-dye products can be seen in rural households everywhere, and the craft has been passed down through generations. Weaving technology in the Bai ethnic areas also has a long history. With the development of agriculture and animal husbandry, Bai weaving gradually became independent from these activities. Initially, simple weaving using palm leaves or grass strips (such as the continued tradition of weaving straw mats and grass curtains in Bai villages) evolved into fabric weaving using plant fibers or animal wool. The most characteristic weaving product of the Bai people is "mai bian" (wheat weaving), which is a unique traditional craft with a long history. Since ancient times, straw hats from Taihe Village in the old city of Dali have been popular and loved by people from other ethnic groups. These hats not only come in various styles but also exhibit high weaving craftsmanship. In addition to straw weaving, bamboo weaving is also prevalent. Bai traditional embroidery was originally created to meet personal needs, serving as decorative elements on traditional ethnic costumes, and was a self-sufficient craft. Today, however, a variety of ethnically distinct embroidered handicrafts are gaining attention, becoming popular tourist products that are loved by both domestic and international visitors.

3. Selection of Bai Ethnic Song and Dance with Distinct Characteristics

Typical dances include "Round the Altar," "Bottle Flower Dance," "Flower Treasure Dance," "Lotus Lantern Dance," "Sword Dance," etc., with "Mountain Spirit Dance" as an example. "Mountain Spirit Dance" is extremely rich in content, encompassing four types: *Tree-holding Dance*, *King of Warriors Whip Dance*, *Eight-pointed Drum Dance*, and *Double Flying Swallow Dance*. Compared to the other three dances, in *Tree-holding Dance*, two people hold a willow branch together, step in unison, bend over, and intertwine their arms. The latter three dances emphasize "beating and jumping." All dancers wear exquisitely crafted costumes and hold different props, rising and falling, flipping up and down, engaging in dance competitions, and striving to outshine one another, creating a lively and magnificent scene filled with vigor and beauty. This dance collectively showcases the open, optimistic, witty, and humorous personality of the Bai people. The "Eight-pointed Drum Dance" has broad mass appeal and economic practicality. For young children, learning the movements of the Eight-pointed Drum Dance is simple and easy to follow. Moving to the music helps exercise their sense of balance, enhances their self-confidence and teamwork, aids in understanding national culture, and promotes the cultivation of individual emotions and will, as well as the healthy and comprehensive development of personality. The distinctive Bai ethnic ballads (known as "Baiku" or "Bai Songs" in Bai language) are particularly noteworthy for their rich content, diverse themes, simplicity, and catchiness. They include labor

songs, ritual songs, fable songs, life songs, children's songs, object-eulogizing songs, ironic songs, custom songs, placename songs, and one-word songs, such as *Moon Sister*, *Thousand Laughs*, *Nini Nai*, *Pickled Vegetables*, *Lonely Girl*, *Calling Sparrows*, *Loach Tune*, and *White Moon*, *White Clang Clang*. The lyrics are easy to understand, popular, and deeply rooted in people's hearts.

4. Making Good Use of Bai ethnic Dwellings and Decorations with Rich Cultural Connotation and Aesthetic Value

The Bai ethnic is one of the ethnic groups in China that places the greatest emphasis on residential architecture. The Bai ethnic in Dali is a shining pearl among the many ethnic minorities in Yunnan. Its architectural culture is more mature compared to other ethnic minorities. More importantly, the meticulousness and exquisiteness of the decorative elements of Dali Bai ethnic dwellings are unparalleled by other ethnic minority buildings in Yunnan. The decorative art of Bai ethnic dwellings integrates brick carving, stone carving, wood carving, clay sculpting, painting, and calligraphy. Among these, painting and calligraphy are most closely combined and possess the deepest significance. The motifs for paintings are diverse, including animals, flowers, trees, and many decorative landscapes, decorative figure paintings, and even paintings of myths, legends, and religious stories, making the motifs extremely rich. The colorful patterns, with the aid of metaphors, symbols, metonyms, homophones, and combinations, embody the ideals of the Bai people, express rich social meanings, and reflect profound artistic conception. The inscriptions on paintings also exhibit the charm of calligraphy art, encompassing various fonts such as running script, regular script, cursive script, seal script, and clerk script, displaying a splendid display of calligraphy art and serving as a living textbook for nurturing children's appreciation of calligraphy and painting art.

5. Making the Best Use of Circumstances and Leveraging Bai Ethnic Group's Traditional Festivals as Curriculum Resources

The parents and teachers can introduce the traditional festivals of ethnic groups to children, such as the March Street Festival, Torch Festival, Sea Opening Festival, and Clothing Competition Festival. This can be done by showing videos and images to introduce the customs associated with these festivals, paying attention to the decorations in the surroundings during the festivals, and collaboratively decorating the classroom environment. During these festival activities, it is recommended that parents, if possible, lead their children to personally participate in the colorful festival activities. After the festivals, teachers and children can share their experiences and appreciate the folk art works collected by everyone. In the rich atmosphere of ethnic and folk culture, children can feel the beauty of folk art works. Additionally, organizing parent-child activities such as "Three Cups Tea, Dish Dance, and Butterfly Gathering," and parent-child performance activities like "Folk Tale Story Contest" can be beneficial. After each activity, parents and teachers should discuss their experiences and provide suggestions together, allowing shared ethnic sentiments and patriotism to closely unite teachers, children, and parents, thereby building a bridge for promoting ethnic and folk art culture and fostering national spirit education.

6. The Application Pathways of Bai ethnic Folk Art in Kindergarten Curriculum

How to specifically incorporate folk art into kindergarten curricula is a topic of great interest to many kindergarten teachers. There is unlikely to be a readily available textbook on folk culture curricula, as it relies heavily on the choices and judgments made by teachers themselves. Engaging in such activities falls under the broader category of curriculum development within the kindergarten context, which refers to how kindergartens and teachers manage and make decisions

regarding the existing curriculum[3]. Therefore, the available pathways are as follows:

6.1 In-depth exploration of educational factors to filter and create new resources from the collected data.

The resources initially gathered are still quite rough, and some content may not be suitable for inclusion in preschool curricula. Therefore, it is necessary to filter and adapt them. The first consideration during the selection process should be the "educational" aspect, as determined by the intrinsic value of preschool education. "As a form of cultural expression, the preschool curriculum's value lies not only in shaping children or cultivating individuals who can carry forward human culture, but most importantly, in developing the children's sound spirit, character, and physique, thereby enhancing the overall life of the next generation!"[4] It is essential to tailor the content for the preschool curriculum to align with the physical and psychological characteristics of young children. This includes creating materials that are appropriate for their level of skill and aesthetic appreciation. For example, traditional folk embroidery includes techniques that can be quite challenging, which may pose difficulties for young children whose fine motor skills are still developing. Thus, the focus should be on grasping the broader shapes and main features.

6.2 Utilising folk art to create a uniquely distinctive environment

The environment of a kindergarten can be considered from two aspects: the overall area and the interiors of various activity rooms. There are many spaces within the kindergarten that can be utilised effectively. For instance, a certain kindergarten has created relief sculptures featuring traditional Bai patterns on either side of the entrance, allowing children and parents entering and leaving every day to experience the charm of traditional culture. The corridor should also be a focal point; beautiful embroideries, printed artworks, and paper cuttings created by the children can be hung on the walls of the corridors. Within the activity rooms, a specific area can be designated to create themed wall decorations in conjunction with theme activities, as well as a dedicated exhibition space to showcase the craft works made by the children. Various craft items can also be used as indoor decorations. Furthermore, a dedicated exhibition room for folk art can be established, displaying a collection of various folk crafts that possess significant artistic value for children and parents to appreciate.

6.3 Expansion of Themed Activities

"Most kindergartens across the country lack local characteristics, with a uniform educational content disconnected from the real lives of children"[5]. Various thematic activities can be developed around folk crafts for all age groups. For instance, in an activity themed "Beautiful Bai Ethnic Houses," children's active participation can be encouraged, expanding into sub-themes such as "Perception and Appreciation," "Discussion and Discovery," and "Creation and Expression," which can be further refined under these themes. It is important to ensure a natural transition between activities. When children are still very interested in a particular theme, it is advisable not to abruptly change the topic, while also seizing opportunities to broaden their horizons.

6.4 Integrating Bai ethnic folk art course resources into various educational areas in kindergartens.

"Implementation is the process of putting curriculum design into action, essentially constituting the creation of new educational experiences within specific educational contexts." [6] Curriculum

implementation should integrate Bai folk arts across all areas of activities in kindergartens; only by being represented in various fields can the educational value of folk crafts be fully realised, rather than being confined to the arts alone. For instance, using handmade crafts by children as props for physical activities or recognising various geometric shapes through drawing different folk patterns. Kindergarten curricula are inherently integrated, with interconnections across various domains. Folk arts encompass educational content relevant to multiple fields, and with educational insight, they present an inexhaustible treasure. It is important to note that incorporating folk arts into kindergarten curricula does not mean offering a separate folk arts class; instead, it involves permeating the various curricular fields within the kindergarten, which is reflected in the organic integration with various educational activities.

7. Conclusion

In summary, each ethnic group has its own distinctive and unique art. Taking the Bai ethnic group as an example here, this illustration shows the cultural varieties available for selection in Bai folk art for kindergarten curricula. With just a pair of eyes that are good at discovering, we can bring inexhaustible cultural resources to kindergarten curricula.

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