

# Shape and Substance of Comprehensive Practical Activities in the Context of New Curriculum

Lingyuan Leng<sup>1, a</sup>, Xiaoyan Wu<sup>2, b</sup>

<sup>1</sup>No.1 Primary School of Dachqiao, Jiangyin, China

<sup>2</sup>Jinhu County Chengnan Experimental Primary School, Jiangsu, China

<sup>a</sup> lenglingyuan@163.com, <sup>b</sup> 350799011@qq.com

---

**Abstract:** Against the backdrop of revisions to the new curriculum standards, this paper analyzes the current state of comprehensive practical activities courses. It posits that the implementation of activities should adhere to their essence, with activity formats always serving that essence. Through the analysis of specific cases, the paper illustrates the phenomenon of overemphasizing form at the expense of substance in the current implementation process. It proposes improvement measures which have certain guiding significance for the conduct of comprehensive practical activities at this stage.

**Keywords:** Comprehensive Practical Activities; Core Competencies; Form; Essence.

---

## 1. Introduction

With the revision of the new curriculum standards, the Comprehensive Practical Activities course has gained increasing attention from schools and teachers alike. In the latest curriculum plan, two significant changes to the Comprehensive Practical Activities course have caught people's notice. The starting grade level has been moved up from third grade to first grade, and the content has been adjusted by separating labor education and information technology from the Comprehensive Practical Activities course.

It is not hard to see that these two changes indicate that with the comprehensive popularization of compulsory education, the demand for education has shifted. Starting Comprehensive Practical Activities earlier is more conducive to developing Chinese students' core competencies. Separating information technology and labor education from the Comprehensive Practical Activities makes the course content more specialized and professional, clarifying the nature of the course and setting clearer goals.

Based on these changes, many schools are actively engaging in various comprehensive practical activities, and it seems that the springtime for the Comprehensive Practical Activities course has arrived. Judging from school news reports and WeChat posts, the themes of Comprehensive Practical Activities are rich and varied, with students enthusiastically conducting all sorts of explorations and experiences both inside and outside the classroom. However, during observations and studies of some school activities, I have also noticed some issues: whether students' subject-specific competencies have been enhanced through these activities; what the participation rate and depth of involvement of students are in the activities; and whether the guiding role of teachers in the activities is being adequately reflected. Reflecting on these questions, I realize they all relate to handling the relationship between the form and the essence of the course. Therefore, in this article, I would like to share some of my preliminary thoughts on the form and essence of Comprehensive Practical Activities:

## 2. Amidst a Profusion of Activities, One Must Focus to Discern the True Nature.

Since the release of the "Guidelines for Comprehensive Practical Activities Course" in 2017, schools across the country have attached great importance to the Comprehensive Practical Activities course. Numerous bases for such activities have sprung up everywhere, and judging from various reports, these activities are thriving.

Taking just September 2022 as an example, we can see: the nine-year-consistent school in Liaoyang County offered eleven Comprehensive Practical Activities including simulated car driving, paper-cutting, rescue first aid, and ancient tea appreciation; primary schools in Fushan District conducted themed activities on labor, life, traditional Chinese medicine culture, and beautifying the campus; No. 9 Middle School in Nankai District carried out Comprehensive Practical Activities at museums and memorial halls... From WeChat posts, there were over thirty large and small activities nationwide, featuring diverse formats ranging from classroom discussions to extracurricular practices, and from field investigations to experiential learning.

However, do all these varied activities adhere to the essence of Comprehensive Practical Activities? This is debatable. The nature, philosophy, and objectives of Comprehensive Practical Activities courses differ significantly from those of subject-specific courses. In terms of nature, it is a course rooted in students' real lives, derived from their direct experiences, closely linked to their personal lives and social realities, embodying the integrated application of knowledge—a practical course centered around students' experiences and lives.

Yet, not every practical activity qualifies as a Comprehensive Practical Activity. Simply stepping out of the classroom or the school does not automatically make it a Comprehensive Practical Activity. The purpose of practice should be to develop and enhance students' understanding of nature, society, and themselves, and to improve their abilities in problem-solving and creative realization during the process.

Using a school's post as an example, based on the content

and images, it could be described as an extracurricular practical activity, but labeling it as a Comprehensive Practical Activity might be inappropriate.



**Figure 1.** Students are lined up and carrying out activities under the guidance of their teacher.

Figure 1 illustrates students participating in activities organized in lines under the guidance of their teacher. The teacher is lecturing at the front, while the students are listening at the back, indicating a lack of exploratory activities. According to the report, "Students became acquainted with plants such as flowers, fruit trees, and medicinal herbs they had never seen before, observed agricultural tools from decades ago, and gained insights into the evolution of agrarian societies. Through activities like real-life CS jungle combat and jungle crossing, team collaboration skills, innovative spirit, and practical abilities were fostered." But how did they "become acquainted"? What was the purpose of their "observation"? And which activities were initiated by the students themselves? Without students engaging in investigation and experience, such activities are not much different from regular sightseeing tours.

Similar activities are widespread across schools, and many define them as Comprehensive Practical Activities. However, it is clear that throughout the process, students are not required to apply their own knowledge to analyze and solve problems, thus failing to enhance their overall competencies.

### **3. A Myriad of Hues Signals Spring, De tailed Cultivation Yields Fruitful Forms.**

Compared to subject-specific courses, the Comprehensive Practical Activities course boasts a rich variety of formats. By method of activity, it includes thematic investigative research, project and design activities, experiential learning primarily through social observation, and practical activities involving community engagement. Depending on participant numbers, activities can be student-led individual explorations, group collaborations, or inter-class, inter-grade, inter-school, and inter-regional social practices. In terms of presentation outcomes, visual art, photography, drama, and performances can be utilized, alongside writing reports, reflective journals, and notes. Methodologically, students employ research, interviews, data collection, observation, experimentation, and more in their studies.

Such a diverse array of activity forms distinguishes Comprehensive Practical Activities from subject courses, imbuing them with vitality. To effectively utilize these formats, enhancing students' practical experience and problem-solving capabilities, and cultivating comprehensive competencies suited for modern needs, the author offers

several recommendations:

#### **(1) Selecting Appropriate Formats Based on Themes**

Although the formats for comprehensive practical activity courses are diverse, careful consideration is needed to determine which format is suitable for a given theme. Taking the first unit of the third-grade "Comprehensive Practical Activity Growth Handbook" as an example, this unit includes themes such as "My Study of Household Waste," "Exploring Traditional Games," and "Mystery of the Park," all categorized under the investigative research type. During the practical activities, apart from treating these themes as investigative research topics, adjustments can be made based on actual circumstances to incorporate activities with social investigation and practical nature, thereby broadening the depth and breadth of practical activities. For these three thematic activities, initial methods of practice could include data collection, questionnaire surveys, and interviews. However, using a questionnaire survey for "My Study of Household Waste" might yield more research materials, while conducting interviews for the study of "Exploring Traditional Games" could more conveniently obtain relevant information.

#### **(2) Allow Students Ample Independence to Utilize Formats Effectively**

While comprehensive practical activities are often conducted in group collaboration, this is not the only format. From the perspective of practical research patterns, there are times when students need to conduct research independently. For instance, "Exploring Traditional Games" might be better suited for individual student research, where they can gather relevant information by interviewing family members like parents, grandparents, etc., and at the stage of presenting findings, they can invite peers to participate in experiences.

Compared to group collaboration, individual research reduces some of the time spent on communication, potentially allowing for deeper exploration in certain investigative activities. Of course, this isn't always the case, but regardless of the organizational format, teachers should allow as much independence as possible during activities, giving students more time for autonomous engagement. In my observations of comprehensive practical activity courses, I've noticed that some teachers overly focus on maintaining a complete classroom procedure, meticulously designing transitional phrases and comments. As a result, students have significantly less time for their activities, leading to superficial engagement in some cases.

### **4. Green Leaves Shade the Branches Laden with Fruit; A Thousand Songs Cultivate Virtue**

We often say that education is a profession that focuses on "cultivating without expecting immediate harvest," yet educators should have a vision of the "fruit" they aim to produce. The revision of the curriculum standards has indeed clarified the desired outcome of education: to nurture "new-era individuals capable of shouldering the great responsibility of national rejuvenation."

Regarding this revision, Tian Huisheng, Director of the Textbook Bureau of the Ministry of Education, stated at a press conference: "This revision fully implements the requirement to cultivate new-era individuals capable of shouldering the great responsibility of national rejuvenation. Considering the nature of compulsory education and the positioning of the curriculum, it translates the Party's

educational policy into specific core competencies that this course should strive to foster in students, reflecting the cultivation requirements for correct values, essential character traits, and critical abilities.” The “core competencies,” “correct values,” “essential character traits,” and “critical abilities” mentioned here are also the “fruits” that the education endeavor strives to achieve.

Therefore, while guiding students through various activities, it is crucial to remain clear that regardless of the form of the activity, its purpose is to serve the cultivation of students’ comprehensive literacy. Educators should keep the following points in mind when designing activities:

(1) At the initial stage of the activity, fully integrate students’ experiences, allowing them ample participation in planning the activity program. Guide students in choosing appropriate formats for conducting activities, while continuously optimizing the plans. Emphasize the depth and breadth of the activity.

(2) During the summary phase of the activity, guide students to present results in suitable formats. Presenting activity outcomes is not merely a display but should also emphasize guiding students to reflect on gains and losses. The primary goal should be to enhance individual experience and promote the structuring of knowledge.

(3) For the design and implementation of activity evaluations, the purpose should be to promote the sustained development of students’ overall quality. Evaluation methods cannot be monotonous; use as many diverse forms as possible to illustrate the entire activity process of students. Simultaneously, utilize evaluations to enhance students’ key abilities.

With the evolution of the times, a new round of curriculum reform is both inevitable and necessary. People’s lifestyles, learning habits, and work environments are constantly changing, and the growth environment of children and adolescents has undergone profound transformations. Talent cultivation faces new challenges: the demand for mechanized labor force produced in bulk during the industrial revolution is gradually diminishing; instead, there is an increasing

demand for professionals with greater innovative awareness who can delve deeply into various fields. The value of the comprehensive practical activities course, distinct from subject-based courses, becomes increasingly evident. If, under such circumstances, the implementation of activity courses remains unchanged, still using disciplinary teaching methods to “direct” students to conduct activities, it would undoubtedly contradict the intentions of the new curriculum reform. Only by firmly grasping the essence of comprehensive practical activities courses can we avoid mere formalities in activity design, truly cultivating well-rounded socialist builders and successors.

## References

- [1] Li Hongmei. Design and Implementation of Comprehensive Practical Activities Curriculum under the New Curriculum Background. Educational Research. 2019.
- [2] Zhang Xiaodong. Practice and Reflection on Comprehensive Practical Activities Curriculum under the New Curriculum Reform. Theory and Practice of Education. 2020.
- [3] Wang Lili. Implementation Strategies of Comprehensive Practical Activities Curriculum under the New Curriculum Background. Modern Educational Science. 2021.
- [4] Liu Wei. Design and Evaluation of Comprehensive Practical Activities Curriculum under the New Curriculum Background. Exploration of Education. 2022.
- [5] Chen Ming. Case Study on Comprehensive Practical Activities Curriculum under the New Curriculum Background. Theory and Practice of Education. 2023.
- [6] Zhao Lina. Transformation of Teachers’ Role in Comprehensive Practical Activities Curriculum under the New Curriculum Background. Research and Experiment in Education. 2020.
- [7] Sun Xiaoming. Resource Development and Utilization of Comprehensive Practical Activities Curriculum under the New Curriculum Background. Theory and Practice of Education. 2021.