

Case Study of the Growth Path of Junior High School Students from the Perspective of Core Literacy—Analysis of Identity Recognition and Learning Planning Based on the Subject of Moral Education and Legal Studies

Meifang Bao*

Kongjiang Junior Middle School, Shanghai, 200092, China

*Corresponding author: 13122131313@163.com

Abstract: This study uses a case tracking method, focusing on a preparatory year student, Xiao Y (pseudonym), and explores the impact of core literacy in the subject of Moral Education and Legal Studies on junior high school students' identity recognition and learning planning through educational observation and intervention. The research shows that systematic identity recognition reconstruction, layered and progressive learning planning guidance, and home-school collaborative educational strategies can help students transition from poor learning adaptation to autonomous development, providing a practical path for cultivating core literacy in junior high school students.

Keywords: Moral Education and Legal Studies; Core Literacy; Junior High School Students' Development; Identity Recognition; Learning Planning

Introduction

In the current context of comprehensive promotion of quality education and the deepening of the core literacy concept, the all-around development of students has become the focus of education. Core literacy in the subject of Moral Education and Legal Studies plays a key guiding role in the growth of junior high school students. How to leverage this to help students grow comprehensively is an important research topic for educators.

This case study focuses on Xiao Y, analyzing in-depth his development in terms of identity recognition and learning planning as a junior high school student. It presents his transition from confusion and uncertainty upon entering junior high school to gradually clarifying his identity and reasonably planning his learning, as well as his performance in various practical activities. The aim is to provide a reference for related educational practices and support the comprehensive development of students.

1. Problem Statement

With the continuous deepening of the curriculum reform in basic education, the development of core literacy in students has become the key to implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtues and cultivating people. The five core literacies of the subject of Moral Education and Legal Studies—political identity, moral cultivation, legal awareness, sound personality, and sense of responsibility—are of great significance to junior high school students^[4], who are at a critical period of rapid physical and mental development. However, the common problems of identity crisis and lack of learning planning during the transition from primary to junior high school severely restrict the adaptation and development of new students.

When Xiao Y first entered junior high school, he faced many difficulties in both learning and life. In class, he appeared sluggish and tired, ignored the teacher's questions, did homework carelessly, and approached exams with an attitude of indifference, which not only affected his grades but also disrupted the classroom order. In terms of interpersonal relationships, he only had a close relationship with a few disruptive classmates and had difficulty integrating into the class collective; the

teacher-student relationship was also quite tense. These problems reflected his inadequate identity recognition as a junior high school student and his lack of learning planning.

From the perspective of educational theory, junior high school students are at a critical stage of self-awareness development. Identity recognition influences their behavior patterns, value formation, and learning motivation, while learning planning is essential for acquiring knowledge and improving abilities. Although the core literacy in Moral Education and Legal Studies plays a unique role in students' growth, there is a lack of empirical research to support how it can be translated into practical support for students' development in real educational contexts. From the perspective of educational practice, the educational problems during the transition from primary to junior high school have long troubled educators. Many students experience a decline in grades and deterioration in behavior during this stage, which affects their subsequent learning. Therefore, conducting in-depth research into typical cases like that of Xiao Y and exploring effective educational intervention strategies is of great practical significance for helping more students smoothly navigate the transition from primary to junior high school and achieve healthy growth^[2].

2. Research Methods

2.1 Research Subject

This study selects Xiao Y, a student in the preparatory grade of a large public junior high school in Shanghai, as the research subject. At the beginning of his school year, Xiao Y's academic performance was among the lowest in his grade (with a total of 435 students in the grade, he ranked near the bottom). His classroom participation was extremely low, his relationships with peers were poor, and there were significant barriers in parent-child communication, which aligns with the "transition period developmental crisis" characteristics proposed by Yates^[1]. At the initial stage of the study, the learning ability test conducted on him showed that his logical thinking and language expression skills were at a lower level compared to his peers, but he demonstrated certain potential in spatial imagination and hands-on abilities. A preliminary psychological health assessment revealed that he experienced a degree of anxiety and inferiority, with a negative attitude toward learning and school life. These test results provided important references for subsequent research and intervention.

2.2 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed research method, collecting data through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation was conducted for 3 class hours per week, with the researcher immersing in Xiao Y's class to observe and record his behavior, emotional responses, and participation in class activities. For example, during a math class, when the teacher was explaining a difficult problem, Xiao Y not only failed to listen attentively, but also whispered to a classmate, disrupting the classroom order.

In-depth interviews were conducted with Xiao Y himself, subject teachers, classmates, and parents. Through communication with Xiao Y, it was revealed that he felt the academic pressure in junior high school was overwhelming, and he struggled to keep up with the pace of teaching, which led to a resistant attitude toward learning. Subject teachers noted that he was often inattentive in class, completed homework poorly, and frequently missed deadlines. Classmates found him hard to get along with and observed that he displayed a passive attitude during class activities. Xiao Y's mother expressed anxiety about his learning, often reprimanding him for academic problems, which strained their parent-child relationship.

Document analysis was carried out on his homework, test papers, and class notes. The analysis revealed that his homework was sloppy, with a high error rate, and many questions were answered carelessly. The test papers showed a significant loss of points in the basic knowledge areas of math and English, indicating poor mastery of the content. His class notes were brief, missing important points, and he had not developed good study habits.

The research period lasted from September 2024 to January 2025, divided into three stages: diagnostic phase (1 month), to comprehensively understand his learning, life, and psychological status and identify the problems; intervention phase (3 months), to implement intervention measures targeting the identified problems; consolidation phase (1 month), to reinforce the intervention outcomes and observe continued development.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, a "Personal - School - Family" three-dimensional intervention model is constructed. In subject teaching, the Moral Education and Legal Studies class uses methods such as case analysis and classroom discussions to help Xiao Y correctly recognize his identity as a junior high school student. For example, when discussing "Responsibility and Accountability," campus cases are introduced to guide him in analyzing the responsibilities of different roles, deepening his understanding of his own responsibilities.

In class management, clear rules and regulations are established, with praise and rewards given for behaviors that follow the rules, and criticism and education for rule-breaking behaviors. Additionally, activities such as sports meets and cultural performances are organized to encourage him to participate actively, enhancing his sense of collective honor and teamwork skills.

In terms of family education, parents are guided to adopt scientific and reasonable educational methods, emphasizing more encouragement and less criticism, while respecting the child's thoughts and choices. After receiving guidance, Xiao Y's mother changed her previous rigid educational approach, trying to communicate with him on an equal footing and listening to his concerns, gradually creating a more harmonious family atmosphere. The collaboration of all three parties forms an educational synergy, promoting Xiao Y's growth.

3. Growth Intervention Process

3.1 Identity Recognition Reconstruction Path

3.1.1 Cognitive Deconstruction Stage

A "Time and Space Dialogue" activity was organized, where students were divided into groups to discuss the differences between primary and junior high school in terms of learning content, methods, and interpersonal relationships, and then share their feelings. Initially, Xiao Y remained silent, but after encouragement from the teacher, he expressed that the junior high school curriculum was more difficult, and that teachers had more relaxed management. An early investigation revealed that his understanding of the responsibilities of a junior high school student was significantly skewed, with only 31% of relevant questionnaire items meeting the baseline requirements. He believed that "junior high school simply means more courses, but it is no different from primary school." To deepen his understanding, the teacher organized a "Day in the Life of a Junior High School Student" themed activity, where students simulated various aspects of junior high life. Through this activity, Xiao Y gained a more intuitive sense of what life as a junior high school student was like and began to reflect on his own responsibilities.

3.1.2 Emotional Recognition Stage

A "Senior Mentor Program" was implemented, inviting outstanding graduates to share their experiences of junior high school life with Xiao Y. The growth stories shared by the seniors, such as overcoming difficulties and making progress, had a deep impact on him. At the same time, a "My Junior High Portrait" themed activity was organized, using role-playing and scenario simulation to allow him to deeply experience junior high school life. During one role-playing activity, he took on the role of class activity organizer planning the class cultural festival. Through communicating and collaborating with classmates, arranging the activity schedule, and preparing materials, he truly realized the importance of teamwork and taking on responsibility. After three months of intervention, his score on the "Campus Ownership Awareness" scale increased by 42%. In a school-organized environmental protection activity, he voluntarily signed up, actively participated in publicity and practice, and even proposed creative environmental protection suggestions, which were well received by teachers and classmates.

3.1.3 Behavioral Internalization Stage

To help Xiao Y further develop, a class management role was created for him, such as serving as the assistant for the Moral Education and Legal Studies subject, and a "Growth Points Bank" was established to reward his positive behaviors with points. During his time as subject assistant, he was responsible for distributing and collecting test papers, assisting in organizing classroom discussions, and other tasks. While helping organize classroom discussions, he proactively thought critically and guided classmates in deeper discussions, which improved his thinking and expression abilities. Over

time, his classroom discipline violations decreased from 3.5 times per week to 0.2 times per week. Encouraged by the "Growth Points Bank," he exhibited more positive behaviors in both learning and life, such as proactively helping classmates solve learning problems and participating in class cleaning activities. Not only did he earn more points, but he also built a positive image for himself, which boosted his self-confidence and sense of responsibility.

3.2 Learning Planning Support System

3.2.1 Metacognitive Awakening

The self-regulated learning model by Zimmerman^[3] was adopted, using "learning logs" to cultivate Xiao Y's awareness of learning monitoring. In the first month of the study, analysis of his learning logs revealed that 60% of his assignments were completed after 9:00 PM, with a correct rate of only 48%, reflecting a lack of monitoring and self-management during the learning process. The teacher guided him to create a daily study plan, prioritize learning tasks by importance and urgency, and allocate time accordingly. He was also required to record the actual time spent on each task and the problems encountered in the learning log, allowing for timely adjustments to the plan.

3.2.2 Strategy Construction

The "Three-Dimensional Goal Management Method" was implemented. In the subject dimension, learning tools were developed based on the characteristics of different subjects, such as an English reading timer, a math error-tracking sheet, and an incremental writing notebook for essays. The English reading timer was used to set reading time limits, helping him improve reading speed and efficiency; the math error-tracking sheet was used to analyze error reasons and summarize problem-solving methods, providing him with a more systematic understanding of math learning. In the time dimension, the Pomodoro Technique was applied, dividing study periods into 25-minute work sessions and 5-minute breaks. Initially, he struggled to adapt, but after some practice, his focus improved. In the evaluation dimension, a multi-dimensional evaluation scale containing process indicators was designed to comprehensively and objectively assess his learning process and outcomes, focusing on aspects such as learning attitude, effort level, and classroom participation. This allowed him to clearly understand his strengths and weaknesses and make targeted improvements.

3.2.3 Self-Regulation

The "Learning Roadmap" tool was introduced, guiding Xiao Y to regularly review and adjust his learning situation. Starting from the fourth month, he was able to independently optimize his time allocation according to the learning roadmap, turning his interest in history into a learning advantage. In his most recent math exam, his performance improved to the top 25% of the class. He developed a detailed math learning plan based on the learning roadmap, which included completing a certain amount of extracurricular math problems each week, seeking one-on-one tutoring to fill in knowledge gaps, effectively using a mistake book, and creating mind maps. His understanding and application of math knowledge became more profound. He also applied this self-directed learning ability to other subjects, gradually forming good study habits.

4. Educational Effectiveness Analysis

4.1 Individual Development Indicator Changes

4.1.1 Academic Performance

After the first semester of intervention in the preparatory grade, Xiao Y's overall academic ranking improved from the lower ranks of the grade to the 250th position, a rise of 62 places. Among these, his performance in mathematics showed significant improvement, with his ranking in the subject rising by 124 places, now ranked 13th in the class. Both his Chinese and English grades also showed progress. In mathematics, through the use of the error-tracking sheet, he mastered the knowledge more solidly, and his problem-solving ability improved. In Chinese and English, by consistently using the reading timer, his reading speed and comprehension significantly improved, with a substantial increase in his scores for reading comprehension in both subjects.

4.1.2 Behavioral Improvements

The rate of active participation in class increased from 4% to 63%, and the on-time homework

completion rate rose from 58% to 98%. He transformed from being passive to becoming more proactive in class, showing a fundamental change in his learning attitude. The quality of his homework also improved significantly, with neater handwriting and a lower error rate.

4.1.3 Psychological Adaptation

Based on the Mental Health Test (MHT), his score decreased from 65 (a warning level) to 42 (within the normal range), indicating a significant reduction in anxiety and inferiority feelings, while his self-confidence increased. In his interactions with classmates and teachers, he became more cheerful and proactive, facing challenges in both learning and life more positively.

4.2 Ecosystem Synergy Effects

4.2.1 Home-School Communication

The frequency of home-school communication increased from 0.8 times per month to 4 times (excluding online communication), making the communication closer. Xiao Y's mother's scores in the parenting style evaluation showed an improvement of 1.8 standard deviations in the "democratic" dimension, making her parenting more scientifically and reasonably guided. After receiving educational guidance, Xiao Y's mother learned to listen to his ideas and respect his choices, creating a more harmonious family environment that provided strong support for his learning and development.

4.2.2 Peer Relationships

Through peer relationship network analysis, it was found that Xiao Y's centrality in the class social network increased from a marginal position (0.12) to a secondary central position (0.67), indicating significant improvement in his interpersonal relationships and his gradual integration into the class group. He actively participated in class activities, interacted more with classmates, and helped them solve problems, earning their respect and affection. During a class outdoor expansion activity, he demonstrated teamwork skills, leading his group to an excellent result, further strengthening his friendships with classmates.

4.3 Core Competency Development Assessment

Based on the core competency framework, Xiao Y exhibited good rational analysis skills in the "Rule of Law Situation Judgment" task, scoring a B (Good). In the "Community Service Design" project, he actively participated, conducted in-depth surveys of community residents' needs, and proposed many valuable suggestions, such as caring for the elderly and promoting environmental protection. His sense of responsibility was recognized with a school-level award, indicating significant development in his core competencies in the Moral and Legal Education subject. In the "Rule of Law Situation Judgment" task, he was able to use the legal knowledge he had learned to accurately analyze the situation, judge the legality of actions, and propose reasonable solutions.

5. Discussion and Suggestions

5.1 Educational Transformation Mechanism

This case study validates the "Cognitive Reshaping - Emotional Engagement - Behavioral Solidification" growth path. When Xiao Y formed a positive feedback loop in identity recognition and learning planning, his intrinsic motivation was activated. For example, after receiving the "Progress Star" title, he voluntarily increased his daily study time by 40 minutes. His improved identity recognition helped him clarify goals and responsibilities, which led him to engage more actively in learning. The reasonable formulation and effective implementation of his learning plan allowed him to make academic progress, boost his self-confidence, and further strengthen his identity recognition, forming a virtuous cycle^[5].

5.2 Practical Insights

5.2.1 Building a "Ladder-Type" Adaptation Curriculum

Schools should establish concrete role transition guidance courses at the entry stage, such as developing a "Junior High School Growth Passport." Through task check-ins, story sharing, and case

analysis, these courses should cover aspects of junior high life such as study methods, interpersonal communication, and school rules, helping students successfully complete the role transition and clarify the responsibilities and missions of being a junior high student^[6,7].

5.2.2 Innovating the Competency Evaluation Method

The "Growth Portfolio" should be used to record students' core competency development trajectories, integrating academic performance with practical activities. This will allow for a comprehensive, objective, and dynamic evaluation of the student's growth process, providing more targeted guidance for education and teaching and encouraging the holistic development of students.

5.3 Limitations and Future Outlook

This study focuses on the individual growth trajectory of Xiao Y, and thus has certain limitations. Future research can expand the sample size and select students from different regions, schools, and academic levels for group tracking studies to enhance the generalizability and representativeness of the results. Additionally, it is recommended to develop a digital support platform to dynamically collect and analyze student growth data, providing more scientific basis for educational decision-making. Under the "double reduction" policy, further exploration is needed regarding how to optimize homework design to promote students' self-regulation development.

Conclusion

The cultivation of core competencies in junior high school students requires educators to have a systems thinking approach. By constructing identity recognition, students' awareness of growth can be awakened, and through learning planning guidance, students' autonomy can be developed, thus achieving the integration of knowledge acquisition and personal development. This case study shows that when school education, family support, and student subjectivity resonate together, significant educational added-value effects can be produced. This provides a new practical paradigm for solving the transition challenges between primary and junior high school, and offers valuable reference for the comprehensive development of junior high school students.

References

- [1] Yates, M. *Adolescent Development in the Context of Social Change. Annual Review of Psychology*, 56, 287-313. **【M】** 2005
- [2] Yates, A. *Transition and development during adolescence 【D】*. 2005
- [3] Zimmerman, B. J. *Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. Theory into Practice*, 41(2), 64-70. **【D】**. 2002
- [4] Ministry of Education. *Compulsory Education Moral and Legal Education Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) [M]*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 2022.
- [5] Wang Chen. *Research on the Path of Core Competency Cultivation at the School Level from an Ecological Perspective [J]*. WeChat Public Platform, 2024.
- [6] Ji Jinren. *Cultivating Core Competencies, Focusing on Student Development — A Case Study Based on "Core Competencies" [J]*. *Liberal Arts Navigation*, 2016 (10).
- [7] Zhong Qiquan. *Where is the "Core" of Core Competencies? — The Framework of Core Competency Research [N]*. *China Education News*, 2015 (12).