

On Family-School-Symbiosis Paradigm for Education Development

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Abstract

Family is the space-time field which entails the closest connection with the individual development. To promote the all-round development of individuals is the common goal of family and school. At present, the practical situation in China's education is that family shirks its responsibility for education, and society resigns itself from education. Taking symbiotic theory as the theoretical foundation, this study proposes the family-school-symbiosis paradigm for education development, and attempts to seek pragmatic ways to practice such paradigm upon the analysis of the realistic difficulties of family education and social education.

Key words: Family-school relationship; Family-school-symbiosis; Paradigm; Symbiosis paradigm; Education development

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INTRODUCTION

As a long-lasting and valuable element of a long history, family is closely connected to individuals and the society they live by. School is the product generated when the development of social civilization reaches a certain degree. It is also the spatial expansion of family based on the awareness of having division of labor as well as cooperation. According to the current popular discourse, education seems to primarily be related to

school, unconsciously to the exclusion of family. This situation essentially explains why so many problems exist in China's education: Considered as the central field of education, school takes up too many responsibilities. It is thus no wonder that there appear those problems. Up to now, the reform of elementary education has stepped into its arduous stage where quality-oriented education comes to a stalemate with examination-oriented education, education fairness suffers lots of criticism, and the overall advance for educational development becomes more difficult and so on. Under such condition, it is necessary and urgent to change the paradigm for education development, highlight the original function of family education and construct a family-school-symbiosis paradigm for education development.

1. CONNOTATION OF FAMILY

1.1 Metaphor of Family

The concept of family is so familiar to individuals that it is almost overlooked. Family is a sector which is the most closely associated with the individuals' development spatio-temporally. It is also a site where the individuals lead the whole span of their life. In terms of its connotation, family is metaphorical into the harbor of one's journey in life, the stage to pass intergenerational roles and the code to advance the social evolvement.

In the aspect of individuals' development, family is viewed as the harbor of the journey of life. Human development starts from the babyhood and then to the childhood, the teenage period, the adolescence, the middle-age period and senescence sequentially. "The primary transmission from biological creatures into social beings is conducted in the family" (Fei, 2013). Family education is where one's lifelong education starts and ends, school education may be dominant in certain periods during this course. Taking a panoramic view of the whole span of life, however, family is both the starting

point and the ending point for the formation and update of individual value, the development of moral character, emotional experience, the cultivation of common sense and viability, and the acquirement and accumulation of experience. In a word, family provides a shelter of the most loyalty and security for individuals' development.

In the aspect of human evolution, family is viewed as the stage where roles are passed from generation to generation. In the history of human development, family is always a developmental sector of the most stability and importance. Meanwhile, affection between family members with the same ties of blood serves as a preferred bond to link and maintain the relation among them.

The continuation of human life is achieved by the way of intergenerational transmission, coupled with the passing on of human survival and accumulation. Such transmission composed of the rules, value, ability, attitude necessary for individuals' survival in the society is called education. (Zhao, 2012)

From time immemorial, China has worshiped the moral logic of "Junjunchenchen Fufuzizi (the monarch and his ministers should respectively perform their own responsibilities matching their own social status; the same way is to father and son)". The monophyletic development of father-and-son relation is of the most importance in all family relations and even in all social relations. In this relation, father is on behalf of father's generation, while son is on behalf of son's generation. Either father or son should fulfill his own duties properly. Then human fulfill this transmission of roles as father and son.

In the aspect of social development, family is viewed as the code to promote social evolvement. For example, the impossibility for the "wolf child" to be taught is not because of his low intelligence; instead, it is the lack of early family education, through which he missed the best occasion for cognitive development and value formation. Such case powerfully proves that early family education is fundamental and decisive for individuals' development. Besides, family education also performs significant functions in the overall traditional education system, and even in China's traditional political fields, the Confucianists' "Yi Xiao Zhi Guo" (ruling the country by the filial piety) course also took family education as its solid base (Zhang, 2005). Therefore, it is safe to say such aspects as personal spiritual pursuit, construction of view of happiness, the development of school education and the establishment and stability of China's social order are all closely related to family education.

1.2 Family-School Relationship

The relationship between family and school has recently received lots of attentions at home and abroad. Researchers' understandings of family-school relationship are all based on the deep cognition of family. For instance, Jin Yaoji believes that "according to the traditions in China, family is not only a unit of reproduction, but also a unit concerning all aspects of society, economy,

education, politics and even religions and entertainment. It is recognized as a fundamental force to keep up the social cohesion as a whole." (Jin, 1999, p.24) Xu (2013) promotes the connotation of family to the institutional level:

The household system, a combination of the integrated family system supposed by mighty traditions and the integrated household registration system supposed by powerful national administration, is a basic system or an original tradition of the rural society in China.

On the other hand, for the foreign researchers, family is "the setting where the child is born, develops and forms for life" (H. Catalano & C. Catalano, 2013), "the first place for the individual socialization as well as the formation of younger family members' personalities and behaviors (Kataki, 1994), and "a principal factor having a profound influence on the adolescents' development in all aspects" (Papanikolaou, 2011).

Based on what has stated above, some foreign researches concerned believe that "a good (family-school) relationship is not obvious, and it is established upon an amicable communication, certain objective requirements and successful guidance to cooperation and participation" (Pechackova, 2004); it demands the suppose of the following four major elements: "effective communication, initiation of contact, provide and protect, and contextual conditions" (Terrinieka, 2011); "a successful education lies on the reciprocal interaction and cooperation between family and school" (Blandul, 2012); though it is generally acknowledged that family-school collaboration "has an important influence on the development of the child's intelligence and social affection" (H. Catalano & C. Catalano, 2013), family-school relationship is not always bidirectional rather in most cases, "the relationship is unidirectional, i.e., from school to parents; in other words, parents' initiatives and motives for collaboration always depend on the teachers, and most parents are too busy or uninterested to be involved in such collaboration with school" (Blandul, 2012).

This study assumes that symbiotic family-school relationship is like a closed loop, through which the information, including textbooks, homework, children, parents' meeting and sports meeting and so on, circulate. Only upon common attention to these circulation elements and active participation in them can the symbiotic relationship between family and school be established. But the existing researches show that the family-school relationship in the real sense has not been formed yet. The current situation seems more to be "an unrequited love" from school to family: One of the bidirectional channels for communication operates well but the information elements circulated never get feedbacks. For this reason, circulation elements in the closed loop find no way to get back, thus greatly dispelling the effectiveness of family-school communication.

2. DILEMMA IN THE CURRENT PARADIGM FOR EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

At present, education in China has always been a topic of public condemnation from the level of institutional structure to the level of practical operation. Among the numerous critics are parents, teachers, educational researchers and governmental officials etc.. Apparently, the educational institution, the teaching faculty and the educational system become the target for all. Indeed, there is no doubt that many problems exist in Chinese education. Of the three kinds of misplaced educational dilemmas, the core relies on the fuzzy boundary of family's and school's responsibility for education.

2.1 Fuzziness in Family's and School's Responsibility for Education

With the emergence of human society comes the consciousness of cooperation in a due division of labor. Family is exactly a unit built on the ties of blood and the consciousness above. And its continuation cannot be free of the inherited experience and ability. Education, in this regard, is the carrier to implement such inheritance. Separation of family and school is the necessary requirement of a division of labor as well as cooperation and also the necessary result of the development of human society. Since the modern times, however, this kind of separation has been becoming increasingly fierce: family shrinks from the education responsibility in a bolder manner; and correspondently, school is extremely positioned on the axis field of education (or even as the only field to conduct education).

The boundary of family education and school education is not easy to define. Ideally, with the individual development, dynamic displacement should occur accordingly in this boundary: As for the individuals in infancy and early childhood, the leading role of child education mainly relies on family, whose tasks chiefly involve child nurture and care, the acquirement of common sense and the formation of habit; in the school-age period from elementary school to college, the learning of cultural knowledge lies in the schooling institution and the individuals in development will be shifted from their parents to school, but such education of how to get well along with others and how to form a good moral character is mostly edified and cultivated in family environment; when in the years of being an adult, the individuals tend to separate from their maternal family and build a new family of their own; meanwhile, the original family education will come after school education and social education, while the individual development is mainly reached by society or the emergent family; at the period of middle age and old age when individuals have spent almost half their life, family education will be dominant again in the individual development. Here

come the problems: the goals of school education and the responsibility of parental education cannot make proper adjustments to the advance of individuals' development. Accordingly, the boundary of family-school education becomes fuzzy or turbulent blindly, in the wake of which some odd phenomena arise such as family education's lagging behind and school education's assuming overall responsibility. At a time when education is the school's business only, family cannot form its partnership with education and even hinder the results of school education. This indicates the deep-rooted problems in China's education.

2.2 Delay of Social Education

Either the individuals or the family setting they live by is the developmental factor in society, thus forming the fundamental role of family education and school education to social education. Since the word "relationship" itself is categorized into the sociological field, all the social factors are already included in the core of this research—the "family-school relationship". To some degree, it stands to reason that school or family is like a subminiature of society. And this decides the role of school education and family education as foundations for the macroscopic social education. In this sense, the supplement of social education presupposes the ordered and effective development of the former two. Without the presupposition, it is beyond imagination for an individual to develop only by social education. And this is also why family-school education is principally discussed in this thesis.

In a broad sense, social education refers to influences and education implemented by all social life on personal physical and mental development. The influences originate from all social culture and social life. It is a huge project in the form of narrative which cannot be revised in short terms but be inherited and accumulated from generation to generation. In a narrow sense, social education means all kinds of educational activities for children, adolescents and adults that are implemented by any cultural education facilities except for school education. The successful cases of Bill Gates and Albert Einstein are surely no accident. In spite of the former abandoning school education and the latter abandoned by school education, the excellent family education is a common factor in their success.

In contrast to the educational idea of developed countries, the responsibility for education is all primarily assumed to school followed by family and society in China, especially in the less developed areas. The reasons why this idea is so prevailing in China are as follows: on the one hand, parents are not equipped with necessary awareness, habits and abilities of participation in education. Social education, on the other hand, does exist all the time; but it is merely because the inefficient family-school collaboration cripples its foundation that small quantities of attentions are drawn to it. For most people

insensitive toward education, social education is hard to conjecture or even to be noticed.

3. BASIS FOR FAMILY-SCHOOL-SYMBIOSIS PARADIGM

3.1 Framework of Symbiosis Theory

The evolution of human education has experienced a spiral escalation from primitivism to rivalry, and to symbiosis. Compared with protoplasm- and rivalry-education paradigm, symbiosis paradigm has its own characteristics. Xu Shuye states, “in the symbiosis education, the contradictory structure surpasses protoplasm education’s objectification structure in which there is no difference between subjects and objects and rivalry education’s subjectification structure in which there is a rivalry between subjects and objects. Instead, a mixed integrated structure of subject-object-subject symbiosis is generated. This is a compound structure where coupled motions happen between subjects and objects and also between objects themselves to generate new substances... and this kind of integrated structure does not exclude the uniqueness and independence of individuals. On the contrary, it presupposes the availability of individual life.” (Xu & Wei, 2007) “As an independent educational entity not institutionalized yet, school education and family education, together with social education, are in a rather harmonious state of symbiosis.” (Wu, 2011) This belongs to the primitive education paradigm. “With the institutionalization of school, school education is progressively reversed into a large-scale cause with a high level of socialization, forming a complicated relationship with society. It also becomes increasingly important in the overall education system and thus weakens the functions of family education and social education to some degree, taking the role of “the axis” of education (Ibid). This is the rivalry education development paradigm, in which much emphasis is laid on objects. In other words, it reinforces the status of school and students as educational subjects while weakening the status of family and parents as secondary education subjects.

In symbiosis theory, the basic features of symbiotic system such as its goal, integrity, openness, and self-organization etc. are demonstrated coupled with the emphasis on symbiotic elements and symbiotic relationship. This is the theoretical foundation and basic analytical method to discuss symbiotic education (Ibid). Under the family-school-symbiosis paradigm for education development, whether being independent entities or related entities, both family education and school education should possess such features above respectively. Only in this way can family-school-symbiosis paradigm for education development be formed.

3.2 Practical Demands of Family-School Development

Biologically, symbiotic relationship indicates the closely mutually beneficial relationship between two different biological species. But under the context of pedagogy, it means that neither family nor school can carry out education in isolation; instead, they will become much closer given the same educational objects. If family education and school education are metaphorical as two circles, ideally, the more they intersect, the more common attentions they draw to individuals (children), thus making it easier to communicate with each other. If these two circles become tangent afterwards, there will be an “either-or” situation where the symbiotic foundation is deprived. Finally if the two circles go further away from each other to produce the vacuum zone of education, deficiencies will be generated in both sides, let alone their symbiotic relationship.

According to the constructive educational desires of both the leaders from education department and school authorities, on the basis of school itself and its resources available, family-school symbiosis aims to get the new-generation family and future parents (undergraduates) prepared for a reasonable perception toward family education and to embed excellent cognitive genes for the future family education from a long-term view. In this way, family will hasten its exchanges with school, thus changing the unidirectional communication of “school-to-family” into the bidirectional “family-school-interaction” and forming the family-school-symbiosis paradigm for education development.

The family-school-symbiosis paradigm is hypothesized upon the present segregated family-school paradigm. It is an effective way to solve the existing education dilemma, and reduce family’s cognitive separation from school. It also contributes to family’s affective link to school and strengthens the bidirectional interaction between both sides, finally realizing the joint development of family, school and students.

4. INQUIRIES INTO THE GENERATION OF FAMILY-SCHOOL-SYMBIOSIS PARADIGM

4.1 To Construct a Learning-Type Family Based on the Concept of “Lifelong Learning”

Lifelong learning is officially proposed by Parl Lengrand during the international conference on “Promotions for Adult Education” organized by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in 1965. Three connotations are entailed in lifelong learning. Firstly, it involves all the learning activities and progress undertaken through life; secondly, as a developmental individual, the learning subject possesses significant

singularity and subjectivity; thirdly, the contents of learning keep pace with the times with a distinct space-time quality. Under the context of lifelong learning, the assumption of “nothing is impossible” sounds reasonable. Indeed this does not cater to the argument of “education being omnipotent” but offers full approvals for the education’s significance to human.

Lifelong education is a process in which individuals connect to their life in every aspect. It is also a unity existing along all the developmental phases of the entire life. In the sense of lifelong learning, family education concerns two aspects: Vertically, for one thing, in terms of lifelong learning, parents’ self-education is a kind of education within; horizontally, for the other, in regard of performing one’s duties, the reciprocal learning from each other between parents and children is a kind of education between individuals. These two kinds of education cannot be separated from each other abruptly. To be specific, in a family, education must be an ongoing process of interaction. The vertical family education starts from the moment when a family is set up while the integrated education starts the moment a baby is born accompanied with the intergenerational transmission of life. Apart from the emphasis on the significance of such learning concept of individual development, therefore, the idea of lifelong learning also highlights the learning concept’s inexorable influences on the harmonious development of the family. Not only does family education resides between parents and children but also in themselves. It is only when the adults (parents) realize this point that it is possible to build a learning-type family.

Learning-type family is the basic unit of a learning-type society, the foothold point of lifelong learning and the strategic choice for the construction of family-school-symbiosis paradigm. China has stepped into an information age in which lifelong learning enjoys the resources and channels provided by convenient access to internet and diversified internet media, and is able to build its foundation of qualities and abilities by the improved elementary education and the generally ameliorated education level. Only in the atmosphere of lifelong learning can possibilities be attached to the building of a learning-type family. Meanwhile, such building relies on two bases: one is the formation and maintenance of parents’ concept of lifelong learning and the other parents’ continuous passion for self-learning, ongoing learning behaviors and ever-updated learning conception. In the process of lifelong education with self-learning as its basic form, parents’ educational awareness will be reinforced, and the understanding of family-school relationship will be elevated. Besides, parents’ learning concept as well as the behavior itself is a type of family education. All this forms the starting point and advantages for the construction of family-school-symbiosis paradigm.

4.2 To Realize “the Kid Being Teachable” Based on New-Generation Families

Parent is a kind of professional category based on the fertility fact. The role of parents begins to work as soon as their kids got their birth. Except for the moral retribution, there have not been any other standardized rules or systems used to evaluate parental performance yet in China at present. Consequently, some parents fail to fulfill their duties or are reluctant to do that. The reason partially relies on parents’ lack of legal knowledge and moral conscience, and partially lies in their absence for school education (higher education).

The new-generation family in the 21st century with “the kid being teachable” and “the parents being able to teach” as its major features provides pragmatic foundation for the family-school-symbiosis paradigm. From the point of view of education, new-generation families demonstrate two distinct features. Firstly, with the implementation of reform and opening up, birth control and the first round of college expansion, parents are prominently those from one-child or two-child family with more education and stronger self-cognition. Their appeal of childcare is more dependent on the “people-oriented” principle. All this serves as important prerequisites for “the parents being able to teach”. Secondly, on the part of the kids, most of whom are the post 2000’s or 2010’s generation, they gradually initiate their pre-school education and compulsory education, thus becoming the main body of the current school education. At the same time, the colorful world and ever-changing society will foster them with more experience with which they have a more detailed and visualized process of growing up. Thus they seem cleverer and more agile than the previous generation. That is the realistic base for “the kids being teachable”.

The cases of “the kids being teachable” and “the parents being able to teach” make it possible to fully use the educational force of family unit. During this process, school education’s professional advantages can give impetus to the all-round development of family education which in turn supplements the deficiencies of the former. This can be discussed from three aspects as follows:

To begin with, after a full comprehension of the current situation of family-school relationship, and on the basis of the existing school system for primary education, schools for parental education should be established, communicative activities be organized in a planned and centralized way and the channel of “family-to-school” be explored and opened, thus scoring mutual effective exchanges for both sides. Secondly, make the most of communication media like “Families-school Connection” and “Family-School Communication” in China Mobile as well as the trend of parents becoming more educated than before. Moreover, new-generation parents should be imbued with intensified awareness of

the importance of family education and family-school communication. Consequently, it is more likely for family members to take an active part in school activities to make breaking-through strikes in education collaboration. The development of education is thereby directed into the way of family-school interaction. Thirdly, based upon the school resources on hand, vocational teachers can be organized to set up a counseling site specialized for education where one-to-one counseling services are available for parents. In this way, the constructive suggestions provided will help parents resolve the problems in family education and also their concerns or worries about being involved in the family-school communication.

4.3 To Provide Early Theoretical Involvement for the Future Main Body of Family Education With the Curricular Reform of Higher Education as the Access Point

Since the college expansion in 1999, higher education in China has witnessed its rapid development. With the breaking of the gross enrollment rate of 15% in 2002, China's higher education has entered its stage of popularization. And an increase of 15% in 2012 over a decade indicates the higher education steadily strikes into its new stage of generalization. Furthermore, according to the State Statistical Bureau, in 2012, the labor population at the age of 15 to 59 in China kept declining for the first time in a rather long period, a decrease of 3.45 million in number than that of 2011. This indicates there would be a tendency of disappearance for the demographic dividend.¹ Higher education population in China is concentrated in those at the age of 16 to 30. The absolute figure of school-age population would decline with the drop of that of labor population. Higher education system is currently becoming increasingly mature in China while the school-age population declines. Such phenomenon implies the trend of "supply exceeding demand" in the future higher education and the speeding up from popularization to generalization. This, absolutely, is beneficial for elevating the overall quality of China's working population.

The present school-age population for higher education is also the future parents-to-be. They form a group with the most mental and physical maturity, a group who will get married and start their own careers the earliest, and a group with the most detailed objective demands. The improvement of their quality and ability will lead them into a better understanding of the basic goals and tasks in school education. Thus, an agreement with school on education will be reached. Additionally, the reinforcement of their rational cognition of family and family education will make this group take a more serious attitude toward the role of parents and facilitate their collaboration with school. In terms of higher education, China's bottom-

up curriculum system should be revised in the aspects concerning family education and childcare education, for example, the absence of sociology of family, sociology of marriage, pedagogy of family and psychology of family. Given the fact the undergraduates who are about to enter the society have been equipped with the mental and physical conditions for marriage and family life, courses related to the aspects displayed above should be set up to provide essential theories for them to perform their duties as parents. To be specific, it can be discussed from the following points:

First is to abandon the concept of instrumental education; instead, elective courses such as family series selective courses related to marriage, family and childcare and so on, should be set up for all grades with individuals' holistic development and happiness as the goal. Second is to formulate feasible standards on the basis of which students are allowed to select the curricula autonomously. As a consequence, marriage and family life can be included into the courses through which students are offered a chance to recognize the theories of family life. Also they can clarify the puzzling and blind awareness of marriage and love, and eliminate the inferiority of family education completely. Third is to get students to define their sense of family responsibility through these courses. Theoretically, this can provide the parents-to-be with an early access to the enlightenment of family cognition and childbearing, lest the future children get misled by the parents' back-and-forth correction of their education concepts and behaviors.

5. THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION: PERFECT REALIZATION OF FAMILY-SCHOOL-SYMBIOSIS PARADIGM

The future development of a nation is anchored to the present generation as well as the next. Without education, the next generation will never register a sound development. Education itself is not an isolated category. Actually, it needs the collaboration of many aspects, among which family, school and society are indispensable to each other. Only when the former two fulfill their duties well and optimize their cooperation can social education be carried out. To sum up, family-school-symbiosis paradigm is a matter concerning the future education. With the amelioration of living standards, the improvement of elementary education and the popularization of higher education and so on, future new-generation families are bound to play a role in the family-school-symbiosis relationship.

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