

Exploration of Predicament and Way out of Chinese Preschool Teachers' Practical Knowledge Development

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Abstract. Preschool teachers' practical knowledge development and professional development has intrinsic consistency. However, Chinese preschool teachers have been beset with severe difficulties when trying hard to develop their practical knowledge, because of the tacit and situational characteristics of practical knowledge. In this connection, several ways in accordance with the principle of the practical knowledge are analyzed and suggested to break through the bottleneck of practical knowledge development of Chinese preschool teachers, i.e. to awake the consciousness of the practical knowledge, to form the habit of reflection on practice, to build up the mechanism of joint development of practical knowledge, and to develop multiple channels for the sharing of practical knowledge.

Keywords: Chinese Preschool Teachers, Practical Knowledge, Predicament, Strategies.

1 Introduction

Teachers' practical knowledge is the foundation of their professional development [1]; at the same time, acquisition and accumulation, deepening and externalization of teachers' practical knowledge is an effective and specific way of their professional development [2]. Preschool teachers' practical knowledge is "an applying theory" constructed and accumulated in their teaching activities, which plays multiple roles such as observing, supporting, selecting, standardizing and guiding in the process of teaching activities for preschool teachers. In view of the current low occupational expectation and the weak professional identity of preschool teachers in China, to strengthen and improve the training of preschool teachers' practical knowledge not only can effectively resolve the preschool teachers' professional crisis, which is to equalizing the preschool teachers stuff to female career, experience career and love career (i.e. pre-education teachers only require the general experiences and love to take care of the children), also help preschool teachers eliminate the blind compliance on the theoretical knowledge and experts, in order to change them from "customers" of the theoretical education knowledge into "producers" of the practical knowledge and form a strong sense of professional identity and independent development.

2 The Development Predicament of Preschool Teachers' Practical Knowledge

Preschool teachers' practical knowledge is a "how-to-do" strategic understanding system based on their past life history and practical experience to deal with the specific teaching situations, whose formation and development is affected by the individual, environment and many other factors. But because of the tacit and situational characteristics of preschool teachers' practical knowledge, it hasn't been emphasized and remains in a state of silent development for a long time, sinking into the tough development predicament.

2.1 The Collective Aphasia of Preschool Teachers' Practical Knowledge

As D.H. Hargreaves puts it, "Teachers often ignore the professional knowledge itself, which causes the teachers fail to apply and share this knowledge; Similarly, the teachers often don't realize what knowledge they lack, which makes it difficult for them to find out what new knowledge to create. Teachers' professional knowledge is a complex system, and no teachers can know the overall professional knowledge of all teachers." [3] Although practical knowledge is an important carrier of the preschool teachers' professional reflection, in practice of China, both kindergarten managers and preschool teachers all lack the attention on practical knowledge and its importance. They are deeply bonded by those traditional concepts of knowledge and not realizing that the implicit practical knowledge is the true master of their teaching practical activities and the fundamental influence of their professional knowledge growth. They usually only consider the practical knowledge as a kind of teaching experience and rarely reflect or be willing to deeply process and reconstruct them. The teachers only obtain fragmental practical knowledge through daily class evaluations, kindergarten-based discussion and other activities, which make up loose structure and non-depth system.

2.2 The Weak Professional Self-development Consciousness of Preschool Teachers

At present, it is not only that the entry threshold for preschool teachers is low in China, but the preschool teachers also encountered problems such as poor personnel management, low wages, and high liquidity. Many of them think that preschool profession is for youth only and they will usually choose another career after several years' kindergarten working. So their professional development is non-persistent and lacking career planning and motivation. In addition, lack of theoretical accomplishment and professional guidance also hinder the update of the practical knowledge. Preschool teachers in China are usually lower educated and they have insufficient theoretical reservation; furthermore, they often get lost in daily chores of kindergarten working and are too busy to reflect on their own teaching practices, not to mention lacking for direction from expert for long.

2.3 The Defects and Setbacks of Preschool Teachers' Education and Training

Influenced by technical rationality, pre-service and in-service education for preschool teachers in China take the "should-be" linear way of thinking under an ideal state; we pay attention to the learning of theoretical knowledge and the training of educational technology, aiming to cultivate skilled craftsmen. Educators and trainers take the dominant and often act as the professional authority in communication with preschool teachers, which makes it hard for them to analyze and discuss practical problems with preschool teachers on an equal footing. Thus, they cannot offer targeted professional guidance and support to preschool teachers. At the same time, they only pay attention to impart theoretical knowledge completely and systematically, rather than to deal with practical issues that preschool teachers have encountered. Therefore, this extrinsic training model makes the development of preschool teachers materialized and objectification. Preschool teachers lack for their own goals and initiatives, unwilling to participate in learning.

2.4 The Rigid Control of the Kindergarten Management Institution

In current China, more than 70% of kindergartens are running privately, and they have to face fierce competitions and shoulder tremendous survival pressure. As a consequence, more attentions are paid to the characteristics of kindergarten building, brand promotion and construction of hardware conditions. And what's more, the enterprise mode for management is taken which is centered with efficiency. This mode emphasizes on the administrative management of general affairs such as people, money, materials, stresses the student recruitment and logistics, and ignores the management of preschool teachers' individual thoughts, accomplishments and abilities. The appointment and management of preschool teachers in those kindergartens show a strong utilitarian philosophy, e.g. basic salary is linked up with heavy workload; or, attendance and professional work are quantized to strictly assess preschool teachers. These institutions greatly suppress preschool teachers' autonomy and motivation. Thus, the practical knowledge of preschool teachers updates slow under the existing kindergarten system.

2.5 Cultural Indifference and Isolation of Preschool Teachers

Preschool teachers take class as the basic unit to carry out teaching and nursing activities. In this class-management system, only those teaching in the same class would communicate on the cultivation of the children, and teachers of different classes have no teaching relationship, no demand and platform of cooperation and are relatively isolated. At the same time, because of the high liquidity among preschool teachers, they don't have external conditions to do deep cooperation and communication. Under the administrative level system established by the kindergarten managers, they usually just follow instructions of the managers and obey the administrative orders. In addition, many kindergartens don't pay attention to construct the teacher cooperative culture, lack open, democrat, free, trusty, supportive

cultural environment, and seldom arrange mutual observing-and-evaluating activities or other regular teaching communication activities.

3 Strategies to Promote the Development of Preschool Teachers' Practical Knowledge

The development of preschool teachers' practical knowledge is in the process of forming new practical knowledge, to continue to inspect, transform and reorganize the practical knowledge, making the content more perfect, the structure more reasonable, which follows the cumulative effect, based on the theoretical knowledge, taking the problematic situations as cause, practical reflections as method, social activities as extension and multi-channel promotion as a whole. Based on the technical route of developing preschool teachers' practical knowledge, to circumvent the obstruction of adverse factors, the following strategies can be taken by kindergartens to accelerate the pace of development of preschool teachers' practical knowledge.

3.1 Awakening Consciousness of Preschool Teachers' Practical Knowledge

Generally, preschool teachers' professional identity is low, which seriously restricts their professional development. As a result, the priority to promote the development of preschool teachers' practical knowledge is to awaken preschool teachers to aware their own practical knowledge, let them realize that the practical knowledge is of significant importance to improve the effect of teaching practices and reflect their own professional, so as to stimulate preschool teachers to participate, pay attention to their subject position, practical experience and independent growth process. At the same time, it is also important to guide the preschool teachers to form career pursuing ideas with self-cognitive ability, self-reflection consciousness and self-development vision, in order to develop a professional work attitude, through constantly solving teaching problems in practice and long-term critical reflections to realize a set of effective rules to cope with the practices and better to deal with complicated teaching situations. It can be realized by depicting metaphors, drawing self-portraits, explaining the self-development will, and designing independent study schedules and career planning.

3.2 Forming the Preschool Teachers' Habit of Reflection on Practice

As mentioned above, reflection is the basis of generation and development of the preschool teachers' practical knowledge, which requires preschool teachers' repeat scrutiny and constant observation to the complex problematic situations, corresponding behaviors and effects, in order to find more appropriate strategies. The important task to promote the development of preschool teachers' practical knowledge is to make preschool teachers form a kind of criticism consciousness and consciously reflect on their teaching practices. The ways of preschool teachers' reflection on

practices are various, including writing diaries, preparing a lesson after class, narrative researches and action researches, which are to percept, inspect, analyze, synthesize and evaluate their own teaching practices. The reflection can also be achieved by listening to classes, evaluating classes, taking teaching notes, which can learn from others' experience of their teaching practices. But if teachers want to make reflection to achieve continuous promotion effects to the development of preschool teachers' practical knowledge, they cannot regard reflection as a phase of a task, rather to make preschool teachers maintain a state of introspection all the time, plant reflection into their careers, be diligent and delight in reflection and form the reflection habit. Preschool teachers' reflection habit not only shows in spontaneously thinking and questioning, but also in the constant exploring interest on practical problems.

3.3 Building up Joint Development Mechanism of Preschool Teachers' Practical Knowledge

The representative of the Reggio Teaching, Loris Malaguzzi, believes that preschool teachers must give up isolated and silent working mode and build up a platform for preschool teachers' joint growth, which can urge preschool teachers to realize the accumulation, migration, sharing and innovation of a variety of practical knowledge in cooperation, dialogues and interactions, and the overall effect of the practical knowledge. Therefore, kindergartens can implement mentor-apprentice system, that is, to pair up experienced preschool teachers and new preschool teachers. Through the guidance, demonstration and hands-on parenting of experienced preschool teachers in the actual teaching activities, new preschool teachers can attain the implicit learning and gain practical knowledge. Second, kindergartens should establish preschool teachers' practice community. Namely, under the equal, democrat, innovate, inclusive, cooperate, interacting and open cultural atmosphere, kindergartens can build up a mutual-beneficial symbiotic system including preschool teachers, kindergarten administrators, preschool education theory experts or students majored in preschool teaching, in which preschool teachers can get diversified, multi-level and multi-dimensional dialogues and guidance, and integrate the experience advantages of the community members. Third, the kindergartens can organize salon activities on a certain practical problem, a key event or activity designs, making the preschool teachers to better extract and reflect on their daily using theories which they don't aware under the outside force, promoting the public spread of preschool teachers' practical knowledge, and inspiring them to think over the practices.

3.4 Use Network and Multimedia Technology to Develop Multiple Channels for the Preschool Teachers' Practical Knowledge Sharing

Preschool teachers' practical knowledge can rely on internet surfing, video viewing and multimedia technology to transfer and spread with more effects. To broaden their horizons and enrich preschool teachers' practical knowledge, kindergartens should

exchange generously, organize regular observation activities, and recording courses of high quality as a model for other teachers' study. In the process of participation and observation of excellent preschool teachers' teaching practices, preschool teachers can feel the dramatic impact of wonderful teaching activities and develop the inspiration to create innovation of the practical knowledge. They also can learn effective practical strategies to shorten their time of exploring the practical knowledge. In addition, in contemporary society with the more popularizing computers and constantly advanced Internet technology, the kindergartens also can encourage teachers to use blog, weibo (a twitter like software), public forum, QQ (an IM software) group chatting and other Internet platforms to share practical experiences and collect useful information. This is an effective way for preschool teachers to collect and improve the practical knowledge. Meanwhile, free communication on the Internet can encourage preschool teachers to obtain some operation strategies to tackle the problems and deepen practical knowledge in exchanges of ideas.

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