Issues and Solutions Concerning Pre-Career Training Provided by Junior colleges for Pre-School Education Majors

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Abstract

Pre-school education programs available in junior colleges have produced numerous excellent kindergarten teachers for the society and are regarded as an important constituent in the kindergarten teacher training system. Thus, to enhance teaching levels for pre-school education majors and improve professional qualities of kindergarten teachers is China’s basic requirement on pre-school education reforms and an essential prerequisite for the ongoing development of the society. Through literature review, face-to-face interviews and questionnaire surveys, the author gives a preliminary definition of pre-school education programs and pre-career training and lists issues existing in current pre-career training programs provided by junior colleges for pre-school education majors, including students’ lack of interest in pre-school education programs, deficiencies in the present curriculum design, monotonous teaching means and limited internship periods. These issues not only impede the development of pre-school education programs in junior colleges but also seriously hinder students’ future career development. Therefore, on the basis of extensive theory studies and research findings and by means of an analysis of questionnaire results, this paper presents solutions concerning pre-career training for pre-school education majors, including enhancement of students’ career identification, improvement of curriculum design, optimization and adjustment of teaching methods and establishment of a good internship mechanism, in the hope of improving pre-school education majors’ career-related qualities and capabilities and developing them to be qualified kindergarten teachers.

KeyWords: Pre-School Education Majors, Junior Colleges, Pre-Career Training, Issues And Solutions.

1. BACKGROUND

Pre-school education is an important part in China’s basic education and the foundation of in-school education and lifelong education. Since the reform and opening up, China’s pre-school education has developed rapidly with tremendous accomplishments and an increasingly high level of popularization (Yan and Rui, 2006). However, generally speaking, compared with other types of education, pre-school education still has many shortcomings (Kong, 2016). To facilitate the development of pre-school education has a direct bearing on the growth of tens of thousands of children and personal interests of countless families, and moreover, it even concerns the future development of China and the Chinese nation. Local governments should fully realize the importance and urgency in driving the development of pre-school education and give priority to it (Zhou, 2015). Nowadays, with the shift of pre-school education programs from Tier-3 normal colleges such as junior colleges and vocational schools to Tier-2 exemplary institutions such as teachers’ colleges, China’s talent development for pre-school education has reached a critical phase. However, there are clear differences between junior colleges and kindergarten teachers’ schools in terms of talent development goals for the profession as their focuses are totally different (Party, 2014). With increasingly high requirements for kindergarten teachers and growingly great demand for highly qualified and skilled teachers, many secondary vocational schools are trying to adjust their talent development objectives. Nevertheless, junior colleges, after upgrading, are so overwhelmed with heavy reform tasks concerning faculty, student enrolment and course design that they cannot handle such an important mission within such a short time (Yan, 2006). As undergraduate programs for pre-school education majors in universities are too focused on theoretical teaching with little attention paid to practice and many university graduates are reluctant to work in rural areas, graduates from junior colleges have gained favor with most kindergartens and parents (Wang, 2011).

Junior colleges have potentials to produce teachers for the pre-school education profession. However, there are some issues evident in their training processes. Therefore, based on current realities, this paper is intended to make an in-depth analysis of the issues existing in current pre-career training for pre-school education majors in
junior colleges and put forward appropriate solutions to fuel the development of pre-school education programs in junior colleges and achieve the aim of producing required kindergarten teachers for the society.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Interviews: Comprehensive interviews with pre-school education majors, graduates, college leaders and lecturers, and professionals engaged in pre-school education were conducted to learn about respondents’ views and understandings about how to enhance professional qualities and skills of pre-school education majors and to understand specific requirements that the profession of kindergarten teachers has for pre-school education professionals.

Literature review: Through data collection online and from the library, the author compiled and analyzed research findings from files, newspapers, and research papers. After a meticulous review and analysis of research results regarding teachers’ professional ethics and career development trends, required competences and qualities for pre-school education majors, and teachers’ teaching methods and concepts, the author has identified issues inherent in pre-career training for pre-school education majors in junior colleges as well as corresponding solutions.

Questionnaire survey: To ensure the adequacy and comprehensiveness of the research, an in-depth questionnaire survey was conducted with pre-school education majors from a locally influential junior college. The college set up its pre-school education program in 2004. After 13 years of development, it has accumulated rich experience in training and developing qualified kindergarten teachers.

During the survey, a total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to 20 selected respondents and 80 pre-school education majors, including 14 from Class 2013, 23 from Class 2014, 26 from Class 2015 and 17 from Class 2016, and 80 valid questionnaires were returned. Besides, a total of 60 questionnaires were sent to teachers, including 30 to kindergarten principals, and all were effectively returned. During the questionnaire survey, 16 questions, mainly concerning course design, teaching objectives, teaching contents, teaching methods and internship opportunities, were asked. These questions were designed in accordance with the definition and requirements regarding professional qualities and competences of pre-school education professionals, and assumptions regarding respondents were made as follows. First, there’s a huge gap between different kindergarten teachers in terms of professional capabilities. Second, there are quite a few issues surrounding pre-career training for pre-school education majors in junior college.

Table 1 Basic information of surveyed personnel (respondents)

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<th>Survey population</th>
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3. ISSUES EXISTING IN PRE-CAREER TRAINING FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION MAJORS IN JUNIOR COLLEGES

3.1 Students’ lack of interest in pre-school education programs

Interest in learning is the key to excellent academic performance. Only when a student has interest in his/her major can he/she be fully absorbed in learning. A student’s interest in his/her major is the basic source of motivation for him/her to work hard, to explore, to persist and to make contributions to the society. Therefore, junior colleges offering pre-school education programs should attach importance to the cultivation of students’ interest in their major. When asked about whether they are “interested in the major”, 56% of the students surveyed express great interest in pre-school education programs, and 34% indicate moderate or slight interest, while 6% say that they had no interest at all and the rest 4% show an indifferent attitude. According to Table 2 followed, a majority of the students surveyed have slight or little interest in their own major.

During interviews with teachers from pre-school education programs, many teachers point out that only a small
portion of students in their classes are highly interested in learning whereas most students fail to devote themselves to learning as they don’t have clear learning objectives and tend to be indolent and slack towards learning. Some students, with a weak foundation of prerequisite knowledge or little understanding of good learning methods, often become anxious about learning. For them, it’s quite difficult to understand most of what is taught. As a result, they tend to be ostrichlike and shrink from such challenges. There are also some students who display great passion and motivation for learning both in class and in academic activities at the start of their college years but later show a diminution of enthusiasm with the passage of time. In consequence, their attitude towards learning gets less and less serious, and their passion for learning also declines. Such cases fully demonstrate that pre-school education majors in junior colleges generally show a low level of identification with their own major. This also indicates junior colleges’ failure to clarify specific learning objectives, which results in non-alignment between colleges and teachers in terms of objectives and students’ feelings of disorientation when it comes to what they should achieve in pre-school education programs.

![Figure 1. Do you like preschool education](image)

**3.2 Deficiencies in curriculum design**

The curriculum design for a pre-school education program determines the final results of pre-career training and even students’ future career development. Courses in a pre-school education program in a junior college mainly include theories on pre-school education, infant psychology, and education psychology and so on. Many colleges normally design their courses in accordance with the industry’s expectations and requirements for pre-school education professions with little consideration of their own actual development conditions and students’ personal abilities and even with no regard for students’ comprehensive development. Consequently, their overall curriculum system is not complete. When asked about “shortcomings about the curriculum”, most students express satisfaction with their current curriculum while a small number of students complain about over-simple courses, monotonous teaching methods and a lack of opportunities of practice. Please refer to Figure 2 for detailed information.

First, the current curriculum for pre-school education majors in junior colleges covers the development of students’ professional qualities and capabilities. Pitifully, as students’ personal conditions such as levels of understanding, behavioral preferences, habits and degrees of interest are not taken into account, such curriculum fails to inspire in students passion for and interest in learning. Second, courses are too focused on theoretical teaching about pre-school education with few opportunities of practice, resulting in students’ inability to quickly adjust them to the work environment after graduation. Third, courses on basic theories and teaching contents of different subjects are quite simple, which is not good for students to enhance their comprehensive capabilities. Curriculum designers give too much emphasis on the development of students’ artistic skills. While this is important for students’ future career development, kindergarten teachers are required not only to have basic knowledge but also competences in music, dancing, and painting. Only in this way can future kindergarten teachers facilitate comprehensive development of children and can their important role be effectively performed. However, pre-school education programs in junior colleges only teach students skills without telling them specific methods for teaching these skills. As a consequence, students with good artistic skills cannot accomplish the goal of educating pre-schoolers.
What are the shortcomings of the curriculum?

- Obsolete knowledge
- Content duplication
- Lack of literacy education
- Limited teacher level
- Weak practice teaching
- Teaching mode is single
- The curriculum structure is simple

Figure 2. What are the shortcomings of the curriculum

3.3 Monotonous teaching methods

Teaching methods mainly refer to effective means that teachers adopt in disseminating knowledge to students to enhance their comprehensive capabilities. Effective and appropriate teaching methods can directly influence students’ learning efficiency and determine teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, they are also an important source of influence that contributes to the generation, optimization and transformation of learning methods and a basic factor that drives students to change their forms of learning.

How teachers teach students of pre-school education will have a profound influence on how pre-school education majors will educate pre-schoolers in their future careers (Yang, 2011). The focus of sound and reasonable teaching methods is often on the development of students’ comprehensive capabilities, and the teacher is required to teach students basic theories, develop their innovativeness and curiosity for constant explorations, enhance their professional qualities and capabilities, and stimulate their ability of thinking in different ways (Zuo and Li, 2012). In addition, the teacher is expected to encourage students to identify and solve problems in the process of learning and improve their ability to apply their learnings. When asked about “whether teachers’ teaching methods can achieve learning objectives” during the questionnaire survey with students, 13.2% of the students surveyed believe that their teachers’ teaching methods can help achieve learning objectives and 54.3% responds that most teachers can while the remaining 32.5% holds that just a few teachers’ teaching methods can help them achieve learning objectives. For detailed information, please refer to Figure 3 followed. From the survey results, it can be seen that most students are satisfied with the teaching methods currently adopted by teachers of pre-school education in junior colleges. Nevertheless, such teaching methods are still confined by traditional teaching concepts and modes, with the existence of outdated teaching contents and backward teaching methods. Besides, the lack of opportunities of practice during the teaching process for pre-school education majors in junior college results in the non-alignment between practice courses and the reality, which further leads to students’ incompetence in the application of what they have learnt in real-life situations.

Figure 3. Can teacher’s teaching methods achieve the goal
When asked about “main teaching methods used in class” during interviews with teachers, 62.4% of the respondents say that they normally use the traditional teaching method, namely, cramming. 26.1% responds that they adopt a cooperative teaching process where students are divided into different learning teams in accordance with specific knowledge to be disseminated to discuss related questions for cooperative learning, and those adopting other teaching methods represent 11.5%. For detailed information, please refer to Figure 4 followed.

![Figure 4. Main teaching methods in class](image)

### 3.4 Limited internship periods

According to the results of the survey into students’ views and thoughts about internship opportunities, the following conclusion is made. First, most students think that their internship periods are too short. The start of an internship period is mainly characterized by attending lectures and visiting (Li, 2013). Nonetheless, after the student has been adapted to the internship environment and ready for practice opportunities, the remaining internship time is already too limited. Students hope that their internship periods can be further extended. Second, students believe that what is taught should be closely related to real education situations in kindergartens. However, in the current curriculum system available in junior colleges, students, without enough internship opportunities, have a superficial understanding of key learning points and theoretical knowledge. They wish that the college could combine practice with learning in designing the curriculum and could arrange for students regular visits to kindergarten for on-site learning when disseminating basic knowledge (Ma, 2014). Third, during internship periods, students have very limited opportunities to exchange ideas with kindergarten teachers, and spend most of their time observing. As a result, they cannot effectively solve difficulties encountered during their internship, and the internship opportunity fails to achieve its original intention. Fourth, some students suggest that internship opportunities should be incorporated into different phases of courses, and should not be concentrated within a certain period. The college should make internship plans and progressively organize internship activities. Besides, they should arrange opportunities for students to practice skills so as to address their weak points in learning. Before students formally enter the profession, the college should arrange students to serve as full-time interns in kindergartens they partner with to help students to gain a deeper understanding of their future work processes and teaching contents.

### 4. SOLUTIONS TO THE ISSUES CONCERNING PRE-CAREER TRAINING OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION MAJORS IN JUNIOR COLLEGES

#### 4.1 To enhance students’ career identification

Students’ identification with their career is a psychological state. It mainly refers to an individual’s views about the prospects and work values about the profession he / she is engaged in as well as the society’s comprehensive assessment and expectations for his / her career. It directly determines an individual’s level of dedication to work and motivation as well as his / her achievement of work values. Therefore, while establishing teaching objectives and pre-career training goals for pre-school education majors, junior colleges should seek to enhance students’ identification with their future profession as a kindergarten teacher and improve their professional qualities and values. To begin with, junior colleges can help students develop correct professional ethics and values through in-class teaching, and make full use of social resources to educate students and strengthen their identification with their career. (Li, 2014) For example, junior colleges should organize lectures and public classes on a regular basis and invite kindergarten teachers to share with pre-school education majors work
experience, interesting things about work, and their sense of happiness and achievement derived from work. Real-life examples given by kindergarten teachers can help students gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the profession and what they want to achieve in it and learn about feelings of happiness to be a kindergarten teacher. Besides, junior colleges can also arrange students to visit kindergartens where they can have face-to-face interactions with children, feel in person the happiness about the work, and be sincerely motivated to join the profession of pre-school education. Furthermore, during the teaching process, teachers should highlight career identification and help students understand the important social responsibilities they will assume. Teachers should also highlight students’ role in class and guide them to learn from and reflect on what they have experienced and done so that students can constantly enhance their awareness of and identification with the career during the process.

4.2 To optimize the curriculum
First, junior colleges should diversify optional courses available for pre-school education majors. Most students majoring in pre-school education are interested in art-related courses. Therefore, junior colleges should add courses such as music education for infants, fine arts education, and class management into the curriculum as they will help students to acquire professional skills that will be important for them to succeed in the profession and be highly used at work. Second, an all-around reform of the current curriculum should be completed to address its deficiencies. (Zhang, 2016). Teachers should change teaching concepts, and create innovative teaching models. College authorities should enhance teachers’ comprehensive qualities by periodically organizing them to participate in professional training programs so that they can learn about the latest concepts in China’s present pre-school education, collect first-hand information, identify related professional trends, clarify teaching objectives and standards concerning the new curriculum and improve the existing one. In addition, college authorities should improve the teaching evaluation and incentive system to increase teachers’ passion for work, motivate them to be fully devoted to teaching and inspire them to play an active role in the curriculum reform. (Zhang, 2017). Last but not least, the current student assessment system should be optimized to cover students’ academic performance, in-class performance and progress in learning to ensure a comprehensive assessment of students’ learning. To improve students’ professional qualities and skills, it’s important to ensure the objectiveness and student-centeredness of the assessment system. It’s necessary not only to analyze and assess students’ learning results but also to summarize and evaluate their professional ethics and qualities.

4.3 To innovate teaching methods
Teachers should, in accordance with the development trends of pre-school education in the current market, proactively change their teaching concepts, innovate their teaching methods, and constantly adjust and improve teaching contents. During the teaching process, teachers should adhere to the principle of human-centeredness. They should take students’ actual differences in learning into consideration and use such teaching methods as are best adapted to students. (Xu, 2015). They should also highlight students’ strengths to further improve teaching efficiency and quality. Besides, they should, on the basis of basic teaching and students’ interests, encourage students to join hobby groups with a controlled size of 25 people to help them further develop their strengths and improve their interest in the major. Furthermore, teachers can adopt the multi-level teaching method. That is, teachers can, based on students’ aptitude and academic performance, divide students into teams of different levels and give different teams different learning assignments to help students to appropriately increase their knowledge on the basis of their own aptitude and improve their competences in other fields. As for the final assessment, teachers should create different assessment systems that feature student-centeredness to ensure assessment diversification. Through such a comprehensive teaching model, it’s believed that students’ passion and motivation for learning can be inspired and win-win results can be achieved for both teachers and students. In the meantime, teachers should have a clear understanding of the role they play in class. They should be good guides and organizers and enable students to have control over the class. As for courses on basic theories, teachers should reasonably plan the class time to ensure that students will have enough time to discuss and digest the knowledge. Teachers should combine cramming with interactive teaching and increase in-class communication with students. Teachers should also timely track students’ learning progress to improve the efficiency of classroom teaching.

4.4 To improve the internship system
Firstly, junior colleges should proactively implement the college-kindergarten cooperation model and establish close and deep relations with locally influential kindergartens to create good internship platforms for students and ensure students’ access to internship resources. In addition, junior colleges should work with kindergartens to develop pre-career training plans and invite kindergarten teachers and principals to join the teaching team to provide guidance for teachers and students, help teachers improve teaching plans and update students on the latest industry news. Secondly, when college authorities organize students to visit kindergartens they partner
with for observation and internship, they should provide students with opportunities for in-depth interaction and understanding. Instead of arranging a superficial visit, they should help students to be truly adapted to their future work environment (Qi, 2009). For example, they can arrange students to serve as kindergarten teachers’ temporary substitutes to have close interactions with pre-schoolers to understand children’s psychological state and real needs and to apply their learnings to practice. During the process, kindergartens partnering with junior colleges can equip students with a kindergarten teacher who can guide students to fully understand detailed work processes and priorities and become well adapted to the work. College authorities should include students’ internship performance into the final assessment system and build a solid foundation for students’ future career development.

5. CONCLUSION

Pre-school educators are practitioners in organizing pre-school education. They apply modern and innovative pre-school education concepts to pre-schoolers’ healthy development and are a fundamental force that drives the continuous development and advancement of pre-school education. To improve pre-career training of pre-school education majors in junior colleges is a basic demand from the society and an inevitable choice for the development of pre-school education programs in junior colleges. Against such a background, pre-school majors should have the positive motivation for constant explorations, noble professional ethics and good professional qualities. What’s more, they should be interdisciplinary talents with comprehensive and thorough professional knowledge and high levels of application skills. Teachers of pre-school education in junior colleges should fully realize their shortcomings in the pre-career training process and proactively change their teaching concepts and methods. They should be brave to innovate and experiment with new things to enrich their curriculum system, optimize the assessment system and the internship mechanism, and inspire students with their own professionalism. In this way, they can improve students’ identification with the profession and help produce more outstanding talents for the pre-school education profession in China.

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