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Case Study

Strategies of Preschool Teachers' Professional Growth in Underdeveloped Region in the East China- A Case Study of Linyi City, Shandong Province*

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Abstract

With more emphases laid on preschool education in China, infant education as the weak link of basic education has attracted much attention. In the underdeveloped areas, infant education is the weakest part of basic education, promoting the professional development of preschool teachers, which has become the key to improving the level of early childhood education. In this paper, we take Linyi region as the example of core area of Yimeng Mountain Range to study the strategies of preschool teachers' profession growing. By the ways of the investigation and in-depth interviews, we found the prominent problems, such as little investment in preschool education, backwardness in the educational ideas and the large mobility of teachers in Linyi. In response to this situation, this case proposes the strategies for the kindergarten teachers' professional development from the perspective of teachers' growing process in underdeveloped areas for the first time: under the premise of increasing the investment in infant education from the government, the education authorities select the kindergarten teacher with strong sense of infant education into induction, and strengthen the vocational training education from experts and learn by organizing learning communities of new and old teachers, so as to promote the professional growth of preschool teachers. These strategies have certain referential significance for the rapid development of infant education under the circumstance of collaboration with the government, schools and teachers in underdeveloped coastal areas.

Keywords

Kindergarten Teachers • Social Input • Preschool Consciousness • The Community of Learning

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Preschool education is an important component of elementary education and it's also the beginning of lifelong learning. The fundamental education is one of the most important strategies of the national education power (Helmerhorst, Riksen-Walraven, Deynoot-Schaub, Tavecchio & Fukkink, 2015; Keyser & Ahn, 2017). It plays key roles for the future of children and country. However, preschool education is the weakest part of basic education, has some obvious region and urban-rural differences, besides this Two-child policy come into effect, all of this make preschool education obvious contradiction between supply and demand. In order to solve this problem, improving infant education as well as making kindergarten teachers' professional growth is the key to this. The infant education level is a little bit backward in the eastern coastal underdeveloped areas of China, so kindergarten teacher need to accept training and learn actively to improve their professional level. Linyi as a representative region of eastern coastal underdeveloped areas for study research, which is an old revolution region with undeveloped economy and poor education located in the southeast of Shandong province. In the basic of local infant education survey and kindergarten teacher development's influence analysis, we propose the strategies for the kindergarten teachers' professional growth in the eastern coastal underdeveloped areas.

The status of kindergarten teachers' professional development in Linyi city

Linyi is an undeveloped area with land area of 17,191.2 km² and population of 11.408 million in 2016 according to *Linyi Statistical Yearbook of 2017*. There has large amount of population, poor per capita GDP, poor public fiscal revenue and per capita income than other surrounding areas. It belongs to undeveloped areas of eastern coastal economic belt.

According to *Shandong Education Statistics Development Bulletin*, Linyi has 2,488 kindergartens, 0.3436 million children in kindergarten, 20331 staffs in 2016. What's more, there were 1,084 public kindergartens in which the percentage of 33% of kindergarten children study. The first three years of kindergarten admission rate in Linyi was 68.9% in 2011, 80% in 2014, and 83% in 2016. Although the kindergarten admission rate grew rapidly, the average teacher student ratio and preschool three years gross admission rate are backward than Qingdao and Shandong average. By the ways of the investigation we found that kindergarten teachers' education background is poor, the rate of junior college education is low without detailed statistical data. Infant education quality improving depends on teachers' professional development level, but kindergarten teachers' professional development level is backward which influence infant education quality seriously (Wu & Zhao, 2016; Hong, Luo & Cui, 2013).

Infant education problems and influence factors of teachers' professional growth in undeveloped region

Understanding the problems in the process of teachers' professional development is the basic and precondition of teachers' growth dilemma, which determines teachers' professional development level. There is not only has some reason of history and economic base, but also has synergistic effects of teachers themselves

and society. As for a kindergarten teacher, good self-cultivation is congenital condition to teach children, caring children and being model for children are the basic professional quality. Besides native endowment, such as acquired regional policy guidelines, management systems and social environment can also become influence factors of teachers' professional development.

Table 1
The General Situation of Linyi Children and its Comparison with Qingdao and Shandong

Comparison item	Year	Number of kindergarten	In kindergarten's children	Infant teacher	Education backward (junior college or above)	Kindergarten admission rate	Staff-student ratio (%)
Linyi	2011	2429	305159	10426	--	68.9%	29.27
	2014	2545	363566	17618	--	80%	20.64
	2016	2488	343572	20331	--	83%	16.90
Qingdao	2011	2502	222000	15620	52%	95%	14.21
	2014	2340	224363	16080	65%	98%	13.95
	2016	2094	237977	18388	90%	98.5%	12.94
Shandong	2011	18455	2423000	112600	55.15%	73.9%	21.52
	2014	18512	2628300	141524	64.55%	81.7%	18.57
	2016	18853	2751804	164177	64.41%	84.9%	16.76

Less social investment and uneven education resources

At present Linyi's infant education resources is uneven which obviously represent in kindergarten's location, numbers and teacher's numbers. There are some differences in systems of running kindergarten, such as state running kindergarten, collective running kindergarten and private running kindergarten. Private running kindergarten is more than state running kindergarten. Linyi's public kindergartens take percentage of 34 in all kinds of kindergartens, which cannot satisfy people demand of public infant education resources. Government outlay mainly put into a few of city public kindergartens, this kind of behavior is uneven, which seriously aggravate the unfair between urban and rural infant education. Besides this, the number of kindergartens supporting urban district is insufficient. For example, only 28 urban districts have supporting kindergarten in Linyi 91 urban districts and only have 5 public kindergartens. The infant education is uneven, and differences in public-private ratio of educational resources as well as regional differences between urban and rural areas affect the balance of infant education, beside this, the teachers' professional development level varies differently.

Low salary and poor welfare lead to teachers losing seriously

The salary has great influence in enter threshold of infant teachers and steady of a team (Jennifer, Arlene & Valeria, 2017; Stinebrickner, 1998). The economy of Linyi is backward and input in infant education is little. By the way of investigation we found that the salary of infant teachers in Linyi is a little bit poor than others. For example, the salary of infant teachers in public kindergartens is 3,000 yuan per month, private kindergartens is about 1,300 to 1,500 yuan, high-end private kindergartens is 2,000 yuan in Yishui county. According to correlational research, we also found that the salary of infant teachers is poor and over 3,000 yuan only accounts 20.5%. From the welfare of working treatment and medical treatment about infant teachers, public kindergartens have higher level and concentrated superior resources, but in private kindergartens, teachers have poor treatment especially in rural areas and remote towns.

Linyi has a special location which peripheral areas' economy is developed and core areas' economy is undeveloped. The infant teachers would reduce their professional emotional identity when they find their salary is poorer than other infant teachers in peripheral areas' city or town and also poorer than other industries in this area. Beside this, private kindergartens take a great percentage in Linyi, but private kindergartens' infant teachers have poor salary and professional development prospect. According to the field survey, the annual losing rate of private kindergartens infant teachers is about 10%, especially in first three years the infant teachers' losing is serious, and for example, one kindergarten's annual losing rate can come to 50%. "It's hard for a region of northern Jiangsu to attract talents," a well-known scholar, Professor Zhu Xiaojin who worked at Nanjing Normal University said, "The per capita monthly salary of infant teachers in rural areas is only about 950 yuan after remove the insurance." The poor salary of infant teachers in undeveloped areas can affect the stability of teachers seriously.

Less training and communication make some teachers' educational ideas outdated.

Training and communication is one of the efficient ways for teachers' professional growth, teachers can improve their education teaching level quickly by communication. The learning opportunities after employment in Germany are based on the professor needs of infant teachers, and focusing on the practical effects of learning content and work. The communications after employment in Korea not only focus on educational theory but also involve civilized manners, informational society and economy, in order to make teacher's educational concept keep up with the times. By the ways of investigation, we found the work tasks of infant teachers are heavy in Linyi, the investment in infant education is limited and the salary of infant teachers accounts for more than 80% of the total investment, infant teachers have less training-communication chances and they also have backward educational concept.

Low professional emotional identity leads the lack of working enthusiasm for efforts.

Professional identity is an important prerequisite for improving the quality of infant teachers' education. Only when infant teachers have a high degree of professional emotional identity can they actively participate in the preschool education with positive enthusiasm and improve their professional level. Nowadays parents pay more attention to infant education than before, and the number of kindergartens is increasing, however, the quality of infant education has not been significantly improved. Some people think that the infant education is "baby-sitting", this kind of mind can result in low social status. Teachers have a feeling of "looking at the head" and have a low emotional recognition of their profession. Those conclusions are same as previous researches. The infant teachers' lack of effort after work, then the problem of "idle work" would appear.

The professional growth strategy for preschool teachers in underdeveloped areas

Recognize the importance of infant education and give play to the leading role of government investment.

The government should recognize that infant education plays an important role in all educational periods of life which can obtain most effective benefits, but it has concealment and hysteresis which effect long term and appear slowly. Funding investment in basic education is the material basis for its normal operation. The public

funds invested for preschool education can be used as a basis to measure the government's attention to preschool education, the financial investment in preschool education and attention to children's development. From the statistical data we can found that the developed countries pay attention to preschool education, their kindergarten rate of school-age children is relatively high. The rate of net in the kindergarten is as high as 100% in Western Europe, and the infant education in Northern Europe is also ahead of the world. From the aspect of GDP input, Northern Europe' Denmark education input accounts 8.1% of GDP, in the periods of 0 to 6 years old accounts 2% of GDP, and in the same time Sweden' input accounts 1.9% of GDP (Tang, 2015). The economy of Linyi is undeveloped, and the government input for infant education is poor. Peripheral areas' economy is developed but core areas' economy is undeveloped, this is the reason for losing talents and causing phenomenon of teachers can't stay. Therefore, the government should strengthen leading and supervision functions, establish financial guarantee mechanism for preschool education, only by this can talents flow into the economic "depression". Only when the government increase investment in education and give play to the leading role in the field of education, making policies turn to undeveloped areas, improving the welfare of teachers and increasing the "difficult subsidies in hardship areas", can change the current difficult situation of recruiting teachers, retaining infant education talents and promoting their professional development.

Improve the access system of infant teachers; increase screening and pre-job training

In the 1990s, the State Council promulgated the "Teacher Qualifications Regulations". Then in September 2000, the Ministry of Education promulgated the "Implementation Measures for the <Teacher Qualifications Regulations>". These stipulations make clear provisions on the identification of primary and secondary school teachers' qualifications, but the admission of kindergarten teachers' qualifications is vague, mostly scatter in various national laws and local regulations. A regional preschool education system may be more conducive to the selection and improvement of infant teachers.

The level of infant education in Linyi is backward, if we want to develop it quickly, the bottleneck is input, and the key is teachers. There is no doubt that economic income and welfare benefits largely determine the attractiveness of infant education posts. Under the condition of the local governments increasing their financial resources into this, the attractiveness of infant teachers' posts will increase greatly, then increasing the entry threshold of infant teachers in undeveloped areas, selecting "strong preschool consciousness" infant teachers with professional knowledge, good attitude and high moral character. Preschool consciousness is an awareness which infant teachers seek children's real life closely, promoting children's better growth by game design and scene creation. The preschool consciousness can highlight infant teachers' teaching concepts and method consciousness. Under the attraction of high salary, new teachers with "strong preschool consciousness" will be attracted, then making a possibility of "leap" in infant education.

It's necessary for new infant teachers who have been selected to accept pre-job training. Aiming at the current situation of infant education in Linyi, we can use the practice mode of "lin yuan" to strengthen the ability of communication with children and self-reflection consciousness. At present, we usually emphasize the theoretical knowledge during the process of training infant teachers. There are less practice time only accounts for about 5% of the total school hours which is far away from 1/3 of Denmark and other countries (Cameron &

Moss, 2011). It's important for new infant teachers to use the practice mode of "lin yuan" to practice before work, because it will directly lay the foundation of the future teaching model and professional development of infant teachers.

Connect local colleges and kindergartens; make integrative training of teaching and research.

After work the infant teachers need to understand the concept of preschool education deeply, master the preschool education reform, development experience and implementation measures in this stage, and then enhance their personal awareness and educational ability significantly. Universities and educational research institutes are a great place to gathering talents, which can occupy a good educational resource advantage, including an education think tank for children. There are many schools for training infant teachers in Linyi. The experts here in the field of infant education stand in the forefront of preschool education, understand the latest concepts in preschool education, and grasp the scientific methods of parenting. When local colleges and kindergartens are connected, experts can communicate with teachers in educational concepts, kindergarten curriculum structure, curriculum characteristics and curriculum implementation. Besides, they can also answer questions about problems encountered in educational practice. The infant teachers can promote their professional development and healthy growth with children by the way of learning advanced educational concepts and teaching methods. By the mode of "going out and inviting in", infant teachers can take part in some high-level special training, or invite experts from outside to give lectures to promote the professional level of infant teachers. Nowadays the Education Bureau of infant education section office in Linyi has organized some educational activities and received great results. Such as provincial kindergarten director lectures, Beijing Normal University professor lectures and Shanghai famous teachers observe teaching activities can promote the changing of kindergarten director' concepts and improve teachers' scientifically education concepts.

When infant teachers take part in training activities, not only can they get answers quickly during teaching practice process, but also help them to reflect their teaching behaviors. An American psychologist called Posner put forward the formula of teacher's growth: $\text{growth} = \text{experience} + \text{reflection}$; Dymont J E and others put forward that writing reflective diaries can make advantages greatly in the learning and sustainable development of all beings (Dymont & O'Connell, 2007). Writing reflective diaries can not only establish a dialogue foundation between infant teachers and training experts, but also develop the cognitive ability and self-understanding ability of preschool teachers, as well as improve the practicality and pertinence of infant teachers training. The infant teachers can observe, record, communicate and summarize through teaching practice, then raise the reflective record to the level of teaching research, achieve the integration of theory and practice, and the integration of teaching and research. Through teaching and scientific research activities, infant teachers can not only improve the quality of kindergarten running and teaching level, but also widen the road of professional development.

Establish a regular flow mechanism for teachers; form a learning community of new and old teachers.

Establish a regular flow mechanism for teachers. Different kindergartens have different park concepts, but their educational concepts have certain advantages. The competent department can formulate an institutional

policy first on teachers' mobility to promote the regular flow of teachers between different kindergartens. There are two purposes about flowing of teachers. Firstly, promote the balanced development of infant education. At present, the distribution of infant education resources is uneven, and the quality of education varies greatly. For example, the difference between urban and rural areas, the difference between public and private kindergartens, and the difference between demonstration kindergartens and non-demonstration kindergartens are obvious. Here we take the example of county education competent authorities establish the methods of flowing infant teachers in this area. For example, infant teachers must have at least one year's experience working in economically underdeveloped towns or rural kindergartens before each evaluation, this method can promote the balanced development of infant education among different kindergartens by teachers' flowing. Secondly, promote the communication about management experience and educational methods among different kindergartens' infant teachers. Different kindergartens have different management methods and educational concepts, so there also have certain differences in the corresponding methods of infant education. The infant teachers can go deep into teachers' regular communication mechanism, learn new methods of education, achieve the goal of "enriching themselves and developing themselves", and then promoting the professional development of themselves indirectly. In rural areas and remote towns' kindergartens, teachers are over-aged, school conditions are poor, and educational concepts are relatively backward. When urban infant teachers come to rural areas and remote towns, they can bring advanced educational concepts, promote rural areas' infant teachers' professional development indirectly. At the same time, rural kindergartens have more natural "education materials", so infant teachers can use local materials to design their own teaching activities, and then urban kindergarten teachers can observe and learn the "frugal and effective" game design.

Form a learning community of new and old teachers: No matter in the same kindergarten or in exchange for teachers in different places, new and old teachers, excellent teachers and ordinary teachers, they can become partner as learning community and learn from each other. The newly graduated infant teachers have complete professional theoretical knowledge, have theoretical knowledge such as constructivism and multiple cognitive, and also have a wide range of perspectives, but they lack of teaching experience. The infant teachers who have worked for more than ten years have rich experience in teaching practice and they can solve problems in teaching process more easily. The learning community requires participants to "dialogue" and "share" with other learning subjects in their identity and role. Teachers share their experience and feelings in educational practice with each other through communication and learning, and acquire their own educational knowledge through "learning from each other's strengths to complement each other's weaknesses" after "learning from each other's needs". This kind of knowledge growth and skill improvement can affect all aspects of teacher education and teaching eventually. Especially for new teachers, the first three years of work is a very important stage which called the "survival period" of the new teacher. In this stage he not only needs to learn how to become a teacher, but also learn specific education way in his kindergarten. Under the teaching of old teachers, new infant teachers can strengthen their educational concepts and teaching methods learned in school after working in their position, promote themselves' professional growth quickly. Of course, experienced teachers can also aware the new thinking and educational concepts of young teachers in the process of imparting experience, and absorb the teaching thinking methods suitable for the own development.

Teachers should stand in education firmly, and make a smooth "link" between home and school.

Educational belief is the source of motivation for teachers' growth which concentrates in internal motivation for teachers to promote self-development, and the motivation for achievement accelerates the independent development of teachers. In the process of practicing preschool education, teachers should have super pre-school awareness and reflective awareness, uphold the concept of "who is educating and responsible"; in the process of communication with parents, and promote more public education ideas. Parents can not only know more about children through teachers, but also help to form a social atmosphere that respects the laws of education; students can get integrated development under the "harmonious" atmosphere of the home and school; teachers develop actively under the atmosphere of respecting teachers and teaching.

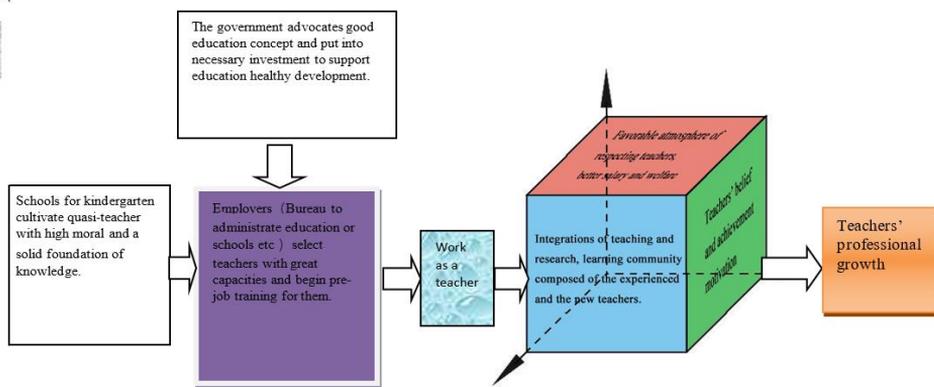


Figure 1. The Strategy map of preschool teachers' professional growth

Conclusion

In a word, from the actual situation in economically underdeveloped areas, the government should play a leading role to increase investment in infant education; the society should respect the law of educational development, less "eager for quick success and instant benefit", and form an educational atmosphere of respecting teachers and education; the teachers with "strong preschool consciousness" should stand in educational concepts firmly, such as teachers' beliefs and achievement motivation so on, and then take actions for lifelong learning, such as carrying out regular exchanges and training activities. The government, society and teachers constitute the "three-dimensional integration" development driving force (Fig.1), synergistically promote the infant teachers' professional growth, and make the professional level of infant teachers improve continuously. By this strategy mode the professional level of infant teachers can be rapidly improved. In the economically underdeveloped areas, "depression" can become the "highland" quality of infant education, thus providing intellectual support for the sustainable development of society.

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