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The Beauty of Character Education on Preschool Children's Parent-Child Relationship

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Abstract

Early childhood education in Taiwan puts high value in cultivating young children's character education, especially for preschool curriculum guideline proposes that character education should start as earlier as possible. Research focus on the importance of character education from early childhood education perspective; however, little study investigated the key factors of character education integrated into parent-child relationship, especially in multi-culture family. This study aims to explore the beauty of character education and its impact on young children's parent-child relationship. The purposive sampling of the research includes the young children's parents in the ten preschools adopting the program of character education integrated into family daily life for more than one year in the Southern Taiwan cities. Parents, early childhood education experts and teachers are interviewed and the questionnaire survey is further preceded. The study concludes that in terms of the influencing factors of character education integrated into parent-child relationship, the experts pay attention to Children's Character Cultivation within the evaluation dimensions in the second hierarchy, with the weight 0.426 about 42.6% of the overall weight. The following emphases are Parent-Child Relationship and then Parents Demography. From the investigation, Children's Character Cultivation is regarded as the most stressed dimension for character education integrated into preschool children's parent-child relationship in Taiwan. And with the conclusion that character education can deepen the bond between parents and children, as well as significant influence the preschool Children's Character Cultivation, and also, the preschool parents' support and scaffolding in children's storytelling, play, music and arts serve as significant factors in preschool children's parent-child relationship.

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Introduction

Under the premise of preschool education and care and curriculum guideline implement in Taiwan (Education Bureau, 2008; 2012), there are six areas for preschool teachers to cultivate the character education practice for the young children, including language, cognition, social, emotional, physical health, and aesthetics. With the prevalence of parents' believing in children's learning outcome are assumed to be more important than their character education cultivation, parents put all efforts in pushing young children learn all kinds of school curriculum even after school time. With the research emphasis on the importance of parent-child interrelationship (Cillessen & Mayeus, 2004; Elicker et al, 1992; LaFreniere & Sroufe, 1985; Parker, Rubin, Price & DeRosier, 1995; Stephens, 2009) and with the importance of value education, moral education proposed by Piaget's research (Rheta, 2012) on children's reasoning about moral rules, such as telling the truth. The further thinking into the topic is the distinction between two types of morality offering the framework for thinking about early childhood education. Parallel to the two types of morality are two types of adult-child relationships (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Howard, Berkowitz & Schaeffer, 2004). Hence, the study aims to fill the gap between preschool children's family character education practice and parent-child relationship. For the diverse culture derived from family members in modern times, the awareness, the understanding, and the appreciation of multi-culture, self-reflection, respect issues in modern family would also be included in this study. To conclude, the research aims to explore the beauty of the influencing indicators of family character education integrated into preschool children's parent-child relationship.

2.Literature review and discussion

2.1 Character Education Integrated Into Family

Early Childhood Education educators have long concerned themselves with character, morality and values (Kohlberg, 1966; Kohn, 1997), since preschool period plays very significant role in children's development and learning. Jenna (2007) proposed that with the preschool educators' and parents' emphasis on honesty, compassion, loyalty, respect, trust, responsibility...etc, our society might not be suffering from severe social and moral problems which are visibly reflected by our young children. For young children, those important revelations on values must be taught, learned, practiced and experienced through interactive environment. Following this thoughts, the family parents and the preschool educators are at the forefront in guiding our children to know, to care about and to act upon core ethical values in their daily life experiences. In Taiwan's education system, the long term process of educating young children to develop good character could be traced from Confucianism (Lockwood, 1997; White & Warfa, 2011). It is also the blending of moral/character education learning activities into family education to have children acquire, organize, demonstrate, and communicate information (Berkowitz & Vier, 2004; Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Ginsberg, 2007).

In accordance with John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer, character education is the objective of schooling and family caring (Chingos & Peterson, 2011; Kessler, 2000; Park & Peterson, 2006). For preschool children, parents create the environment where children can learn, celebrate, and enforce the values on which good character is based. There are a variety of teaching and approaches for us to guide our children in knowing character education, and Althof & Berkowitz (2006) proposed that newer approaches purport to incorporate children's thoughts and feelings as suggested in their action expressing, learning, and appreciating. It is very important that parents need to be all concerned that children's moral reasoning by listening to children's perspectives, drawing them out, and elevating them in order to promote children's character development.

With the character education of early childhood area, it deals with many dimensions, including honesty, compassion, loyalty, respect, trust, responsibility. Those dimensions could also be put into practice through parents scaffolding, assisting, and instructing through children's daily life experience in play, music stories, visual aids, and pictures. (Knight & LaGasse, 2012; Martin, 2012). To put it in more deliberate definition, the activities related to play, music stories, visual aids, and pictures in parent-child relationship are concerned to be in the topic of the research. Some research suggested that the application of children's stories might help elevate young children's problem-solving skills and the provision of information literacy cultivation (Chien & Liu, 2010; DeRoche & William, 2001; Lai, 2010). Dwyer (2002) indicated that information technology allowed students constructing and inspecting the true situations and learners self-adjusting and applying various resources. Kamii and DeVries (2003) proposed that adults can apply constructivist evaluation to enhance young children's learning. Vygotsky (1967; 2004) proposed that play and its role in the mental development of the child is so important that early childhood

educators need to design dynamic assessment to record children's creativity and imagination. Domestic researchers have also emphasized the research on music, plays, and stories integrated into family could enhance parent-child interrelationship. For parent-child interaction in family, stories, music and play of character education presents better applications of interaction, reproducibility, computability, and instrumentalization (Andang'o, & Mugo, 2007). Moreover, Chang (2012) pointed out that parents could have better opportunities in applying character education integrated into family education, especially in cooperation with children's favorite play, music and stories, the spirit of "active exploration and research" to further cultivate aesthetic apprehension, expression, and creation ability (Marilyn, 2012), and their "independent thinking and problem-solving ability" (Lickona, 1996; Bulach, 2002) could also serve as quality determinants in parent-child interactions.

2.2 Parent-Child Relationship for Preschool Children

In the early stages of children's learning and development, parent-child relationship did lead to children's future development. Young children's experiences in interacting with parents form the stereotype in their future verbal and physical communication with peers (Cillessen & Mayeus, 2004; Donovan, Stoyles, & Berry, 2010; Stephens et al, 2009). As LaFreniere & Sroufe (1985) and Elicker et al.(1992) proposed that the characteristics of children in secure parent-child relationships are desirable to peers. Cillessen & Mayeus, (2004) suggested that being kind, trustworthy, cooperative, and sociable are common characteristics of peer-accepted children. In accordance with Jenna (2007), Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRosier, (1995) and Stephens et al (2009), these characteristics bring children's future qualities including curiosity, enthusiasm, positive affect advanced cognitive development. In preschool situation, some of the children are well-liked among their peers, but some of them are not usually recognized as members of the popular group. A significant factor to consider is a positive relationship between parent-child relationship from Jenna (2007) include quality, relatedness, autonomy, and idealization. Jenna (2007) gave those factors the following definitions adopted by this research: Autonomy, generally, is understood as self-governance, and healthy parent-child relationships involve early support and sensitivity of dependency and autonomous functioning; Relatedness is a kind of feeling of being connected with others, and positive relatedness with parents creates children a feeling of safety in interacting with the exploration in peers and in environments; The habit of dependent on parents for the dependency on peers in preschool has related effects on the idealization of parents, and idealization is derived from autonomy of parents and individuals; the strong link can be easily found between the type of parent-child relationship quality and children's later peer relations with relationally aggressive behaviors. And those factors are just the determinants preschool parents can guide children learn from family character education.

3. Research Design and Method

3.1 Delphi Method

Delphi Method combines the advantage of expert group opinions so as to avoid the situational pressure resulted from face-to-face discussions. The overall opinions and the predicted problems are further feedback to the experts for more opinions. The experts would modify the original opinions according to the overall opinions, and then they would be summarized. By repeating such steps for several times, more consistent prediction would be acquired. Having Modified Delphi Method as the research method, present indicators were organized from relevant literatures, and anonymous expert group decision-making was applied to integrating the expert opinions on Character Education Integrated into Family. Statistical Analysis, Mean, and Quartile Deviation were further utilized for systematically processing data in order to acquire the common consensus of the experts on the factors in Character Education Integrated into Family.

3.2 Evaluation indicator

The first questionnaire, which was based on the interview from 12 early childhood education professionals, 12 preschool teachers, and 12 preschool children's parents, titled The Considered Factors in Character Education Integrated into Family, was sent to the experts by email. The considerations for Character Education Integrated into Family were organized from the first expert feedback. Such considerations were further classified and sent back to the experts for opinions. Email was utilized in the process till the final results. An expert conference was eventually held to classify the critical factors in Character Education Integrated into Family into the dimensions of Parents Demography, Children's Character Cultivation, Parent-Child Relationship. Such key factors were further regarded

as the dimensions for AHP questionnaire. The professionals, the young children's parents and teachers in the ten preschools in Southern Taiwan Cities were selected as the purposive samples for questionnaire survey. It tended to understand the effects of the weight of each factor on Character Education Integrated into Family. With the modification of Delphi Method, the following evaluation indicators were contained.

Parents' Demography: 1. Parents' Education Degree, 2. Parenting Style, 3. Family Recreation Activity 4. Parents' Moral Value 5. Parents' Occupation, and 6. Parents' Monthly Income.

Children's Character Cultivation: 1. Children's Stories, 2. Children's Play, 3. Children's Music, and 4. Children's Arts.

Parent-Child Relationship: 1. Quality, 2. Relatedness, 3. Autonomy, and 4 Idealization.

3.3 Research subject

By distributing the questionnaire to the professionals, teachers, and parents in the preschools in the Southern Taiwan Cities, it was expected to realize the effects of the weight of each factor on Character Education Integrated into Family. Total 400 copies for preschool parents in Kaohsiung were distributed, and total 366 valid ones were retrieved, with the retrieval rate 90%.

4. Discussion of Questionnaire Data Analysis

After completing all hierarchical weights, the evaluation indicators were allocated in each hierarchy according to the importance, presenting the importance of the indicator in the entire evaluation system, and the overall weight of the critical indicators in Character Education Integrated into Family was selected, Table 1.

Table 1: Overall weight of the critical factor in Character Education Integrated into Family

Dimension	Hierarchy II weight	Hierarchy II order	Indicator	Hierarchy III weight	Hierarchy III order	Overall weight	Overall order
Parents Demography	0.206	3	Parents' Education Degree	0.132	6	0.016	14
			Parenting Style	0.165	2	0.038	6
			Family Recreation Activity	0.271	3	0.128	8
			Parents' Moral Value	0.199	1	0.092	2
			Parents' Occupation	0.179	5	0.061	13
			Parents' Income	0.106	4	0.009	12
Children's Character Cultivation	0.426	1	Children's Storybooks	0.371	1	0.121	1
			Children's Play	0.234	2	0.075	3
			Children's Music	0.212	3	0.028	10
			Children's Arts	0.258	4	0.043	11
Parent-Child Relationship	0.368	2	Quality	0.225	1	0.041	4
			Relatedness	0.193	3	0.034	7
			Autonomy	0.318	2	0.063	5
			Idealization	0.301	4	0.119	9

Based on the analyses of questionnaire survey, Table 1, the following conclusions are summarized.

Within the dimensions in Hierarchy II, the experts focus on Children's Character Cultivation, with the weight 0.426 about 4.6% of the overall weight, followed by Parent-Child Relationship (weight 0.368) and Parents Demography (weight 0.206). The results reveal that Children's Character Cultivation is the most emphasis for Character Education Integrated into Family.

Within the evaluation indicators in Hierarchy III, the hierarchical weights are ordered as below.

I. The evaluation indicators for Parents Demography are ordered as Parents' Moral Value, Parenting Style,

Family Recreation Activity, Parents' Income, Parents' Occupation, and Parents' Education Degree.

- II. The evaluation indicators for Children's Character Cultivation are ordered Children's Storybooks, Children's Play, Children's Music, and Children's Arts.
- III. The evaluation indicators for Parent-Child Relationship are ordered Quality, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Idealization.

Concerning the professional, teachers and parents' interview data for constructing the first questionnaire, the summarized description are as follows. In Parents Demography, to provide sufficient parenting education within family education needs to be assisted by preschool professionals and educators. With a view to making parents feel comfortable both with the resources application through school and community, the child-centered program which children can make choices by themselves is valued importantly as storybooks and play quality time in the family learning environment. However, in assessing Children's Character Cultivation, teachers and parents need to pay more efforts in taking advantage of children's music and art activity toward the quality character education in family time. In parent-child relationship, quality is most valued; that is to say, the accumulated time to be with preschool children means less than the quality to be with them. Modern parents are always occupied with busy work and life pressure, in addition to arrange family recreation with educational function, the character education could be multiple applying with storybooks, plays, music and arts activity. Parents care about the cultivation preschool's developmental ability in quality, autonomy, relatedness and idealization. Only when the interrelationship with parents reaches quality, preschool children would be able to build quality interrelationship with outside world and peers. The materials appealing to preschool children, including stories and play, could also be combined with school and family resources.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

Research (Chingos & Peterson 2011; Jacques, 2008; Janis, 2006; Marilyn, 2012; Vicki, 2007) on the importance of Character Education for children; with the children's learning environment lies in preschool and family; therefore, the results of the determinants preschool parents care about show that the application of storybooks and plays could be on the same pace with preschool curriculum activities. What preschool parents secondly value is parents moral/character value; therefore, the preschool could hold regular parenting conference or workshop for parents and community members. With the cooperation of teachers, parents, and community resources, the quality parent-child relationship will be built naturally. Take the children's storybooks for example, there are so many libraries in the community, with the co-experiment activities between libraries and family, parents would have more possibilities to get more assistance in getting appropriate resources in educating children's character education. Further, with the theoretical emphasis on character education, parents could put those theory into practice and preschool children would learn hands-on experience through their real interaction with parents and peers. At last, Based on the above analyses, within parent-child relationship, the top five indicators, within the fourteen evaluation indicators, contain (1) Children's Storybooks (2) Parents' Moral Value, (3) Children's Play, (4) Quality, and (5) Autonomy; it is assumed that the time parents and children experiment together is very important; therefore, the parents' perspective in cultivating preschool children in character education needs to be naturally combine with preschool children's daily life, and the storybooks and free play time would be a very impressive and convenient tool. Moreover, with parent's character value, it is different from each other; therefore, preschool educators can arrange more time in communicating or in exchanging opinions with parents. The fourth one is Quality between parent and child relationship; the definition of quality needs to be child-centered. The fifth one is autonomy, which is highly valued by modern times, as we see that many parents and grandmothers are apt to offer too much assistance for children, and it is easy to decrease preschool children's autonomy in caring, exploring, realizing, reflecting, appreciating, and respecting themselves. Finally, parents need to realize that preschool children's play and learn are highly interrelate in their daily life, no matter in preschool or at home. At last, considering the Character Education Integrated into Family toward elevating parent-child relationship, the study propose that parents should spend more time and efforts to understand each child's inner potential, and with appropriate environment setting up and daily life materials, children's interrelationship with parents would be elevated through the application of character education into family environment.

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