

Study of the Relationship and Intervention between Role-swapping Games and Young Children's Gender Perception

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Abstract: The Guidelines for the Learning and Development of Children 3-6 state that "Early childhood development is a continuous, gradual process, and at the same time shows certain stage characteristics." Young children's gender perception not only affects their personal growth and development, but also reflects and shapes society's gender concepts and cultural norms to a greater extent. By providing diverse and inclusive educational environments, young children can be helped to develop healthier gender perceptions. Therefore, exploratory role-play is important for the healthy physical and mental development of young children. Based on this, the study explores the effect of role-playing on young children's gender cognition, and analyzes the effect of role-playing on young children's gender cognitive ability with role-playing as the independent variable and young children's gender cognitive ability as the dependent variable. This study used literature, questionnaire survey, experimental research and other methods to evaluate and analyze the gender cognitive ability of the two groups of subject children before and after the game intervention using the Bem Gender Role Scale. Findings: after 4 weeks of game intervention, the gender cognitive ability of children in the experimental group was improved, consistent with the research hypothesis, then it shows that the young children's role swapping game plays a positive role in young children's gender cognitive ability. Games play a very important role in kindergarten's daily activities. Role-swapping games are novel and varied in content, which can have a strong attraction to young children and stimulate their interest. Therefore, the gender cognitive ability of young children before and after the game intervention is significantly reflected, which also indicates that the role exchange game has a positive effect on young children's gender cognition.

Keywords: Role-Swap Play; 5-6 Year Olds; Pro-Social Behavior; Young Children's Gender Cognitive Skills.

1. Introduction

According to the Guidelines for Learning and Development of Children Aged 3-6 issued by the Ministry of Education in 2012, the five domains of early childhood development (ECD), i.e., health, language, society, science and technology, put health in the first place, which shows that the physical and mental health development of young children has a very important position. The gender cognitive ability of 3-6 year olds has already been formed at the initial stage. The concept of gender cognition in young children mainly involves children's understanding of their own and others' gender identity, gender roles and the gradual formation of gender concepts. In today's society, many scholars believe that young children generally lack gender traits that are clearly in line with their biological characteristics, which is detrimental to the healthy development of young children's physical and mental health. Nowadays, there are a lot of monographs on gender cognition in China, but the content basically does not combine the game interaction and gender cognition development in early childhood, and there are almost no research scholars to study the relationship between role-playing for young children's gender identity and the intervention situation. Based on this, gender cognition of young children is extremely important in the process of young children's physical and mental health development, and play is also very important in young children's day-to-day life, so it is crucial to intervene in young children's gender cognitive ability efficiently through the way of play.

2. Purpose, Significance and Relevance of Study

2.1. Purpose and Significance of the Study

The study firstly adopts role-exchange games to intervene with young children, explores the intervention and improvement effect of role-exchange games on young children's gender cognition, and then further clarifies the relationship between role-exchange games and young children's gender cognition, and examines the effective effect of role-exchange games on young children's intervention.

2.2. Significance of the Study

2.2.1. Theoretical Significance

The study conducts in-depth analysis of young children's gender cognition, explores the intervention effects of role-exchange games on young children's gender cognition, provides theoretical basis for the development of young children's gender cognition and young children's pro-social behavior, and enriches the theoretical system of the means of development of young children's gender cognition through this study.

2.2.2. Relevance

The study discusses the influence of role-exchange games on the development of young children's gender cognition, provides new ideas, new methods and new means to improve the level of young children's gender cognition development, provides kindergartens with better game means, promotes the development of young children's pro-social behavior, and lays

a solid foundation for the all-round development of young children's morality, intelligence, physicality, physicality, aesthetics and aesthetics.

3. Research Status at Home and Abroad

3.1. Role Exchange Game

3.1.1. Definition of Role-Exchange Game

Role exchange game is a kind of fun and educational activity, which aims to improve the understanding and communication between participants by simulating the identity and behavior of different roles. Participants play roles that are different from their usual identities or roles, and by simulating the daily activities, decision-making processes, and emotional experiences of these roles, they can enhance their understanding of and empathy for other roles or groups.

Role-swapping games are more commonly found in kindergartens and at home. In kindergarten, role-play between teachers and children can enhance children's gender awareness, as well as their autonomy and independence in specific contexts. Several studies have confirmed that the use of role-play with children in the early school years promotes academic self-reliance in the classroom [1].

Parents are important companions of young children, and role play, as a kind of creative game, is loved by young children, so role-play between parents and young children is one of the most important ways of triggering young children's pro-social behavior [2]. At home, role-exchange games with young children guide them to constantly simulate different situations and roles, propose different tasks in different scenarios, and allow them to try different problem-solving methods and strategies, so as to exercise their imagination and creativity, and then promote their cognitive flexibility [3].

3.1.2. Impact of Role Swap Game on Early Childhood Development

Role-swapping games have far-reaching and positive impacts in the process of young children's development. Such games not only promote the development of social skills, but also deepen their understanding of the roles of self and others, further promoting emotional, cognitive, and creative growth.

First, role-play helps children develop empathy and social skills. In the game, children need to put themselves in the shoes of others and imagine and play roles different from their own. This experience enables them to better understand the feelings and needs of others, thus enhancing empathy. At the same time, through interaction with peers, young children learn important social skills such as cooperation, sharing and negotiation, laying a solid foundation for future social interactions. In conclusion, role play helps young children develop self-knowledge, thus helping them get rid of self-centeredness, promoting the development of peer interaction skills, and improving their play [4].

Secondly, the role-swapping game promotes the development of young children's self-awareness and gender awareness. In the game, young children can try out different roles and identities, which helps them to know themselves more comprehensively and discover their interests and potentials. At the same time, by playing roles of different genders, young children can gradually recognize the differences and commonalities between genders and develop a more open and equal gender concept. Role play can provide a stage for young children to simulate the real world, allowing them to experience different roles and situations in the game,

thus promoting their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical and mental development [5].

To summarize, role-swapping games have a multifaceted positive impact in the process of young children's development. In life, teachers and parents can also carry out role-swapping games with their children, so that children can experience the feelings of being a parent and a teacher, and guide them to make the right choices in life and take the initiative to correct some bad practices [6]. It not only helps to develop young children's empathy and social skills, but also promotes the development of their self-awareness and gender awareness, while stimulating their creativity and imagination. Therefore, parents and educators should make full use of the advantages of this type of play to provide strong support for the overall development of young children.

3.2. Young Children's Gender Cognition

3.2.1. Definition of Early Childhood Gender Cognition

Young children's gender cognition is a gradual development and deepening process, which involves young children's understanding and awareness of the gender of self and others. This stage begins with the growth and development of young children and gradually begins to be complicated, advancing young children to gradually form cognitive concepts of gender. If young children are not correctly guided to promote the healthy development of their gender cognition, then most young children will develop gender cognitive stereotypes at the age-appropriate stage [7].

3.2.2. Influencing Factors of Young Children's Gender Cognition

The influencing factors of young children's gender cognition are composed of many aspects, mainly affected by the physical and mental development level, family and social factors [7].

The physical and mental development level of young children is an important factor influencing young children's gender perception. Early childhood is the key stage of children's physical and mental development, and the physical and mental development characteristics of this period are mainly reflected in the physical development characteristics and psychological development characteristics. Firstly, in terms of physical development, early childhood is one of the fastest periods of physical development [8], with significant growth in height and weight. And toddlers' gross movements to fine movements gradually develop, such as from crawling to walking, then running and jumping, etc. At the same time, toddlers are in the critical period of the development of fine hand movements, the control of the wrist and fingers is gradually flexible, and hand-eye coordination develops rapidly [9]. In addition to this, psychological development is also an important factor affecting young children's gender perception. At this stage, 3 to 6 years old is a period of rapid brain development and a critical period of rapid cognitive development for young children [10]. They begin to be able to understand and use simple symbols and language, and perform preliminary logical reasoning and problem solving.

Family factors also play an important role in contributing to the influence of young children's gender cognitive development. In the family parenting session, the mother's behavior and attitude is one of the earliest gender role models that young children are exposed to. The tender, caring, and nurturing qualities that mothers display in their daily lives are often perceived by young children as the gender roles expected of women. This modeling role helps young children

to initially form a perception of female gender roles. Therefore, some scholars believe that the innate gentleness, attentiveness, and thoughtfulness of female roles will help young children to establish their initial cognition [11].

Social factors play an important role in promoting the development of young children's gender cognition. As they grow older, young children begin to interact more with their peers. Play, communication and imitative behaviors among peers will further consolidate or change their perception of gender. For example, if a group of boys always play the role of "hero" or "leader" in a game, and girls play the role of "protector" or "helper," this role is not necessarily the same as the role of "protector" or "helper," but rather the role of "protector" or "helper. This kind of role allocation reinforces children's stereotypical views of gender roles. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to gender role education in early childhood, and only by educating young children in the critical period can we maximize the effect of gender role education and eliminate gender role stereotypes at an early age, so as to change the current situation of society more effectively [12].

3.2.3. Intervention Approaches to Young Children's Gender Perception

In terms of gender role intervention for young children, there are various ways to carry out intervention research on young children's gender cognition.

Zhang Hui advocate the adoption of games for intervention, they advocate the setting of games in kindergartens, so that boys to choose a masculine role to play, and girls to choose a feminine role to play. However, the current environment, China's kindergarten teacher groups on the component is still mainly female roles, male teachers on the lack of letting young children in the role of the game for imitation of the object has a more ambiguous choice and definition. Based on this, some scholars believe that the lack of male kindergarten teachers makes it difficult to guarantee the scientific gender role awareness education for preschool children [13].

In addition to this, picture book intervention in young children's gender role cognition is also quite common. In the process of picture book reading, teachers can guide young children to participate in the discussion, answer their questions, and help them establish correct gender cognition [14]. Some scholars believe that picture books are a tool for young children's role socialization, which should be based on the premise of warmth, innocence, courage and other beautiful factors, and encourage young children to explore gender role characteristics on the basis of respecting their autonomy, which is an inevitable requirement for the sound development of young children's gender cognition and personality traits [15].

3.3. Role Swap Game and Young Children's Gender Cognition

Role exchange games play an important and positive role in the development of young children's gender cognition. By allowing young children to temporarily play roles that are different from their own gender, this type of play promotes their understanding and acceptance of gender diversity, and at the same time provides a space for practicing the flexibility and malleability of gender roles.

First, role-swapping games help break down gender stereotypes. In the traditional conception of gender roles, males and females are often assigned fixed roles and behavioral patterns. When conducting role play, children can

be allowed to judge whether their behavior is consistent with their role identity in terms of the name, gender, and age of the role [16]. This experience helps break down gender stereotypes and allows young children to be more open and tolerant of gender differences.

Secondly, role-swapping games promote the development of empathy in young children. Some foreign scholars, Suryani, suggested that teachers should use creative ways such as role play to develop children's empathy because role play has a significant impact on young children's social adaptability [17]. When young children take on roles that are different from their own gender, they need to put themselves in the shoes of the character to understand the feelings and needs of that character, and this process helps to develop empathy and sympathy in young children.

To summarize, there is a close relationship between role-swapping games and young children's gender cognition. Such games not only help break gender stereotypes and promote empathy development, but also help young children form a positive gender identity. Cultivating students' gender cognition through role play and other teaching activities enables students to have a clearer understanding of their own gender developmental characteristics and the differences between them and the opposite sex, as well as an understanding of their own gender traits and social roles [18]. Therefore, in early childhood education, we should make full use of the role-exchange game as an effective tool to provide more support and help for the development of young children's gender awareness.

3.4. Operational Concept Definition

3.4.1. Role Swap Game

Role-swap play in the study refers to 2-6 year old children playing different roles and experiencing others' perspectives and emotions. This type of play is often used to promote empathy, understand diversity, and improve social skills.

3.4.2. Young children's gender perception

Early childhood gender cognition in the study refers to the understanding and identification of gender roles, gender characteristics, and gender identities that young children aged 2 to 6 years begin to develop.

3.5. Research Review

To summarize, family role-play is closely related to the development of young children's gender cognition, and role-play can effectively intervene in the development of young children's gender cognition and gender identity, and the improved family role-play can effectively enlighten young children. The improved family role play can effectively enlighten young children. Parents can effectively intervene in the healthy development of young children's gender cognition by practicing role play in the family.

3.6. Research Innovation

The study, in accordance with the realistic theoretical basis, combines for the first time the development of young children's gender cognition with role-exchange games, and adopts role-exchange games to promote the enhancement of young children's pro-social abilities.

4. Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Role exchange game is feasible.

Hypothesis 2: Role exchange game can promote the

development of young children's gender cognition.

5. Research Objects and Methods

5.1. Research Subjects

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to students in two classes of a kindergarten class in a province by random sampling, and the age of the subjects was 5-6 years old.

5.2. Research Methods

5.2.1. Literature Method

Using resources such as China Knowledge and Google Scholar, the study of "Role reversal play" "Infant gender cognition" "Infant gender cognition" and other keywords were searched. As of September 25, 2024, 3,462 documents were searched in China Knowledge Network with the theme of 'Role reversal play'; 3,462 documents were searched with the theme of 'Infant gender cognition'; 3,462 documents were searched with the theme of 'Infant gender cognition'. As of September 25, 2024, a total of 3,462 articles were searched in the China Knowledge Network with the theme of "role exchange games", and 30 articles were searched with the theme of "young children's gender awareness". In Google Scholar, a total of 3,462 articles were searched with the theme of "Role reversal play", and 30 articles were searched with the theme of "Infant gender cognition". On this basis, the literature was screened, sorted, analyzed and refined to fully understand the research dynamics of young children's role reversal play and young children's gender cognition, and to lay a theoretical foundation for this research article.

5.2.2. Questionnaire Method

The Behm Gender Role Scale is used, which is divided into two parts: the masculinity scale and the femininity scale, of which the reliability of the masculinity scale Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$, and the reliability of the femininity scale Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$, both of which have been tested for good reliability. Each subscale of the scale consists of 20 trait words, and subjects are asked to rate these trait words in relation to their own reality, where 1 = never conform, and 7 = fully conform. According to the scale, when the average score of the masculinity scale is higher than 4, it means that the subjects have masculine characteristics; when the average score of the femininity scale is higher than 4, it means that the subjects have feminine characteristics; if the average scores of both subscales are higher than 4, it means that the subjects have not differentiated their gender roles, and they lack the ability of self-gender cognition.

5.2.3. Experimental Research Method

(1) Experimental purpose

1) To verify the effect of role swapping game on gender intervention for young children.

2) To compare the changes in gender cognition levels before and after the experimental group and the control group through the experimental intervention for young children, and to study and discuss the promotion effect of the Role Swap Game on young children's gender cognition.

(2) Subjects

1) Basic information of experimental subjects

Two groups of kindergarten children in X kindergarten in W city were selected as experimental subjects, with a total of 104 young subjects. One class was randomly set up as the experimental group and the other class as the control group. Among them, 52 were in the experimental group and 52 were in the control group.

2) Duration of the experiment

The experiment lasted for a total of 4 weeks, from August 26, 2024 to September 24, 2024, and ended.

3) Experimental variables

The independent variable of this experiment was the toddler role swapping game and the dependent variable was the gender cognitive ability of the toddlers. During the four weeks, the experimental group of children were implemented the role exchange game for young children, while the control group was not implemented the role exchange game, that is, the traditional kindergarten game activities.

4) Experimental Measurement Instrument

The experiment measured the basic gender cognitive ability of young children by means of a questionnaire, in which the Bem Gender Role Scale needs to be administered under the guidance of the kindergarten teacher.

5) Role exchange game

(3) Principles of the game

Principle of safety - ensure that all props are safe and harmless, suitable for young children to use, and avoid sharp or fragile objects.

Principle of Inclusiveness - Encourage each child to participate and respect their choices and expressions. Ensure that each child has the opportunity to try out different roles.

Principle of Imagination and Creativity - Encourage children to give free rein to create their own character stories and performances to stimulate their imagination.

Principle of Social Interaction - Promote communication and cooperation among children through role swapping to help them learn to share and understand others.

Principle of flexibility --Adjust the content and time of the game according to children's interests and emotions to keep the game interesting and engaging.

Principle of positive feedback --Give children positive encouragement and feedback during the game to enhance their self-confidence and desire to perform.

Principle of Learning and Growing--Integrate basic social skills, emotional understanding and role recognition into the games so that children can learn while having fun.

(4) Game setup

Set up two experimental groups, one for the experimental group and one for the control group. The pre-test and the two groups filled out the Gender Bem Role Scale to measure the baseline level of gender cognition of the children in the two groups. Subsequently, the experimental group was tested with a common game, while the control group was implemented with a role-swapping game, and the posttest was filled out with the Behm Gender Role Scale again to analyze the difference between the two groups' data.

(5) Game flow

Before the start of the game, the teacher first explained the basic content and basic rules of the game to the children. Then divide the children in the class into 5-6 groups of 8-10 each, the game needs to be played in groups. The first part of the game starts with a role selection session (3 minutes), where the teacher prepares a variety of role props in advance and lets the children freely choose the role they want to play. They can be encouraged to try different roles. The second part of the role introduction session (5 minutes), each child chooses a role and then takes turns to introduce his/her role to the group, including the character's name, characteristics and story. For example, "I'm a cute bunny and I like carrots!" In the third part of the role-swap session (2 minutes), once the game starts, every five minutes, children can choose to swap roles with

other children. The time can be signaled by music or a bell. In the fourth part of the role praise session (10 minutes), after each role swap, children can perform a short role play to show off their new roles, which can be a short story, dialog, or movement performance. Part 5 is a role sharing session (8 minutes), after the game, everyone sits around and shares their favorite role and experience. Encourage them to express their feelings.

(6) Precautions

Teachers should make sure the props are safe and not easily dismantled. And remind the children to respect others' roles and performances before the game starts.

(7) Experimental Steps

1)Pre-experiment test

Before the official start of the game, the Behm Gender Role Scale was distributed to two kindergarten classes to measure children's gender cognitive ability, and the scale was recovered.

2)Formal Intervention

After the formal intervention began, the length of the intervention was 4 weeks, 2 times a week, 38 minutes each time. The experimental group played role-swapping games, while the control group played traditional games.

3)Post-experimental test

After the 4-week experimental intervention, the scale was released to the kindergartens again, filled out and collected.

5.2.4. Data Analysis Method

SPSS.26 was used for the descriptive statistics of the data and the test of difference

6. Findings

There is a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in gender cognitive ability after completing the experimental intervention. The mean values of the scales of the experimental group were significantly higher than those of the control group, indicating that the role-swapping game can significantly improve the gender cognitive ability of young children.

7. Research Analysis and Discussion

7.1. Reasonableness and Feasibility of Role-exchange Games

The young children's role-exchange games used in the experiment are all in line with the characteristics and laws of young children's physical and mental development, and are designed closely around the basic principles and laws of young children's role-exchange games.

From Piaget's theory of gender cognitive development, children understand and form gender identity through the following stages: in the sensorimotor stage (from birth to 2 years old), children gradually recognize gender through sensory experience; in the preoperational stage (from 2 to 7 years old), children begin to use language, but gender understanding tends to be simpler and more egocentric; in the concrete stage (from 7 to 11 years old), children are able to understand the stability and categories of gender, and recognize the importance of gender. stability and categories of gender and recognize the social roles of gender; and in the formal operations stage (ages 11 and up), children are able to think abstractly and understand the complexity and fluidity of gender. The theory emphasizes that children actively construct their perceptions of gender in social interactions and

gradually deepen their understanding of gender roles as they develop. Kindergarten children are in the preoperational stage, they only have a simple understanding of gender, if not correctly intervened, they will have errors in their perception of gender, which will have a great impact on children's pro-social behavior. The game of gender role swapping is exactly a bridge for children's gender cognition. In the process of the game, children can improve their gender cognitive ability by experiencing different roles. For example, when children play the roles of policemen and nurses respectively, they can experience the main gender components of the two occupations through different scenarios in an immersive way. Moreover, children can gradually enhance their gender cognitive ability through verbal communication in the process of playing, so that their pro-social behavior can be developed.

From Kohlberg's theory of gendered development, it is explored that how young children form gender identity and gender-related behaviors goes through three main stages: gender cognition (becoming aware of gender), gender stability (understanding the relative stability of gender), and gender congruence (becoming aware of the persistence of gender). He emphasizes that children learn gender roles by observing and imitating the adults around them, while interacting with peers to further reinforce these roles. The theory states that education and the home environment are crucial to gendered development, advocating that gender stereotypes be avoided in education and that children be encouraged to explore diverse roles and interests. Gender role swapping games can help children reduce gender stereotypes, for example; small children tend to think that the profession of police officer must be a boy and the profession of nurse must be a girl. Through the role swapping game, children can try to play the roles of male nurses and female police officers to reduce their stereotypes of the gender of these occupations, thus promoting the enhancement of children's gender cognitive ability.

From the above experiments, it can be seen that the gender role swapping game not only conforms to the law of serpentine development of young children, but also helps to improve the gender cognitive ability of young children, and the game shows a high level of participation and completion in the early and late stages of the game, which is favored by young children and has been unanimously praised in kindergartens.

7.2. The Effect of Role-swapping Game on Young Children's Gender Cognition

After 4 weeks of game intervention, the experimental group of children's gender cognitive ability has been improved, consistent with the research hypothesis, then it shows that the role swapping game for young children plays a positive role on the gender cognitive ability of young children. Games play a very important role in the daily activities of kindergartens, so the setting of games in kindergartens is quite important. Role-swapping games are novel and varied in content, which can have a strong attraction to young children and stimulate their interest. Therefore, the gender cognitive ability of young children before and after the game intervention has a significant reflection, which also indicates that the role swapping game has a positive impact on young children's gender cognition.

7.3. Shortcomings and Prospects

(1) The experimental intervention is only measured by the

way of scale, the content is relatively single, the future experimental intervention can use the scale combined with the observation method for research and comprehensive measurement.

(2) The game content of the experimental intervention is relatively single, future experimental research can increase the form and content of the role swap game, so that the game can be more attractive to young children.

(3) The experimental intervention only considered the influence of children's own factors on gender cognition, and in future research should be increased to explore the influence of other factors such as the environment in which children grow up on the development of gender cognitive ability.

8. Research Conclusion

(1) Role exchange game is in line with the physical and mental development of young children, and can be successfully implemented in kindergartens.

(2) Role exchange game can promote the improvement of young children's gender cognitive ability. The role exchange game can effectively improve the gender cognitive ability of young children and enhance their pro-social behavior.

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