

How Leaders Can Avoid the Tendency of "Primary Schooling" in Kindergartens - in China

Chenxi Cui^{1, a}

¹University of Birmingham B15 2TT, Birmingham, United Kingdom

^achenxicui 66@gmail.com

Abstract: As an important stage of education, early childhood education cannot avoid the problem of capitalisation. Then capitalisation has led to changes in the education system and kindergarten teaching system. Take education as a means of competition to profit for capital. Then, is this form of education suitable for the learning and development of young children? How we avoid this issue of education is the main study of this article.

Keywords: Kindergarten, Leadership, GERM, Privatization Education.

1. Introduction

"Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is about more than just getting kids ready for kindergarten. Its goal is to meet all of a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical requirements, laying a solid foundation for lifetime learning and happiness. ECCE has the capacity to build future citizens who are compassionate, capable, and responsible (Melhuish et al, 2015)."

Early childhood education is very important in a child's life. However, in recent years, the sweep of the capitalist society has led to a major change in the leadership style of schools. Many schools have adopted the leadership style of the Global education reform movement (GERM), an element of which is the use of the corporate management model, which assumes that businesses know how to manage schools better than public sector enterprises. Chasing profits is very different from creating space for children to learn and blossom (Wasmuth & Nitecki, 2017). The logic of capitalism (profit) and the logic of education (learning) are completely different dynamics, and confusing them can have disastrous consequences (Bussey, 2012).

In China, early childhood education, although not part of compulsory education, has always received attention. In this study, we will analyse the changes in the way kindergartens are led in China and the current situation of 'primary education' in kindergartens. This is a serious problem that is detrimental to the physical and mental development and learning characteristics of young children and their physical and mental growth. Some kindergartens, in order to meet the misguided needs of some parents, are seriously deviating from the quality of education we want for our children, forcing them to take on tasks too early for their age, which is contrary to their physical and mental development. development and severely stifle their playfulness and nature. This reflects the importance of the management style and philosophy of kindergarten leaders, who need to establish a correct view of early childhood education and teaching, respect the laws of physical and mental development, improve the professional education and teaching philosophy of early childhood teachers, change parents' perceptions and improve the business philosophy of kindergartens.

The Ministry of Education's (MOE, 2011) Circular on

Regulating Kindergarten Care and Education and Preventing and Correcting the Phenomenon of "Primary Schooling" clearly states that the laws of physical and mental development of young children should be followed and the content and methods of "primary schooling" should be corrected. The draft of the Professional Standards for Kindergarten Directors (MOE, 2014), which is open for public consultation, again makes it clear that a qualified kindergarten director should respect the laws of early childhood education and prevent and overcome the tendency of "primary schooling" in kindergarten education.

1.1. What is "Primary Schooling"?

"Primary schooling" refers to the early introduction of primary school academic knowledge in kindergartens, where children aged 3-6 are treated like primary school students and are unilaterally taught knowledge, including advanced English words, Chinese character writing, mathematics addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, and so on, so that children aged 4 and 5 learn what primary school students should learn (Zhang, 2018).

According to Chinese scholars, such education means going beyond the regular development of children and teaching them things they will need to learn to accept later in life earlier (Fan & Gao, 2012). It means allowing students to learn what older students learn so as to achieve a state of being smarter than other children, which can also be referred to as over-learning. The educationalist Rousseau once suggested that nature wants children to behave like children before they become adults, and if we disrupt this sequence, we will cause some fruits to ripen early and they will grow neither plump nor sweet (Gianoutsos, 2006).

The "primary" education in kindergartens focuses on the transmission of knowledge without paying attention to the physical and psychological development of children, unilaterally 'instilling' knowledge and neglecting the active and exploratory learning of children in play. To be more precise, Chinese kindergarten "primary schooling" is defined as over-education, also known as early education, which means that children are taught things that they will need to learn and accept later, beyond their normal development (Li et al, 2002).

The American psychologist Gessel's experiment with identical twins practising stair climbing has taught us that

"education should respect the actual level of the child, wait patiently before the child is mature, do not violate the natural laws of the child's development, do not violate the child's internal 'schedule' of development ' and not to artificially accelerate children's development through training" (Liu & Chen, 2011).

Despite this, over-education has become the norm in Chinese education. The China Social Survey Institute surveyed 500 parents of young children and 100 teachers and teaching leaders in Wuhan and Beijing. More than half of the respondents voted in favour of the 'primary schooling' of kindergartens because they want their children to learn academic knowledge early so that they can achieve excellent exam results when they enter primary school. This is despite the fact that 60% of teachers clearly stated that 'primary schooling' of kindergartens is detrimental to children's development and that early pressure can erase children's imagination (Jiang, 2008). However, with the creation of entrance exams for many high-quality primary schools, parents' desire to get their children into better primary schools, and the capitalisation of education, the way early childhood education is taught should be disrupted and a tendency towards 'primary schooling' begins to emerge.

1.2. Reason

"The GERM policy has led to significant changes in the way ECEC operates around the world." (Nitecki & Wasmuth, 2017).

GERM has been a major cause of change in school leadership styles. In China, surveys have shown that the "primary schooling" of kindergartens comes from three sources: society, parents and schools. Parents' attitudes not only have a direct impact on their children but also influence the choice of kindergarten institutions and the teaching guidelines (Liu, 2018). Currently, many parents want their children to be able to learn at the primary school level earlier in kindergarten education so that they can be ahead of the competition. This educational concept has led to the educational ideology that parents want their children to acquire more knowledge and be good at taking exams, and under this ideology, parents often disregard their children's wishes.

The philosophy of kindergarten schooling is also an important factor. In order to gain more economic benefits, teaching is based solely on the market, leading to a preoccupation with fame and fortune in teaching practice; in order to attract more students, schools tend to over-educate according to parents' demands (Li & Hu, 2017). In the long run, the primary schooling of kindergarten education has become a common trend.

Kindergarten is a place where children socialise, play and explore together, however, it has now become a highly structured and planned preparation for later schooling (Nitecki & Wasmuth, 2017). Although both parents and schools are important reasons for this, it is all based on the influence of social factors. Chinese kindergarten leadership styles have been capitalised and privatised in recent years due to the influence of GERM, which sees testing as the only way to measure 'important' topics (Wasmuth & Nitecki, 2017). Parents and schools have begun to teach young children more about academics in order for them to excel on tests, rather than allowing them to develop holistically and healthily. Leaders need to nurture young children according to the needs

of society and set teaching philosophies for profit, thus ignoring incorrect factors in the development of young children.

1.3. Why Leadership?

The notion that effective leadership is critical to successful schooling is being supported by a wide range of evidence (Hallinger 2003a; Leithwood et al, 2012). Leadership is now considered to be the second most important factor influencing school and student achievement, after classroom practice (Leithwood et al, 2012). Schools and colleges are often successful because of the skills and commitment of their headteachers and senior teams. Where failure occurs, poor leadership is usually a major contributing factor. As a result, 'school leadership has recently become one of the central concerns of education policy makers' (Hallinger 2003b). School leaders, particularly headmasters, are instrumental in setting educational direction, and educational philosophy and creating a positive school culture. as well as supportin and enhancing the motivation and commitment of staff to facilitate school progress and success in a challenging environment (Day & Sammons, 2016). A good headteacher is likely to emerge as a good school.

Since 2011, when the Ministry of Education issued the "Circular on Regulating Kindergarten Care and Education to Prevent and Correct the Phenomenon of 'Primary Schooling' " how to avoid the "primary schooling" of kindergarten education has The issue has been raised to the level of national policy. However, to truly address the problem of 'primary schooling' in kindergarten education actually requires the concerted efforts of many parties (Shi, 2014). Among them is the kindergarten director, who is the 'central' figure in determining the quality of kindergarten teaching and learning. They play a key role in correcting the tendency of 'primary schooling' in kindergarten education. (Yi, 2012). The problem boils down to the 'primary schooling' of educational content and methods, and the head teacher is the manager of the kindergarten, the supervisor of the curriculum, and has the power to decide on the content and methods of education. When parents' expectations are misaligned, it is the responsibility of the leader to guide them toward the right philosophy of early childhood education (Shi & Qin, 2015). Thus, the importance of leadership in a school is evident.

2. Findings

2.1. Leadership styles should not be socially capitalised

Early childhood education is too market-oriented in China. Early childhood education, which is at a non-compulsory stage, needs strong support from private funding due to the shortage of funds and the uneven distribution of educational resources. After the 1990s, the government introduced various policies and regulations to support the marketisation of kindergartens. The ultimate goal of marketisation is for investment operators to make profits, and the lack of appropriate market regulations and over-reliance on the free development of the market can lead to individuals in the market blindly pursuing profits. Many kindergartens use the difficulty of "primary schooling" and intellectual development as a way to get parents to invest more in their children, so that they can increase their tuition income through various "primary schooling" special programmes.

The current market for early childhood education in China is in such a chaotic situation, which has led to a series of negative consequences today. The original purpose of early childhood education is gradually being distorted by the lure of profit. The promotion of the physical and mental development of young children has become the slogan, and the ultimate goal is to make higher profits. Interviewee This is a problem that must be avoided in the management of kindergartens. "Not to run kindergartens for profit and not to run them on a commercial basis. A kindergarten, is a school, not a business. Kindergarten leadership is about educated administration, curriculum management, etc., not putting profit first. We need to be educators, not bosses.

We can understand that most bosses of a business need to put profit interests first and everything they do is in the interest of the company. But as a school, a kindergarten, holding the philosophy of education, the headmaster should put the students first, and all interests are built on the students. Interviewee A believes that as a kindergarten leader we are not a boss but an educator and that kindergartens do not need to be managed and operated commercially.

In the current reform of ECE, leaders need to have a clear understanding of marketisation. The profit-seeking, equivocal nature of the market is at odds with the essential characteristics of early childhood education, such as public welfare and welfare. If the government weakens or even abandons its responsibility for pre-school education and pushes it into the market, the children of low-income people will not be able to enjoy quality early childhood education resources due to their weak ability to pay, which will only increase the disparity between urban and rural early childhood education and lead to greater educational inequality.

2.2. Kindergarten leaders should keep the beginnings of education in times of rapid change

Go about all teaching and learning planning on the premise of ensuring the healthy development of young children, with children at the centre. The capitalisation of the kindergarten industry has been developing rapidly in China in recent years, and many investment institutions are now very interested in the early childhood education sector, with many early childhood education assets being capitalised and the securitisation of kindergarten industry assets being activated. In the minds of many investment institutions, kindergartens are very good 'cash' and a great business. Interviewee A talked about being approached by a commercial investor who wanted to work together to build a kindergarten, but in their subsequent conversations, a number of different educational philosophies prevented their collaboration from proceeding.

It is most important to keep your head above water when engaging with capital. Thought from the perspective of young children, allowing them to grow naturally in accordance with their nature, rather than blindly catering to the needs of capitalist society and prematurely and compulsively instilling academic knowledge such as mathematics, science and chemistry in children, advocating respect for young children's lives, their personality and the laws of their growth and development, and allowing them to develop holistically in a harmonious and beautiful environment. The ECE sector is mainly educational and does not have a commercial purpose, so it must be acknowledged that it is not possible to make more profit, which is a test every leader needs to face.

2.3. focus on the educational process, not the outcome

As a leader need to focus on the process of children's development and help them better in the process, not just on the results. One of the reasons for the 'primary schooling' of kindergartens is that everyone focuses too much on the outcome of children's learning, not on the process and methods of teaching, but only on the outcome, in order for children to learn more. Some parents choose kindergartens based on the popularity of the kindergarten and the results of the examinations for entry into primary school. In order to attract more parents to enrol in kindergartens, there is a tendency to 'primary school' the content of teaching and learning and to infuse students with primary school knowledge too early in order to increase the school's promotion rate. Children should be taught through appropriate play and practical activities to help them develop.

However, most kindergartens in China today largely ignore the developmental process of children and focus on the addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, spelling and word formation of primary schools, giving too much importance to the transmission of knowledge and the results of examinations, which leads to a distorted state of psychological development. The idea that children develop through practical activities has become an important theoretical basis for early childhood education, and the process of activity is extremely helpful to young children's development. Developing positive learning habits is better for young children than teaching academic knowledge in advance. As a leader it is incumbent upon to help teachers develop a correct view of education, as well as to establish the educational philosophy of the whole kindergarten.

2.4. Challenges

In avoiding the 'primary schooling' of kindergartens, the most challenging part is reaching out to parents' concerns and making them aware of the right way to educate. A quality kindergarten requires a high level of cooperation with parents. As school leaders we need to communicate with parents, some of whom may ask us to teach primary school and we need to change their mindset by communicating with them. It is therefore essential that parents' meetings are organised every term to inform them about early childhood education and that they are regularly invited to participate in the children's activities.

The reason for this is that the pressure to learn has been shifted down to the early years, as the academic competition of students has forced the curriculum reform of kindergartens through various channels in school, family and society. Parents think that by learning earlier than children from other families, they can leave behind those children who have zero starting points. Unbeknownst to them, learning the primary school curriculum ahead of time gives children in the first year of primary school a different starting point and makes it very difficult for the first year teachers to organise their teaching. In addition, children who have already learnt phonics and arithmetic will not have the freshness that a beginner should have when listening to the teacher again, and may even become bored with learning, to the detriment of their future learning.

The key to solving the "primary schooling" problem is to improve the joint educational approach of families, kindergartens and primary schools. Kindergartens and

primary schools should treat parents as important partners, establish effective collaborative communication mechanisms, and guide parents to work actively with kindergartens and primary schools to prepare for school. As leaders, we need to understand parents' confusing issues and suggestions on school readiness and adaptation, help parents understand the dangers of overly intensive knowledge preparation and early learning of primary school curriculum content, relieve parents' stress and anxiety, create a good family education atmosphere, and actively cooperate with kindergartens and primary schools to make a good transition.

3. Conclusion

This study examines what one kindergarten headmaster did to avoid the problem of 'primary schooling' in kindergarten. The study explores the impact of marketisation on kindergartens, which has led to widespread problems in society, families and schools. The findings suggest that kindergarten leaders are central to leadership in avoiding 'primary schooling'. Leaders need to communicate the right philosophy and educational goals to the curriculum team and teachers. It is also worth noting the importance of parents in this issue, which means that the education authorities should not only focus on kindergartens to prevent the 'primary schooling' of kindergartens but should also take into account the parents' factor so that parents can eliminate their anxiety and cooperate with kindergarten leaders in the transition from kindergarten to primary school. We can observe that appropriate leadership in kindergartens can effectively avoid the "primary schooling" of kindergartens.

The importance of government policies and regulations was mentioned several times in the interview. The entrance examination for kindergarten to primary school puts enormous pressure on kindergarten teaching and learning, which is one of the reasons for the tendency towards primary schooling in early childhood. It is also a problem that kindergarten leaders are unable to address. As the education system has been reformed and improved in recent years, despite the extreme importance of primary school teaching, it is significantly different from kindergarten education and should be independent of each other (Yao, 2017). The examination system for kindergarten to primary school has seriously undermined the normal and smooth development of early childhood education, limiting the versatile forms of teaching and learning that should take place for young children, failing to value and focus on discovering children's natural talents, and contributing to the mechanisation of kindergarten education, limiting the normal effects of education (Li, 2019). Therefore, the state needs to carefully delineate the boundaries between primary education and early childhood education. It should fully respect kindergarten education, further clarify the goals of kindergarten education, and strictly regulate the examination system for kindergarten to primary school. The issues in this research require the joint efforts of the state, society, parents and educators, and can only be achieved through purifying the social environment, changing people's perceptions and mindsets, and making reforms in the education system and mechanism.

References

- [1] Ahrens, T. and Dent, J.F. (1998), "Accounting and organizations: realizing the richness of field research", *Journal of Management Accounting Research*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 1-39.
- [2] Bussey, M.P. (2012). When no crisis is the real Crisis! The endless vertigo of capitalist education. In *Surviving Economic Crises through Education: Global Studies in Education* (pp. 247-255). University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland.
- [3] Day, C. and Sammons, P. (2016). *Successful School Leadership*. Education Development Trust. Highbridge House, 16-18 Duke Street, Reading Berkshire, England RG1 4RU, United Kingdom.
- [4] Fan, S.J. & Gao, S.Z. (2012). On the negative effects of pre-primary education in children's learning process. *Basic Education Research* (19), 2.
- [5] Gianoutsos, J. (2006). Locke and Rousseau: Early childhood education. *The Pulse*, 4(1), pp.1-23.
- [6] Hallinger, P. (2003a) 'The emergence of school leadership development in an era of globalisation: 1980–2002', in P.Hallinger (ed.), *Reshaping the Landscape of School Leadership Development: A Global Perspective*. Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger.
- [7] Hallinger, P. (2003b) 'School leadership preparation and development in global perspective: future challenges and opportunities', in P.Hallinger (ed.), *Reshaping the Landscape of School Leadership Development: A Global Perspective*. Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger.
- [8] Jiang, Y. J. (2008). Irrational pre-schooling: Reflections on the scientific nature of early education. *Journal of Northeast Normal University: Philosophy and Social Science Edition* (6), 6.
- [9] Leithwood, K. and Sun, J. (2012). The nature and effects of transformational school leadership: A meta-analytic review of unpublished research. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(3), pp.387-423.
- [10] Li, L., Yu, J. and Zhou, J. (2002). A preliminary study on the effects of over-education on students' social interaction and self-perception. *Psychological Science*(3), pp. 367-368.
- [11] Li, Q. F. & Hu, D. W. (2017). Analysis of the causes and hazards of primary schooling in kindergarten education. *Jilin Education* (13), 1.
- [12] Li, J. F. (2019). How to overcome the tendency of primary schooling in kindergartens.
- [13] *Proceedings of the 2019 National High-end Forum on Innovation and Development of Education and Teaching* (Volume 4).
- [14] Liu, F. H. (2018). A study on the influence of parents' educational philosophy on the tendency of primary schooling in kindergarten education. Doctoral dissertation, Hunan ShiFan University.
- [15] Liu, J. F. & Chen, C. X. (2011). Causes and countermeasures of primary schooling in kindergartens. *New Curriculum Learning* (8), 2.
- [16] Melhuish, E., Ereky-Stevens, K., Petrogiannis, K., Ariescu, A., Penderi, E., Rentzou, K., Tawell, A., Slot, P.L., Broekhuizen, M. and Leseman, P. (2015). A review of research on the effects of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) upon child development.
- [17] Nitecki, E. and Wasmuth, H. (2017). Global trends in early childhood practice: Working within the limitations of the global education reform movement. *Global Education Review*, 4(3).
- [18] MOE. (2011). Notice of the Ministry of Education on regulating kindergarten care and education to prevent and correct the phenomenon of "primary schooling". Ministry of Education of China, Beijing.
- [19] MOE. (2014). Professional standards for kindergarten directors. Ministry of Education of China, Beijing.

- [20] Shi, W. (2014). Reflections on the primary schooling of kindergarten. *Primary School Science (Teacher Edition)*, 000(005), 149-149.
- [21] Shi, K. J. & Qin, X. F. (2015). Principals are the key to resisting the "primary schooling" of early childhood education. *Education Guide: Second half of the month* (2), 2.
- [22] Wasmuth, H. and Nitecki, E. (2017). Global early childhood policies: The impact of the global education reform movement and possibilities for reconceptualization. *Global Education Review*, 4(2).
- [23] Yao, X. F. (2017). A practical analysis of correcting the tendency of primary schooling in kindergarten. *Reading and Writing: Journal of Education and Teaching* (4), 1.
- [24] Yi, L. Y. (2012). Kindergarten principals are the core force in combating "primary schooling". *Education Today: The Golden Journal of Early Childhood Education* (11), 2.
- [25] Zhang, X. Y. (2018). Talking about the de-primarization of kindergarten. *Early Education (Education and Teaching)* (11).