

A cross-cultural study of contemporary early childhood arts curricula

Abstract

This thesis presents a cross-cultural study of young children's arts education. A comparison of the intended arts curriculum for 5-6 year old children in Beijing and Australia portrays a snapshot of the similarities and differences of these arts curricula. The examination of the contemporary literature revealed a perceived creativity gap between China and some Western countries. Early childhood is particularly important in bringing about change to this situation, as children of 5-6 years of age are believed to be in a critical period for the development of their creative thinking skills. This research seeks to enhance the understanding of the arts education among a cohort of Chinese 5-6 year old children in this era of globalisation; it aims to contribute to current education philosophy and practices of childhood arts education in Beijing.

Underpinned by an overarching social constructivist epistemology and using the theory of governmentality as a critical lens, this thesis investigates the intricate power-knowledge system in relation to curriculum, arts and pedagogy in Chinese Beijing children's arts education. Constructivist grounded theory is the primary research methodology that guides the analysis of sequential qualitative research phases of this study. These phases include a comparative curricula analysis, followed by a survey study involving 88 EC teachers among 12 public kindergartens in Beijing. These first phases of the research inform a collective case study across three kindergartens.

This study reveals that the arts represent a significant learning area both in Chinese Beijing and in Australian ECE. However, evidence from the study demonstrates that in the contemporary Beijing context, the main pedagogical approach to children's arts learning continues to be teacher-directed and teacher-initiated, and collective teaching remains the predominant pedagogical organisation form. The findings of this study reiterate results in the literature reviewed and further confirm a gap between Chinese

ECE policies and implementation, and between Chinese EC educators' espoused beliefs and enacted practice.

This thesis challenges and problematises some of the claims and understanding of this research field, for example, the discourse on child-centredness in the contemporary Chinese EC curriculum. The data provided evidence that the participant EC educators possessed a diverse range of knowledge of the potential benefits of globalisation from an EC perspective. It is argued that in this particular field, the forces of globalisation interact and interplay with local powers in the emergent practice of Chinese ECE.

This research highlights the potential for early childhood arts education to cultivate enhanced creative and critical thinking skills for children in Beijing. This study indicates the need for new policy to address the importance of emergent technology in Chinese children's arts education. In addition, Chinese EC educators' professional learning requires further and continuing development, to incorporate the contemporary views of children, the disciplinary knowledge and skills, and a more open understanding of the optimal pedagogy for children's arts learning.

当代学前儿童艺术课程的跨文化比较研究

摘要

本论文呈现了一个跨文化的儿童艺术教育的研究。该比较研究展示了一幅关于中澳两国之间五至六岁儿童艺术课程异同点的快照。当代文献揭示了中国和一些西方国家之间在创新力方面存在着差距。儿童早期教育对于改变此创新力差距有着重大的意义，因为五至六岁儿童被认为是处于发展创新性思维的关键时期。在全球化的背景下，本研究旨在提升对一群五至六岁中国北京儿童的艺术教育的理解，以促进当代北京儿童艺术教育教学的理念与实践。

在社会建构主义认知理论的支持下，运用治理理论作为一个批判性的视角，本论文探寻在当代北京儿童艺术教育中的课程，艺术和教学法之间的错综复杂的权力和知识体系。使用建构主义实地理论作为该研究的基本方法论促进了一系列连续的定性研究的方法。这些研究方法包含一个跨文化的艺术课程的文本比较，和一个由来自北京地区 12 个公立幼儿园的 88 位学前教师参与的调查问卷。这些初始的研究方法为接下来由三个幼儿园参与的一个集体性的个案研究奠定了基础。

本研究的调查结果显示，艺术学习领域在中国北京和澳大利亚的学前教育中都占有显著的地位。基于本研究的数据采集与分析结果，在当代中国北京的背景下，儿童艺术教育的主要教学法仍处于以教师为主导和引导的局面，集体教学依然是主要的教学组织形式。本论文的调查结果重述并且进一步确认了当代文献中关于中国学前教育领域中政策和实施之间的缺口，以及中国学前教育工作者的教育理念和教育实践之间的差距。

本研究数据分析的结果质疑了该研究领域中存在的一些观点和理解，例如，关于当代中国学前课程以儿童为中心的话语。参与调研的学前教育工作者们从学前的视角对全球化的潜力有着广泛的认知。本论文论证了在这个特定的领域，在当前中国学前教育的实践中，全球化的作用力和其他本地的主要力量相互影响并相互作用。

本研究凸显了通过艺术教育从而提升北京儿童创新能力和批判性思维能力的潜力。新的学前政策需要突出新兴科技在中国儿童艺术教育教学中的重要性。中国学前教育工作者的职业学习也有待进一步持续的发展，从而实现有机地融合儿童艺术教育教学中的几个重要因素，即：当代儿童观，学科的专业知识与技巧，以及更加开放和优化的教育教学法。