

Exploration of the Talent Cultivation Path of New Higher Vocational Compound Childcare Integration

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Abstract: With the continuous development of society, people's concept of early childhood education is also gradually upgrading. In the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), "childcare" is listed as one of the seven national key livelihood tasks, and the model of "integration of childcare and early childhood" is gradually being widely used in infant and toddler education. The application of this model not only promotes the development of infant and toddler education but also brings new challenges to the training of talents specialized in childcare in higher vocational colleges. Higher vocational colleges and universities should adjust the talent training mode according to the requirements of the childcare integration mode, so as to build a high-quality skilled personnel team and promote the further development of infant and toddler education.

Keywords: Childcare integration; Infant and toddler care; Higher vocational colleges and universities; Talent cultivation

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1. Introduction

Early childhood education has always been a top priority in building people's livelihoods. Infant and toddler care is one of the important measures to implement the people-centered development idea. In order to better carry out infant and toddler child care and realize "early childhood education and good education," it is necessary to improve the quality of infant and toddler childcare professionals. Over the past decade, various countries have included early childhood education into the scope of lifelong education, the "childcare integration" model has also become an important measure to promote early childhood development. The education model of "childcare integration" refers to the concept of treating children aged 0–3 years and 3–6 years as an educational whole to implement care and education, and aims to improve the quality of preschool children's care and education services^[1]. In summary, this paper takes "childcare integration" as the core, discusses in depth the opportunities and challenges brought by the promotion of the "childcare integration" model for the childcare profession of higher vocational colleges, and explores the optimization of the talent

training mode of higher vocational colleges and universities in this context.

2. The emergence and development of “childcare integration”

2.1. The emergence of “childcare integration”

Since 2010, many developed countries have begun to implement the integration of early childhood education courses and childcare teachers, “childcare integration” model began to gradually emerge. With the continuous improvement of China’s economic level, people’s demand for childcare services is also increasing. In today’s society, the dual factors of economy and education are still one of the factors that discourage many families from having children. In 2013, the General Office of the Ministry of Education issued the Notice on the Pilot Program of Early Education for Infants and Toddlers 0–3 Years of Age, launching the pilot program of early education for infants and toddlers aged 0–3 years in 14 regions such as Beijing, Shanghai, etc., and putting forward the idea of “fully integrating public education, health, and community-based education into the early education system, and strive to build a service system of early education for infants and young children based on kindergartens and maternal and child health institutions, oriented to the community and guiding parents”^[2]. Subsequently, China issued a series of documents, such as the “Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Care Services for Infants and Young Children Under 3 Years of Age,” “Opinions on Promoting the Healthy Development of Old-Age Child Care Services,” “Standards for the Setting Up of Child Care Institutions (Trial),” “Code of Practice for the Management of Child Care Institutions (Trial),” “Guidelines for Child Care Guidance for Child Care Institutions (Trial),” etc, and these documents provide policy support for the implementation of the cause of the development of child care.

2.2. Development status of the “childcare integration” in China

For a long time in the past, China’s early childhood education has been a “two-track parallel” state: children aged 0–3 years old go to private early childhood education institutions or daycare classes in public kindergartens, mainly for childcare; children aged 3–6 years old enter kindergartens, mainly for preschool education that combines childcare and education. However, the market for childcare services in China is mixed, and the quality of childcare services varies and charges high fees, causing childcare anxiety among many parents. For a long time, the family has been the main body of infant and toddler care^[3], and early childhood care is the common responsibility of multiple subjects such as the government, the market, and society. As of 2023, the survey shows that the number of newborns in China is around 9.02 million, and the enrollment rate of kindergartens is not optimistic. The vast majority of the researched kindergartens are not full, the actual class opening rate is only 71.82%, and the full rate is only 61.50%. As of the beginning of the first semester of 2023, of the kindergartens that had opened nursery classes, an average of 1.9 nursery classes were operated per institution. Among them, 46.55% of the institutions run one nursery class, 34.48% run two nursery classes, and the percentage of institutions with four or more nursery classes is only 10.34%^[3]. The above data show that the current enrollment and nursery class opening situation is not satisfactory, and there is more room for the development of the integrated model of childcare, which needs to be improved by measures.

3. Challenges faced by higher vocational colleges and universities in cultivating talents in childcare majors

3.1. Inconsistency between career orientation and cultivation objectives

The lack of reference to industry and educational standards has led to the lack of a clear division of majors in

higher vocational colleges and universities. It is easy to confuse the construction of the childcare major with preschool education, early education, and other majors. According to the survey, in the construction of childcare professional curriculum, there is a phenomenon that some higher vocational colleges and universities share the cultivation program of childcare profession with the cultivation program of the preschool education profession, which undoubtedly has a great impact on the cultivation of basic vocational literacy and vocational skills of childcare students, making the quality of the training of childcare professionals not able to meet the needs of childcare institutions and parents in the market, resulting in the obstruction of the development of the childcare industry.

3.2. Indistinct professionalism

According to the background of the development of the childcare profession, it combines the knowledge of many majors such as health management, sociology, preschool education, and so on ^[4]. In 2021, the Ministry of Education officially adjusted the childcare profession from the public service category to the medicine and health category, which is undoubtedly a test for higher vocational colleges and universities whose health qualifications are unable to meet the professional requirements. Within the framework of school management, some colleges and universities offer courses in early childhood art, early childhood health care, early childhood education, childcare facility management, etc., resulting in the phenomenon of “extensive but not refined,” which is undoubtedly unfavorable to the formation of professional characteristics.

3.3. Inadequate curriculum system

At present, regarding the infant and toddler education of 0–3 years old, no matter the academic research, teaching materials, school philosophy, or the practical operation of each organization, the systematic knowledge based on the actual experience is very little, and it is all in the exploratory stage. Therefore, it is difficult to define the teaching objectives when setting up the curriculum system of childcare majors in various higher vocational colleges and universities. The design of teaching activities tends to emphasize teaching over conservation, neglecting the cultivation of students’ childcare ability, resulting in the absence of childcare modules, which to a certain extent restricts the improvement of students’ childcare ability.

3.4. Disconnect between theory and practical skills

The childcare majors of some higher vocational institutions pay too much attention to the laws of early childhood development, health literacy, psychological knowledge, the field of art, the field of language, and other knowledge, and spend a lot of time on theoretical knowledge education, aiming to improve the theoretical foundation of students; however, this practice seriously limits students’ practical training time, and the lack of practical experience is detrimental to the improvement of their professionalism ^[5]. There are also some higher vocational colleges and universities that encourage students to do internships in early childhood education organizations and childcare institutions, but these internships often cannot be carried out together with the curriculum, resulting in a disconnect between theoretical experience and practical experience.

3.5. Inadequate teaching means and assessment methods

At present, the higher vocational colleges and universities’ childcare professional teaching methods are single, the assessment of the quality of childcare is not perfect, the main body of the assessment focuses on the school, and the evaluation method is relatively single. Most of the teachers use the theoretical knowledge test results to evaluate the students. The evaluation of student internships and educational practices is just a formality. The compatibility between graduates’ career suitability assessment and vocational education is low. The reasons for

this are mainly the following two aspects. Firstly, many teachers in higher vocational colleges and universities do not have the experience of working on the front line of childcare institutions, so many teachers use the traditional theoretical teaching methods, and students can only passively accept the theoretical knowledge inculcated, and cannot feel the problems and joys of the actual childcare work, so it is difficult to stimulate the students' learning motivation and professional enthusiasm. Secondly, the establishment of a sound childcare quality assessment system and supervision and management system is a difficult systematic project that requires a long period of exploration and integration before it can be gradually perfected.

4. Discussion on the reform of talent cultivation mode in higher vocational colleges and universities

4.1. Clarifying the goal of talent training

The ultimate goal of childcare services is to care for young children and promote their comprehensive development. Therefore, when providing childcare for 0–3-year-olds, we should focus on early care and education services from the aspects of infants' large movements, fine movements, sensory cognition, language, emotion, and sociality ^[6]. When providing childcare for children aged 3–6 years old, early education activities combining care and education should be carried out for children in the five major areas of health, language, society, science, and art, so as to promote the all-round development of young children. Therefore, childcare professionals should integrate the teaching programs of the two phases into a whole, focusing on the relevance of the two phases. In this way, activities can be carried out to not only meet the needs of 0–3-years-old that focus on parenting and integrate education but can also meet the needs of 3–6-year-olds that combine childcare and education, in order to realize the effective articulation of the different developmental needs of children in the two stages ^[7].

4.2. Establishing a good cultivation concept

In determining the concept of talent development, attention should be paid to the combination of breadth and depth, in accordance with the order of “learning professional foundation–strengthening professional skills,” first let students master the professional foundation, and then strengthen the overall job skills, so that the students' professional knowledge and ability can meet the job requirements of the enterprise. Childcare service has high requirements for professional quality, therefore, the cultivation of professional skills should be combined with the cultivation of professionalism, so that students can love the childcare service industry and have excellent vocational skills and professionalism, as well as a strong sense of social responsibility.

4.3. Establishing a systematic professional system and reshaping the curriculum teaching structure

In order to strictly follow the pace of the latest national reform of vocational education, higher vocational colleges and universities should establish an integrated education system of job requirements, course learning, competency competitions, and practitioner certificates, and reconstruct the educational structure of the courses by combining teaching methods, skill competitions, and vocational certificates. In the past, the employment goal of pre-primary education majors in higher vocational colleges and universities was kindergarten teachers, the most important thing for graduates was to obtain the kindergarten teacher's qualification certificate, and schools often provided channels to obtain the nursery school nurse's certificate, and graduates of the “two certificates” are quite popular among employers. Since the launch of the “Childcare Integration” program, the employment scope of graduates has been expanded to a variety of early childhood education institutions

and childcare institutions^[8]. In addition to the kindergarten teacher's license, babysitter's license, and nursery teacher's license, students can also obtain the "1+X" competency certificate. The "1+X" competency certificate consists of two parts, namely, theoretical knowledge and skills assessment, and the content is mainly related to the early education profession. Teachers of childcare majors in higher vocational colleges and universities can help students accumulate relevant theoretical knowledge and improve their professional skills in the process of early learning by integrating the content of the certificate assessment into the relevant courses.

4.4. Strengthening the industry practice of college teachers and consolidating the practical foundation of childcare talent cultivation

The childcare industry practice of college teachers plays a crucial role in the improvement of the comprehensive quality of childcare talents, especially the improvement of practical skills. The main purpose of strengthening the industry practice of college teachers is to enable college teachers to have a deeper understanding of the actual needs of the childcare industry, including the content, methods, and standards of childcare services, so that they can better grasp the focus and direction of teaching in the teaching process. Active participation in the practice of industry enterprises can give teachers the opportunity to personally participate in the actual operation of childcare services, so as to improve their professional skills and practical teaching ability and they will be more familiar with the operational processes and norms of the childcare industry and be more comfortable in the teaching process. Teaching resources are also very important to college teachers, industry practice can also provide college teachers with a wealth of teaching resources, including the actual cases of enterprises, experience sharing, etc. These resources can be used as teaching materials to enrich the teaching content and teaching methods, so that the teaching is more vivid and specific.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, "childcare for the young and good education for the young" has become an important social development goal related to the country's economy and people's livelihood. The childcare service system is also developing from the traditional "two-track parallel" education to "childcare integration." Facing the opportunities and challenges brought by the promotion of "childcare integration" for higher vocational colleges and universities, higher vocational colleges and universities should carry out the change of talent cultivation mode with the vision of development, start from talent cultivation program, strengthen the construction of "childcare integration" faculty, improve the professional skills and practical experience of talents, and promote the development of professional skills and practical experience, promote the integration of professional courses and the construction of dual-mentorship internships, and continuously improve the quality of the childcare professional teaching force^[9].

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