

A Comparative Study of Early Childhood Teacher Education Programs in Chinese and American Universities

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This multi-site case study examines the similarities and differences of the early childhood teacher education (ECTE) programs at a university in China and a university in the United States (U.S.) to develop a model for ECTE based on best practices in both countries. The two universities are partners in a student and faculty exchange program that aims to prepare highly effective teachers to lead high quality early childhood education (ECE) programs in the U.S. and China to address the increase in the global demand for public preschool programs to ensure that all children are academically and socially ready to be successful in elementary school.

Keywords: early childhood education, early childhood teacher education, developmentally appropriate practice

Introduction

Curriculum is a major component of a university program. To understand the differences between early childhood teacher education (ECTE) in United States (U.S.) and China, we will compare the curricula of two ECTE programs. The programs are Western Michigan University (WMU) in the U.S. and Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University (GPNU) in China. These universities are partners in a student and faculty exchange program that aims to prepare teachers who can lead high quality early childhood programs in China and the U.S.. By comparing the two programs, we can discover the advantages and disadvantages of each curriculum approach. Our goal is to construct a model for ECTE that integrates the best practices of both countries.

One important difference to note is the age range that defines early childhood education (ECE) in U.S. and China. ECE in China is designed for children aged 0-6. In the U.S., ECE focuses children aged 0-8 years old. Therefore, there are differences in the future employment of graduates of ECTE programs in China and the U.S.. In China, ECTE graduates teach children aged 3-6 should in kindergartens. In the U.S., ECTE graduates are qualified to teach children age 3-5 in preschool and children aged 6-8 in kindergarten-3rd grade classrooms in public schools.

The U.S. ECTE program presented in this article is in an urban area in a mid-west state. Content taught in

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U.S. teacher education program was based on Western cultures, theories, and pedagogy. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) defined Western teaching pedagogy as child-centred and play-based. This U.S. program is accredited by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation of early childhood higher education programs. Since 2006, NAEYC has accredited early childhood degree programs, in order to set a standard of excellence for early childhood degree programs and to recognize programs that have demonstrated they meet this standard, thereby benefiting the early childhood profession, young children, families, and communities.

The China ECTE program presented in this article is in an urban area in a south province. Content taught in China teacher education program was based on the Chinese culture and social needs. The education policy has played an important role in curriculum. Such as the Teacher Education Curriculum Standard (Trial) guide early childhood higher education programs since 2011. The Ministry of Education (ME) promulgated Professional Certification Standards (2017) in order to grant accreditation to early childhood degree programs. And now, all the universities adjust and improve their courses to meet the requirements of the standards.

Background

Many of the U.S. and China comparison studies focus on the differences in the ECE programs the children attend rather than the ECTE programs. Gong and Wang (2017) explained that the influence of the developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) framework is the major difference between ECE programs in the U.S. and China. DAP has a major impact on ECE programs in the U.S.. DAP includes child choice in materials and activities, hands-on lessons, and play. The NAEYC defines three core considerations of DAP: considering child development at their age levels; considering socially appropriate play, interaction, and environments for each child; and considering culturally relevant information of each family (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Wang James, McMullen, and Mao (2008) described the programs in the U.S. as child-initiated with an emphasis on social-emotional development. Conversely, programs in China are teacher-directed and place a greater emphasis on academic skills. Although DAP is starting to be accepted in China, there are philosophical beliefs and cultural norms that make it difficult to fully implement it. Hu (2002) explained that China is a socially collective culture. Therefore, children are taught with whole group instruction. DAP advocates for a balance among whole group, individual, and small group instruction. In contrast, U.S. children are expected to be independent. Other barriers to fully adopting DAP in China are large class sizes that require more whole group instruction, because they are not enough ECE teachers to create smaller classes (Hu & Li, 2012; Hu & Szente, 2009). Also, parents who have only one child have extremely high expectations for their child's achievement and success. Therefore, they believe a structured curriculum that focuses on academic skills is more effective than a play-based curriculum (Pang & Richey, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (Vygotsky, 1978). As we examine the similarities and differences in ECTE in the U.S. and China, we will explore the cultural influences on what is taught and how it is taught. This approach is influenced by Vygotsky's notion that learning happens first on the social level and then is internalized on the personal level. Thus, our socio-cultural environment impacts what and how we learn.

If we accept the premise that all learning is socially and culturally mediated, we must examine the

dominant cultural beliefs regarding child development and ECE in each country. In the U.S., Jean Piaget's theory on cognitive development is the foundation of child development and ECE (Piaget, 1936). Based on this theory, early childhood educators and researchers in the U.S. have developed benchmarks for DAP for preschool and early elementary education. In China, the Confucian tradition of learning which emphasizes reception, repetition, review, and reproduction has consistently resulted in high levels of academic achievement. Therefore, ECE is expected to be teacher-centered to transmit cultural traditions and wisdom (Hu, 2002).

These different cultural beliefs have led to different models for ECE. In the U.S., the Piagetian theory is applied in ECE programs that are play-based and child-centered. These programs allow children to experiment with play materials, so they can learn skills at their individual level of development on their own timeline. In China, Confucian traditions are included in the cultural focus of the curriculum in ECE using arts. Therefore, ECE programs in China devote more time to arts education (Scollon, 1999).

Over the past 20 years, both countries have expanded their ECE program options to prepare children for formal schooling. Therefore, there is a demand for more early childhood teachers. In a previous study, Li, An, and Ma (2017) compared ECTE objectives and program courses in the U.S. (Pennsylvania State University [PSU]) and in China (Capital Normal University [CNU]). The ECTE program at PSU included courses on a wide range of subject areas and elective courses on language, while the ECTE program at CNU courses focused on art.

The main contribution of the current study is to compare the similarities and differences in the ECTE programs of WMU and GPNU. The focus will be on program design, admission requirements, training goals, and course work. This study will examine how two universities prepare early childhood teachers. Specifically, we will compare the course work and requirements for field experiences to determine how both programs can be enhanced by integrating aspects of both programs.

Methodology

This study is a comparative study that compares both the ECTE programs in the U.S. and China. In this comparison study, we use a multi-site case study approach to examine an ECTE program in the U.S.—WMU and in China—GPNU.

Comparative Research

According to Bereday's four step comparison model (Adick, 2018), description is the first step, we describe the two universities' major programs based on the information from the websites and program documents. Interpretation is the second step, we evaluate the information from the historical, political, economic, and social dimensions. Juxtaposition is the third step, we establish the similarities and differences between the two universities of U.S. and China. Comparison is the final step, we summarize the results of our research and make recommendations for each university.

Case Study

Although the ECE programs in each country are roughly the same, in order to show the differences between the two countries more specifically, we conduct case studies on WMU and GPNU. Each ECTE program is described in detail.

Description, Interpretation, and Comparison

Background of ECE Programs

“Who to train, how to train, and for whom to train” is the fundamental focus of Chinese education. Chinese ECTE programs must follow national and regional education policies, regulations, and industry standards. Chinese ECTE programs follow the ME’s “Teacher Education Curriculum Standards (Trial),” “ECE Teacher Professional Standards,” “ECE Professional Certification Standards,” and the content of “ECE Teacher Certification Examination.”

In the U.S., national accreditation is granted by the NAEYC. This organization uses current research to develop standards for curriculum and instruction in ECE. However, each state can set standards for licensing early childhood programs that determine the requirements for staffing, environment, employment policies, and safety procedures. In addition, many states have developed a quality rating system for early childhood programs that provide additional guidelines for centers to reach the highest level of quality.

Admission Requirements

Usually, test scores influence how Chinese students choose universities, majors, and determine admission. Universities give priority to the candidates with high test scores. Candidates may be admitted into their first-choice university if they meet the admission requirements. Based on the score cut offs for each major, the universities ultimately determine the students’ major. Therefore, the students who are enrolled in the university could be assigned the ECE major whether it is their first-choice or not.

In the U.S., universities set their own admissions standards based on their capacity and focus. For example, a large public university in the mid-west that focuses on teacher education may have the capacity to enroll hundreds of students each year. This university may develop admission standards to accept students that have scores in the average range on the college admission exams as well as students who have college admission scores in the above average range. To attract more students into the field of ECE, many universities will admit students with test scores in the average range.

Training Objectives

The training objective for GPNU is to prepare kindergarten (including preschool) teachers in ECE. Therefore, about 90% of GPNU ECTE graduates will go to work in kindergartens (including preschool). The ECTE coursework focuses on professional knowledge, professional skills, and professional practice that are required for kindergarten (including preschool) teachers. In contrast, the training objectives in the U.S. focus on birth through 3rd grade and include elementary education standards. Therefore, less than half of ECE college graduates will work in preschool programs if they obtain certification to teach in elementary schools.

The Curricula

Because the national education policy and professional training objectives are very different, that ECTE course work at WMU and GPNU are also different. The differences are mainly reflected in general courses, professional courses, and teaching practice.

General Courses

Taking WMU and GPNU as examples, the required general courses ECTE majors in two universities are shown in Table 1. The required general courses at WMU and GPNU are quite different, while the elective general courses have some similarities. There are more required general courses and credits at WMU than at

GPNU. The general courses at WMU focus on content knowledge in the core subject areas of math, English, social studies, and science. Therefore, the students develop a deep body of knowledge in the content areas they will teach in elementary schools. For example, WMU students take a series of mathematics courses for elementary or middle school teachers. In contrast, the required general courses of GPNU are mostly ideological, political, English, and career development courses. Students are not required to take math and science content courses.

Table 1

General Courses

University	WMU		GPNU	
	Course	Credit	Course	Credit
Required course	ENGL-Thought and Writing	4	Cultivation of Ideology & Morality and Foundation of Law	3
	ED-Human Development	3	Compendium of Chinese Modern & Contemporary History (Including Integrity and Self-Cultivation)	3
	MATH-Number Concepts for Elementary/Middle Teachers	4	Introduction to Mao Zedong's Thought & Deng Xiaoping Theory and Three Representative Important Thoughts	6
	MATH-Geometry for Elementary/Middle Teachers	4	Situation and Policy	2
	MATH-Probability & Stats for Elementary/Middle Teachers	4	College English	12
	ENGL-Lit. for the Young Child	4	Physical Education	4
	BIOS-Life Science for Non-Major	3	Mental Health Education for College Students	2
	PHYS-Inquiry and Insight	3	Application of Computer Technology	3
	GEOG-Exploring Earth Science: Atmosphere	3	College Chinese	2
	CHEM-Active Chemistry	3	Innovation and Entrepreneurship Foundation	2
	ECON-Economics	3	Career and Development Planning	1.5
	GEOG-World Geography/Media & Map	3	Career Guidance	0.5
	PSCI-National Government	3		
	HIST-U.S. History to 1877	3		
	Total	47		44
Elective courses	ART 1480 or MUS 1480	4	Natural Science	2
	Word History to 1500 or Michigan History	3	Humanities and Social Sciences	2
	Healthy Living or Choices in Living	2-3	Economic Management	2
			Art Course	2
	Total	9-10		8

Major Courses

GPNU's major courses include required courses and elective courses. The major required courses are teacher education method and content courses. Major elective courses include skills courses and skills certification. Compared with WMU, GPNU's courses are mainly aimed at the education of children ages 0-6. All major courses at GPNU are designed to provide a theoretical foundation and improve students' professional skills to prepare them to be kindergarten (including preschool) teachers. Therefore, there are more specialized courses in GPNU's program. The WMU major courses in elementary education focus on teaching methods in the core subject areas (English language arts, math, social studies, and science), educational foundations,

special education, technology, and classroom management. The major courses for ECE are aligned with the national standards. Therefore, WMU offers courses in child development, assessment, working with families, administration, and curriculum.

Table 2

Major Courses

University	WMU		GPNU	
	Course	Credit	Course	Credit
Required courses	ED-Assessment & Instruct in ECH Inclusive Education	3	General Pedagogy	3
	ED-ECH Classroom Organization/Management	3	General Psychology	4
	LS-Early Literacy	3	History of Foreign & Chinese Education	3
	LS-Literacy Across Discipline	3	Educational Research Methods	3
	MATH-Teaching Elementary School Math	3	Early Children Psychology	3
	EDT-Technology for Elementary Education	3	Early Children Pedagogy	3
	ENGL-Writing: Elementary School	4	Early Children Hygiene	3
	ED-Young Child/Family/Society	3	Kindergarten Curriculum	2
	ED-Administration Child Development Centers	3	Early Children Play Theory	3
	SPED-Learners with Disabilities	3	Creation of Kindergarten Environment	2
	ES-School & Society	3	Health Education of Early Children	2
	HPHE-Physical Education for the Elementary Classroom Teacher	2	Language Education of Early Children	2
	HPHE-Teaching Elementary Science	2	Social Education of Early Children	2
	ED-Teaching Elementary Science	3	Scientific Education of Early Children	2
	ED- Social Studies/Multi-cultural Education	3	Music Education of Early Children	2
	ED-Creativity	3	Art Education of Early Children	2
			Educational Technology	2
			Teacher Teaching Skills Training	2
			Education Policy and Laws	1
			Teacher Spoken skill	1
			Three Words Training	1
Major elective courses	Total	47	Haodxie	48
			Early Education Policy and Laws	2
			Family & Community Education of Children	2
			Organization and Management of Kindergarten	2
			Development and Learning of Children With Special Needs	2
			Early Children Characteristic Curriculum Theory And Practice	2
			Art	6
			Music Theory	3
			Dance	6
			Playing Method of Musical Instrument	8
	Total	0		33

Teaching Practice Courses

GPNU's practical courses are based on the ME's professional certification standard "Educational Practice ≥ 18 weeks" (Ministry of Education, 2017), which includes a 4-week education probation and a 16-week graduation education internship. Internship schools are mainly preschool and kindergarten programs. Education probation is conducted in four semesters from sophomore to junior year. Each semester is arranged for a full week of education probation. Education internships are usually arranged in the first semester of senior year, for a total of 16 weeks, Monday to Friday every week in preschool/kindergarten, after four weeks of childcare internship (preparing for familiarization with work), students officially enter into the educational internship.

Students at WMU complete a 2-day a week pre-internship in a kindergarten-3rd grade classroom for a full semester and 5-day a week, full-time internship in another kindergarten-3rd grade classroom to fulfill their elementary education requirements. During the internships, they plan lessons, conduct assessments, and co-teach with the lead teacher. To fulfill the requirements for the ECE major, the students complete a half-time internship that consists of five morning sessions or five afternoon sessions each week for the full semester in a preschool, toddler, or infant classroom. They are required to complete developmental assessment reports for families, plan and facilitate developmentally appropriate activities.

Table 3

Teaching Practice Courses

University	WMU		GPNU	
	Course	Credit	Course	Credit
	ED- Internship/Early Childhood (1/2 days)	6	Educational Probation (Sophomore to junior, four semesters, one week/semester)	4
	ED-Pre-Internship (2-full days)	6	Preschool/Kindergarten Education Internship (First semester of senior year, full 16 weeks)	8
	ED-Internship/Elementary	12		
	Total	24		12

In sum, the outcome for this project is to strengthen and expand our student and faculty exchange program between the universities to improve how we prepare ECE teachers to lead programs in China and the U.S.. The reflection below is from an exchange student who completed her bachelor's degree at GPNU and master's degree at WMU in ECE. She has worked as an ECE teacher in China and U.S. and is completing her Ph.D. at WMU to become an ECE professor in China.

Student Reflection

As a student who has obtained an ECE undergraduate degree in China and received an ECE master's degree in the U.S.. She experienced different curricula, teaching styles, classroom practices, as well as field placements. These differences impacted her understanding of ECE, her practice in the field, and her daily interaction with others. Her personal experiences are described in the following paragraphs. Although she has experienced both American and Chinese ECTE programs, it was not been at the same educational level both countries. When comparing the undergraduate curriculum differences, she can only speak from her experience in ECTE in China and observations of ECTE in America. One of the differences between American and Chinese ECTE program is course design. Chinese ECTE courses focus on teaching students with content knowledge intensively with early childhood pedagogies. For example, math is a general education course in

America, which was not required in Chinese ECE curriculum. However, Chinese ECTE has a course called “Preschool Math Teaching.” From this perspective, she gained more understanding of how to specifically teach math in preschool from Chinese curriculum. Learning math and learning how to teach math in early childhood classroom are two different concepts. While learning math enriches student’s math ability, learning how to teach preschool math aims to apply early childhood teaching methods within a math context. Also, U.S. curricula address early childhood teaching strategies in a different way in a U.S. course called “Early Childhood Methods and Materials.”

The other differences in both ECTE program is the graduate level core courses. The core courses in Chinese ECTE graduate program are mostly policy and second language related. When she started her Master’s program in the U.S., one of the first classes she attended in was human development and philosophy, which is not offered in Chinese Master’s program of ECTE. The discussion and open-ending group work were also new to her. We all read books and articles before class, then we started the class with discussions of certain questions. There were no “correct” answers. She was afraid that she would be left behind because of her language barriers and lack of philosophy background. She expressed her concerns to the instructor. The instructor replied with encouragement and told her to do her best. She learned that it is not always about comparing herself with others. It is about trying her hardest and learning as much as she can. This has contributed to increasing her self-esteem as an English language learner. She also learned to be more open-minded in her teaching practice. On the other hand, by studying the policy and second language related courses in China, she gained more content knowledge on school environments, as well as skills in reading and writing with a second language. The policy and second language related courses in China helped her establish a foundation for further study in U.S..

Besides the core content courses mentioned about, there are other differences in early childhood courses in Chinese ECTE and U.S. ECTE programs. In the Chinese curriculum, she was required to learn the “four skills”—playing instruments, singing, dancing, and art/craft, which she put so much time and effort into while she was in undergrad program. As she went into field placements in local preschool programs as a teacher, she realized that most U.S. ECE teachers focus more on building relationship instead of learning “four skills.” Everyone in her Chinese undergrad cohort was able to dance, play piano, singing, and do craft, draw, and paint at a semi-professional level. We were trained with those skills to better teach in the classroom by attracting students’ attention. However, she observed that U.S. teachers are trained more on how to interact with children, instead of how to attract students. She started changing her wording in the classroom: From “controlling students” to “keeping students safe,” from “Why are you sad?” to “Can you tell me about what happened?,” and from “come here” to “Can I have a hug.” She made major shifts in her teaching within one year of field practice. It was not just the changes in her conversations with children, but also changes in her beliefs about teaching and learning, regarding student-centered instruction and open-ended play.

Conclusion and Discussion

In recent years, China has increased the number of ECE programs. China encourages and funds many students and teachers to study in the U.S.. ECE in the U.S. began a half a century earlier than in China. Chinese students come to U.S. to learn about and practice in ECE programs. This study compared two ECTE programs in China and the U.S.. Both countries have something to learn from each other, especially regarding ECTE curricula.

Similarities

ECE is important in the U.S. and China. Since 2010, China has formulated a series of policies and regulations to develop preschool education to promote the development of ECE nationwide. The U.S. government over the years has also expanded ECE policies and funding. National ECE policies and regulations in China and U.S. influence what is taught in ECTE programs.

Both China and the U.S. have increased their focus on ECE teachers, because they are an important factor that determines the quality of ECE. The U.S. researchers found that “Only by cultivating and protecting an outstanding faculty of teachers, the U.S. can get rid of the predicament it has fallen into, and only by solving the problems of teachers can it resolve the education crisis, emphasizing the concept of quality teachers training high-quality talents’ to lay a solid foundation for all children, and then To ensure the U.S.’ dominant position in various world competitions” (Holmes Group, 1995).

Both China and the U.S. have the same course format. The course format includes compulsory and elective courses, and the course content mainly includes three major blocks: general courses, major courses, and practice courses. It not only emphasizes the academic ability, but also strengthens the education ability, focusing on the combination of liberal arts knowledge and professional education.

Differences

There are many differences in the Chinese and U.S. ECTE programs. First, the name of the majors is different. In China, the name of major is preschool education. This means the university student after graduating that they will teach the children before elementary school, ages 0-6 years old. In contrast, the name of major in U.S. is ECE, which focuses on children ages 0-8 years old. The difference in age group focus, impacts the training objectives, curriculum, and career paths for the graduates of the ECTE programs in U.S. and China.

Second, the training models are different. China adopts a directional talent training model. The college entrance examination results determine the students’ career path. Students do not have the freedom to choose. The ECE is not the first choice of most people. In contrast, the U.S. trains teachers to adopt a non-directional training model, focusing on providing learners with the possibility of multiple choices, so as to ensure that the people who ultimately choose to do ECE are really enthusiastic and have a basic understanding of the theory and practice of this major. After careful consideration, the person who finally decides to engage in this professional work has a strong professional autonomy.

Third, the training institutions are different. In China, mainly 4-year comprehensive universities or normal universities undertake the training of undergraduates in ECE. In U.S., the pre-service training of undergraduate ECE teachers is mainly completed by comprehensive universities, and there are no independent established normal universities or colleges for ECE.

Fourth, the curricula are different. In China, although the duration of general courses is high, there are few subject categories, and the content is mainly ideological and moral, history, and politics. In the U.S., general courses take up one-third of the total hours, and the subject categories are more comprehensive, covering art, humanities, society, biology, nature, science, and so on.

These differences are not caused by the universities. There are some historical, social, political, and economic reasons for the development of the ECE in the two countries. The unique political, economic, cultural, and social characteristics of each country determined the development of the ECE and the focus of the ECTE

programs at the university.

The history of ECE is shorter in China, kindergartens started in the early 20th century, and the universities began to recruit ECE student in the 1980s. China has learned from Russia, U.S., and Japan. In Chinese history, there was a writer, philosopher, and thinker, named Yu Han in the Tang Dynasty of China, his paper (Han A.D. 801) said that “The real fact is that one might have learned the doctrine earlier than the other or might be a master in his own special field.” Therefore, China believes that the more professional the better. Therefore, the content of curricula in ECE program are mainly for children ages 0-6 years old, and the curricula focuses on academic skills.

In terms of policy, the education has always focused on all-round development in China. To ensure the comprehensive development of children, the teaching method involves the five major areas of health, language, science, society, and the arts. It has a special focus on artistic skills training.

As China’s economy continues developing, the society pays more attention to ECE. Therefore, more professional ECE teachers are needed and the government’s economic support for ECE is also increasing. All these factors will inevitably affect the curriculum of the ECTE programs in the universities of China.

From the micro-level of Chinese social education, China’s educational goal has always been the comprehensive development of moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and labour. All-round development through the educational system must be started from a young age. Therefore, the ECTE curriculum in universities reflects these various fields.

There are various social, political, and philosophical movements that have impacted the field of ECE in the U.S.. Philosophers, such as Jean Jacque Rousseau who taught that children should be allowed to follow their natural instinct to explore and be curious about the natural world have heavily influenced ECE. Building a connection with the natural world was an important part of child development. Later, child development theorists, such as Jean Piaget studied and defined children’s cognitive development stages from concrete thinkers to abstract thinkers. In doing so, he helped us understand the types of activities that would be most appropriate for children in early childhood. Piagetian ideas have influenced DAP that are used in ECE programs in the U.S.. These practices are grounded in the principles of child-centered learning, hands-on materials, free choice time, and child observation to determine which stage children are in and what they are ready to learn. The developmentally appropriate guidelines have been used to develop standards for high-quality early childhood programs in the U.S..

Originally, ECE programs were developed to provide custodial care for children of working mothers. There was not much focus on children’s developmental needs. Later, child development researchers examined the impact of these programs on children’s development and concluded that they can be beneficial if they are high quality. Therefore, ECE programs were used as social program to increase the academic achievement of children in poverty. This led to government funded preschools for low income families. Now, middle- and upper-income families invest in ECE programs as academic enrichment for their children to ensure that they are academically and socially ready for kindergarten. Thus, the demand for high-quality ECE has increased to meet the needs of all young children in the U.S..

In general, the fundamental difference in ECE programs of the universities between the China and U.S. lies in historical and cultural differences in educational values in China and the U.S.. From a Chinese perspective, the curriculum pursues specialized learning with “specialized skills,” which influences the path for teachers’ professional development. Therefore, the scope of the curriculum is narrower than the scope of the

curriculum in the U.S. ECTE programs. Chinese ECTE programs can improve by broadening their scope of coursework to include more content knowledge coursework. From the perspective of the U.S., the curriculum focuses more on kindergarten-3rd grade content coursework, and less on ECE coursework for children aged 0-5. Therefore, U.S. ECTE programs can be improved by increasing the focus on children's development and artistic expression in the early years.

Recommendations for Integrating Aspects of China's Program into the U.S. Program

The U.S. curriculum focuses more on kindergarten-3rd grade content coursework, and less on ECE coursework for children aged 0-5. Therefore, the main recommendation is to develop a separate program that focuses on birth through kindergarten teacher preparation.

In doing so, the age span for the curriculum can be narrowed in scope. Students will have courses that are focused on infants and toddlers. In these courses, they will develop play-based activities for infants. They will also have more opportunities to learn about arts—focused curriculum for toddlers. These courses will be paired with clinical experiences that allow them to implement project-based learning for pre-schoolers.

The birth through kindergarten program will be theoretically grounded in child development. As such, the focus will be on building secure attachments with infants to nurture their development. In the program, students will learn how to design daily schedules that allow them to spend time with each toddler individually and in small groups throughout the day. Students will use intentional teaching practices to choose activities that are based on each child's unique cultural background and developmental stage.

Lastly, the birth through kindergarten program will put families' needs at the center of the educational process. In classes focused on infants, students will learn about the ecological model and how to use community resources to support families. They will implement family-based assessments and developmental screenings with toddlers to make referrals for early intervention services. They will study ECE programs that provide multi-tiered systems of support.

The China's curriculum focuses more on 0-6 years old children's education. Relevant education departments in China particularly emphasize that education for 0-6 years old is different from elementary school education, and therefore requires all kindergartens to avoid "primary schooling" in education content, especially not to learn primary school subjects in advance.

In doing so, the connection between the kindergarten and the primary is still the main problem facing China's ECE. Therefore, China should start to explore educational content based on the characteristics of early childhood physical and mental development to help early children prepare for school, especially for children aged 5-6 to better adapt to future primary school studies.

Kindergarten education, elementary education, and subsequent education are all dynamic systems, and there is a natural internal connection between them, and we should not artificially separate them. Therefore, we need to focus on the physical and mental development of early children, seek the connection point between kindergarten and primary school, and carry out educational planning and design in this direction, to implement appropriate educational activities, and promote the smooth transition of early children to primary education.

First of all, we need families, kindergartens, and the whole society to pay attention to the education of young children, and to reach a basic consensus on educational concepts, content, methods, and requirements. Secondly, starting from the long-term development needs of children and the talent needs of future social development, we should effectively determine "What kind of people to train" as the main focus of educational

development; allowing us to finally design and develop an appropriate kindergarten-primary school bridging curriculum to help kindergarten teachers effectively implement education.

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