

Research on Status Quo of Preschool Education Majors' Professional Consciousness

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Supported by Sichuan Preschool Education Development Research Center "Research on Cultivation of the Preschool Education Majors' Professional Consciousness—Case Study of Universities in Sichuan" (CECER-2015-B10).

Received 14 September 2015; accepted 25 November 2015
Published online 26 December 2015

Abstract

This paper made a research on the professional consciousness of freshmen, sophomores who major in preschool education in three universities through questionnaires and interviews, and analyzed the survey data by using SPSS statistical software 17.0. The results show that preschool education majors' professional consciousness needs improvement. There are differences between their levels in terms of their genders, origins, regions, grades and admission modes. Universities should enhance students' professional identity consciousness pertinently; professional teachers can strengthen the cultivation of students' professional subject consciousness step by step; actively conduct the home-school cooperation and establish a good team to improve and enhance students' professional consciousness together.

Key words: Preschool education; Professional consciousness; Undergraduates

Xia, W. (2015). Research on Status Quo of Preschool Education Majors' Professional Consciousness. *Canadian Social Science*, 11(12), 29-35. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/7987>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7987>

INTRODUCTION

Professional consciousness means

the self-conscious attitudes and consciousness shown by people when they follow the law of a certain discipline's internal development to do scientific research or daily educational practice. The most important performance is the subject consciousness of this professional scientific system and characteristics different from other professionals, as well as the sense of belonging and identity of this professional. (Chen & Wang, 2009)

This definition highlights two dimensions of the professional consciousness, which are subjective consciousness and professional identity. *Kindergarten Teachers' Professional Standards* has put forward the basic requirements in the field of "professional understanding and consciousness", which is "to understand the significance of early childhood care and education, to love preschool education, to have career aspirations and professional dedication. Identify the professionalism and uniqueness of kindergarten teachers, focusing on their own professional development." (Ministry of Education in PRC, 2013). These two basic requirements can be regarded as an explanation of professional standard to preschool professional consciousness. This interpretation not only emphasizes the understanding and identification of preschool education, but also demonstrates the importance of preschool workers' own professional development. Based on these two opinions, the professional consciousness in this study refers to undergraduates' understanding and experience of preschool education. Undergraduates actively use theoretical knowledge and professional skills of preschool education to pursue self-professional development in the study and practice. The specific content is related to professional identity consciousness, professional subject consciousness and professional development consciousness.

Studying and training preschool education majors' professional consciousness can help to enhance the enrollment pertinence and reliability of preschool education major and improve students' academic quality as well as the agreement of employment. There are not enough research results for preschool professional consciousness before. Hence, this study tries to combine the questionnaires and interviews to investigate preschool education majors' professional consciousness so as to understand the status quo and to analyze the factors that influence students' professional consciousness. Combined with the preschool education professional feature, this paper also proposes some effective strategies to train preschool education majors' professional consciousness so as to provide valuable reference for political instructors to conduct students' enrollment education, for preschool education teachers to conduct effective teaching and for universities' admission department to have a good enrollment.

1. RESEARCH METHODS

1.1 Research Objects

The study sampled freshmen and sophomores from University A in Sichuan, University B in the developed city in Shandong and University C in Guangxi who major in preschool education as research subjects. Each university had been distributed 100 pieces of questionnaires. Each grade had 50 copies. Excluding invalid questionnaires, the total recovered amount of University A, B, C were: 89, 92 and 92. (As shown in Table 1)

Table 1
Distribution Table of Samples

| School | A | B | C | Total proportion | |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|----|----|------------------|-------|
| Number | 89 | 92 | 92 | | |
| Gender | Male | 8 | 4 | 16 | 10.2% |
| | Female | 81 | 88 | 76 | 89.8% |
| Grade | Freshman | 49 | 42 | 47 | 50.5% |
| | Sophomore | 40 | 50 | 45 | 49.5% |
| Origin | City | 25 | 18 | 17 | 22.0% |
| | Town | 22 | 30 | 23 | 27.5% |
| | Country | 42 | 44 | 52 | 50.5% |
| Admission mode | 1 st choice | 23 | 79 | 36 | 50.5% |
| | 2 nd or 3 rd | 34 | 10 | 32 | 27.8% |
| | or 4 th choice | | | | |
| Adjusted student | 3 | 0 | 10 | 4.9% | |
| Additional admission | 29 | 3 | 14 | 16.8% | |

1.2 Research Tools

This paper increased the investigation on undergraduates' professional subject consciousness and professional development consciousness major in preschool education

based on the existing questionnaires of "Normal University Students' Teacher Professional Identity Development" (Yang, 2007) and "Undergraduates' Professional Identity of Primary School Education" (Peng, 2008), and also prepared the "Questionnaire of preschool education majors' professional consciousness". The questionnaire contains professional identity consciousness, professional subject consciousness and professional development consciousness. The professional identity consciousness includes the recognition of professional identity, professional courses, teachers in the school, and whether there are professional self-esteem and a sense of belonging to this major. The professional subject consciousness includes students' initiative recognition of the professional nature, the active understanding of the professional object, the initiative grasp of the professional content and the active attitude towards professional learning. The professional development consciousness includes the professional ideal, professional belief, professional goals, professional innovation and professional development trend.

The questionnaires were initially issued in September 2015. Each grade had 20 copies, and 38 copies were recovered. Then this paper had some additions and deletions to individual questions, modifications to some question of words according to the feedback information to perfect the questions so that the survey results can be displayed more accurately and reliably. In addition, it tested the questionnaire's reliability and validity by SPSS17.0 and the result is 0.9073. It had made descriptive statistics and sample T-test to the recovered data. It had also analyzed the professional consciousness of undergraduates major in preschool education and compared the differences.

2. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

2.1 Overall Situation of Preschool Education Majors' Professional Consciousness

The average scores of professional consciousness and its each dimension are shown in Table 2. It can be seen from the table that preschool education majors' professional consciousness need to be improved. In the three dimensions, students' professional development consciousness has a higher average score, but the scores of professional identity consciousness and subject consciousness are relatively low.

When asked that "Are you willing to tell others your major?", the results show that 8% students choose "very pleased", 12% for "relatively happy", 34% for "do not care", 35% for "relatively unwilling" and 11% for "very unwilling". It indicates that some students have the sense of belonging to the major and like preschool education. But some students are not willing to be a professional member and have weak professional identity because they don't have enough professional

cognition and emotion and their professional and social recognition are not high. When asked “Are you satisfied with professional courses in school?” 30% students are satisfied, 30% students feel ordinary, 28% students are not very satisfied, and 12% students feel very unsatisfied. Being asked hardware facilities, teaching levels, internship

arrangements, etc., some students feel unsatisfied. It can be seen that whether students major in preschool education have the sense of identity is not only based on their own cognitive and emotional attitude, but also can be influenced by schools’ software and hardware devices to a certain extent.

Table 2
Average Scores of Professional Consciousness and Its Dimensions

| | Professional consciousness | Professional identity | Professional subject | Professional development |
|----------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| N | 273 | 273 | 273 | 273 |
| Mean | 3.8245 | 3.7216 | 3.8562 | 4.0469 |
| Std. deviation | .4494 | .3564 | .3851 | .5563 |
| Minimum | 1.17 | 1.04 | 1.03 | 1.15 |
| Maximum | 1.48 | 1.40 | 1.68 | 1.94 |

2.2 Group Differences of Preschool Education Majors’ Professional Consciousness

2.2.1 Differences in Students’ Gender

From data in Table 3, it can be seen that there is no significant difference between the levels of professional consciousness of two genders in general. Female students

have slightly higher average scores than male students. In the three dimensions, the difference between males’ and females’ levels of professional subject consciousness is slightly higher than that of other two dimensions. Female students have a strong professional subject consciousness.

Table 3
Comparison on the Average Level of Professional Consciousness Between Male and Female Students

| | Gender | N | Mean | Std.dev | Std.err | t | sig |
|----------------------------|--------|-----|--------|---------|---------|-------|------|
| Professional Consciousness | 1 * | 245 | 3.8250 | .43380 | .02777 | .111 | .912 |
| | 2 * | 28 | 3.8155 | .39546 | .07474 | | |
| Professional Identity | 1 | 245 | 3.7642 | .50175 | .03212 | -.383 | .702 |
| | 2 | 28 | 3.8024 | .47331 | .08945 | | |
| Professional Subject | 1 | 245 | 3.8627 | .53116 | .03400 | .656 | .513 |
| | 2 | 28 | 3.7946 | .40997 | .07748 | | |
| Professional Development | 1 | 245 | 3.9642 | .43447 | .02781 | .375 | .708 |
| | 2 | 28 | 3.9318 | .42180 | .07971 | | |

Note. *1: Female; 2: Male

In the process of social development, people’s inherent perceptions and expectations of male and female group formation are known as “Gender Stereotype”. Words described males’ personality is often used by “brave, strong, adventurous, strong ruling desire and leading”; words described females’ personality is often used by “considerate, obedient, orderly, sensitive, emotional.” (Xu, 2003)

Preschool teachers should not only take good care of children’s daily life, diet and sleep, but also guide them to play games, learn, work, go for a walk and other activities. They play the role of children’s mothers, teachers and friends. (Huang, 2009)

Therefore, people generally believe that women have a unique advantage to be a teacher. They have the innate motherhood and love. They are good at taking care of and considering students, they can narrow the distance between teachers and students, while men would be considered to be “unpromising” to be teachers,

especially preschool teachers. In addition, in China’s traditional values, men should be the head of the family, the backbone of the family, and the main person who is responsible for the family income. Hence, men should have a high income and decent job so that they can support the family. The social role of men is more of a business success, while the meaning of “success” is often evaluated by the economic income. Teaching profession which has a stable income but not high obviously cannot meet the expectations of family and society. Therefore, male students are often not optimistic about the prospects for preschool education. Their professional development consciousness is weak. They lack learning motivation and have weak subject consciousness. Commonly, they choose to change their major.

The result worth noting is that, although female students’ overall professional consciousness level is higher than that of male students, in terms of professional

identity, male students in three universities have slightly higher scores than female students. In this regard, researchers sampled three male students in these three universities to have an open interview. In the interviews, all male students said that they can feel their own values in colleges with many female students. They need to do many important and heavy tasks in the class and colleges. Many of them are class cadres, so their school life is very fulfilling. What's more, as there are few male students in class, they often become the focus and get teachers' attention and consideration. Many teachers would actively cultivate and develop them, so some preschool education male students feel happy instead. Obviously, the relationship between teachers and students, the relationship between students can also affect students' professional attitude and understanding of their major.

2.2.2 Differences in Origins and Regions

As to students' origins, there are no significant differences on professional consciousness between students from cities and towns and those in the countryside. The difference between cities and countryside is relatively obvious than that between cities and towns. Comparing the average value of students' professional consciousness in towns and countryside with that of students' in cities, the former is slightly higher than the latter. When asked "if you have another chance to select your major, will you still choose preschool education?" 76% students

in country sides and towns choose "will" while only 36% students in cities choose the same item. As to "whether to teach or work in countries after graduation", only 12% students in cities choose "willing" and 68% students in countries and towns choose "willing". From the interviews with students, we can know that urban students have higher requirements to themselves, not only because their parents have high expectations, but also because the superior living environment makes them have relatively high self-positioning than rural students. As the preschool education has a low professional social recognition currently, urban students are not optimistic about the development prospects of preschool education. The overall level of professional consciousness is lower than that of rural students.

Table 4
Comparison on the Average Level of Professional Consciousness Between Different Origins

| | Origin | N | Mean | Std.dev | Std.err | t | sig |
|---------------|--------|-----|--------|---------|---------|--------|------|
| Average score | 1* | 60 | 3.7750 | .46978 | .06065 | | |
| of | | | | | | -.668 | .505 |
| Professional | 2* | 75 | 3.8248 | .39680 | .04582 | | |
| Consciousness | 1 | 60 | 3.7750 | .46978 | .06065 | | |
| | 3* | 138 | 3.8465 | .42941 | .03669 | -1.945 | .297 |

Note. *1: City; 2: Town; 3: Country

Table 5
Comparison on the Average Level of Professional Consciousness Between Different Schools

| Schools | | Professional consciousness | Professional identity | Professional subject | Professional development |
|----------|---------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| School A | Mean | 3.7911 | 3.6914 | 3.7697 | 3.9122 |
| | N | 89 | 89 | 89 | 89 |
| | Std.dev | .40823 | .50805 | .48956 | .43110 |
| | Std.err | .04327 | .05385 | .05189 | .04570 |
| School B | Mean | 3.9757 | 3.8992 | 3.9973 | 4.0306 |
| | N | 92 | 92 | 92 | 92 |
| | Std.dev | .42986 | .52256 | .51254 | .40796 |
| | Stdeerr | .04482 | .05448 | .05344 | .04253 |
| School C | Mean | 3.8165 | 3.7138 | 3.7989 | 3.9368 |
| | N | 92 | 92 | 92 | 92 |
| | Std.dev | .42140 | .43694 | .52869 | .45098 |
| | Std.err | .04393 | .04556 | .05512 | .04701 |

From Table 5, we can know that the average scores of investigated three universities' professional consciousness are similar. There are no significant differences between universities, but the overall average scores of professional consciousness are not high. Moreover, the students in western university A have lower levels of professional identity consciousness, professional subject consciousness and professional development consciousness than those of students in other two universities. Students in developed areas have higher level of professional consciousness.

In the year 2006, the research on northwest rural private preschool education showed,

because of unclear identity, independent title, stagnated staffing, poor wages, weak career attractiveness and low stability, many western preschool teachers chose to change their careers. Preschool teachers have become the disadvantaged groups. It is difficult for talents to devote themselves to preschool education. (Wang, 2011)

Faced with this situation, many students had become more anxious and confused. It was hard for them to have a

heartfelt professional identity to preschool education. Many students were passively enrolled. So they had to accept the professional passively. The development trend of preschool education in different regions would affect students' understanding of the development prospects of preschool education. And this understanding would affect the degree of acceptance and learning attitude of students in turn.

2.2.3 Differences in Grades

In terms of the grade comparison, it can be seen from Table 6 that there are no significant differences on professional consciousness between grades, but as to professional identity consciousness, freshmen have higher levels than sophomores'.

Table 6
Comparison on the Average Level of Professional Consciousness Between Different Grades

| | Grade | N | Mean | Std.dev | Std.err | t | sig |
|---------------|-------|-----|--------|---------|---------|-------|------|
| Professional | 1 * | 137 | 3.8494 | .45517 | .03889 | | |
| Consciousness | 2 * | 135 | 3.8025 | .40011 | .03444 | .902 | .368 |
| Professional | 1 | 137 | 3.8355 | .52131 | .04454 | | |
| Identity | 2 | 135 | 3.7037 | .46586 | .04010 | 2.198 | .029 |
| Professional | 1 | 137 | 3.8522 | .54089 | .04621 | | |
| Subject | 2 | 135 | 3.7946 | .49946 | .04299 | -.141 | .888 |
| Professional | 1 | 137 | 3.9482 | .44588 | .03810 | | |
| Development | 2 | 135 | 3.9191 | .41302 | .03555 | -.592 | .554 |

Note. *1: Freshmen, 2: Sophomores

According to the statistics, we can find that as to the question "Are you satisfied with the current courses in school?" only 30% sophomores selected "very satisfied" while freshmen accounted for 75%. As to the question "Does the teaching content meets your expectations?" 29.2% freshmen and 56.3% sophomores chose "very satisfied". As to the question "Are you satisfied with the trainee, internship organized by your school?" only 28.3% sophomores selected "very satisfied". It shows that there are great differences between students' expectations and the curriculum, teaching content, school arrangements. If the schools' curriculum, teaching staff, school conditions, and scientific research level are imperfect, the longer students stay in school, the more unsatisfactory they will feel. And the dissatisfaction will affect the students' professional identity.

2.2.4 Differences in Admissions

Table 7 shows that students who are enrolled by their first choices have higher overall levels of professional consciousness. There are significant differences on professional consciousness between them and students who are not enrolled by the first choices, especially in the professional identity. It can be concluded that students' professional wishes before the enrollment has an important impact on professional consciousness after they were enrolled. Once students are interested, the learning initiative can be enhanced. Students will take the initiative to professional development and promotion. They would have high identity consciousness and their professional development consciousness will be enhanced, forming a virtuous circle, and vice versa. In addition, when asked, "How about your family's attitude towards your current major", 85% families whose students are enrolled by their first choices expressed satisfaction while those who

are not enrolled by their first choices accounts for 18%. Students' degree of recognition of preschool education will be influenced by their family attitudes before attending university.

Table 7
Comparison on the Average Level of Professional Consciousness Between Different Admission Modes

| | Will | N | Mean | Std.dev | Std.err | t | sig |
|---------------|------|-----|--------|---------|---------|-------|------|
| | 1 * | 138 | 3.8877 | .44240 | .03766 | | |
| | 2 * | 76 | 3.8406 | .38858 | .04457 | .776 | .438 |
| | 1 | 138 | 3.8877 | .44240 | .03766 | | |
| | 3 * | 13 | 3.7350 | .41226 | .11434 | 1.196 | .234 |
| Professional | 1 | 138 | 3.8877 | .44240 | .03766 | | |
| Cousciousness | 4 * | 46 | 3.6335 | .40655 | .05994 | 3.442 | .001 |
| | 2 | 76 | 3.8406 | .38858 | .04457 | .898 | .372 |
| | 3 | 13 | 3.7350 | .41226 | .11434 | | |
| | 2 | 76 | 3.8406 | .38858 | .04457 | | |
| | 4 | 46 | 3.6335 | .40655 | .05994 | 2.805 | .006 |

Note. *1: 1st choice, 2: 2nd or 3rd or 4th choice, 3: Adjusted student, 4: Additional admission

SUGGESTIONS

Firstly, when freshmen enter the university, the university should carry out professional identity consciousness education pertinently, which can help freshmen enter the role of professional identity as soon as possible. The survey found that additional admission students have lower professional identity consciousness than those who are enrolled by the first choice. When the school admission department enrolls students, they can entrust college to add a professional interview to students

whose choices are not preschool education in order to investigate students' professionalism and enhance the recruitment quality. The preschool professional political instructors can conduct professional identity consciousness questionnaire for a thorough investigation to freshmen. When dividing the students into classes, political instructors can place students who get low score of professional identity in different classes purposefully so as to let students who get high scores influence them imperceptibly. Then the student can have a positive understanding of the preschool education and develop a good professional attitude. There are few male students in preschool education, and there are fewer male teachers continue to work in kindergarten. If male students cannot find the value of their major during their university learning life and obtain learning achievement, they will turn to other professions. In this regard, political instructors should attach importance to the training of male students major in preschool education, encourage them to participate in professional social activities and give them more opportunities to create values, so that they can have a sense of belonging and experience a sense of happiness as a student major in preschool education.

Secondly, professional teachers should consciously strengthen the cultivation of students' professional subject consciousness. Professional teachers are the main force to train students' subject consciousness. Professional teachers should make students have a correct understanding of preschool education and enhance their active learning attitude by professional basic courses and elective courses. For example, in the first year, teachers should focus on strengthening students' correct understanding and recognition of preschool education. After one year's contacts and experience of professional knowledge, students will have many doubts in the second year and the first half of the third year. Teachers can focus on solving students' professional issues they have in actual learning and daily life and guiding them. By solving the confusions and expanding knowledge, students can more clarify their own learning goals and better combine the professional theoretical knowledge with practical action. In the second half of the third year and the fourth year, students have to face the internships and employment issue. They are confused and worried about the prospects of preschool education. So professional teachers, kindergarten leaders, outstanding preschool workers should train and guide them in the professional field more, not only having the specialized counseling to the common problems they encounter in practice timely, but also assisting them to make their career planning to explore the road of self-professional development.

Thirdly, the university should carry out home-school cooperation actively. When the students attend

the university, the university should not only conduct the professional consciousness education to the students, but also introduce and promote the major to their parents so that parents can more accurately understand preschool education and enable students to get a strong psychological support. At the same time, the university should establish home-school WeChat or QQ group to explain and popularize knowledge about preschool education, and to feedback the students' recent professional learning situation. The family and school cooperate jointly to promote students' professional development.

Finally, in order to improve students' professional consciousness, the university should establish a team which is "political instructors-professional teachers-internship instructors in the kindergarten", and carry out professional consciousness training and education work step by step. When employing preschool education political instructors, the university should consider choosing political instructors who match the major as possible, which means

having the same or similar learning background with students in their own class. It's easy for them to cultivate students' professional identity, provide students with resources and professional guidance, set good examples, which are benefit for carrying out professional activities. (Xia, 2011)

For non-professional political instructors, the university should have a regular training to them in order to improve the pertinence and timeliness of their work. In addition, the specialized teachers play a vital role in leading students' professional consciousness. They can use their professional advantages to introduce new hot spots and new frontiers of preschool education to students, so as to enable students to have a more in-depth understanding. Teachers can also connect the preschool education knowledge to the real life so that students can feel the usefulness of knowledge, to appreciate the significance and value of preschool education, to understand and accept preschool education correctly and theoretically. Of course, the theory learning is inseparable from the practice. Students' first internship in a kindergarten has a very important influence on students' further professional learning, especially for freshmen who lack professional knowledge during the internship. If they only experience by subjective assumption, it may affect their subsequent professional learning attitude. At this time, what they need most is that the internship instructors effectively solve their confusions in the practical experience and guide them to understand and judge in a positive direction. At the same time, the university can also employ good teachers and leaders from the kindergarten to carry out a regular professional training so as to enable students to experience the sense of accomplishment and happiness to be a preschool teacher.

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