

A Comparative Study on Early Childhood Art Curriculum between Korea and China

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Introduction

The Background of This Research

Korea and China lie very close to each other geographically and, for a long period in history, they maintained a very close relationship in many fields, such as language, culture, politics and economy and so on. The two countries are both deeply imbued with the same Confucian culture. According to a 2003 government report, Korean culture is drawn from the combined influences of Shamanism, ancestor worship, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism (UNESCO, 2012). In particular, Confucian decorum – structured around the values of patriarchy, social hierarchy and obedience – has dominated Korean life and thinking over centuries, and still subtly influences many forms of human relations (UNESCO, 2012). In Korea, the influence of Confucianism can be seen also in the early childhood care and education system. Confucian beliefs (an ethic for governing human relationships) about the primacy and sanctity of family relationships and obligations are taught before children enter primary school (Lee, 1997).

The development of both countries has been affected by Western systems and theories. Specific to the field of early childhood care and education, the two countries are significantly influenced by Froebelian methods, Dewey's progressive approach to education, the Montessori Method, Piaget's developmental theory, and American Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP). In terms of early childhood art education, Korea and China both believe that art education does not mean teaching skills, art knowledge, or even cultivating children to be famous artists. It should be an education in aesthetics. Feeling and expression should be emphasized.

Although both countries have introduced similar advanced educational theories and practical models, their level of development is not entirely the same. This study aims to grasp international development trends in the sector so as to lay the foundation for the theoretical innovation of early childhood art education in China and learn from the successful experience of Korean art

education to reform and develop practice in China. The current study chose the perspective of comparing the art curriculum of both countries.

The Nuri Curriculum in Korea

Early childhood care and education in Korea evolved into two parallel systems: childcare facilities and kindergartens. On the one hand, the childcare facilities catered to children aged from 0 to 5, typically from low-income families with working mothers; the kindergartens, on the other hand, catered to children aged 3–5 and to the middle and upper income brackets. They are administered respectively by the Childcare and Education Division within the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Childhood Education Division within the Ministry of Education. Therefore, there are also two different curricula in Korean early childhood settings: a standardized childcare curriculum for childcare centers and a national curriculum for kindergartens. Up until March 2012, the Korean government had begun to implement the Nuri curriculum as a national curriculum for all children aged 5 in both kindergartens and childcare centers. The Nuri curriculum was expanded in March 2013 to cover children aged 3–4. “Nuri” means “world” in the Korean language, signifying a wish for all children to lead happy lives and fulfill their hopes and dreams (Chang, 2013). The Nuri curriculum is widely acknowledged as a notably significant milestone in the history of Korean early childhood care and education.

By this curriculum, the government wishes to achieve two main aims. Firstly, to make sure that every child receives quality early childhood care and education. The Nuri curriculum comprises the basic quality elements for children aged 3–5. It is child-centered and play-based and all contents are carefully selected and organized from the “National Kindergarten Curriculum” and the “Standard Childcare Curriculum.” Secondly, government wants to ensure that every child receives the same early childhood care and education. The Curriculum aims to provide all children with an equal starting point, regardless of their family background and the background of kindergarten/childcare center attended. Before Nuri, only children below the 70% of all household income levels could get financial support. With this curriculum, the Korean government marked the start of a universal subsidy and free education for all young children aged 3–5, regardless of household income levels. In addition, whether in kindergartens or in childcare centers, all children are provided with the same educational contents and guaranteed equal educational opportunities. The Korean government also expected that this new curriculum would solve the problem of Korea’s low childbirth rate by easing parents’ financial burden of tuition and childcare costs. In 2012, the fertility rate of Korean women was