

**EECERA SIG Gender Balance
2nd International Research Conference
Barcelona, Spain, 7th September 2014**



Xu, Yuwei * (2015)

Exploring Gender, Culture, and Early Childhood Education & Care in Chinese Societies: A comparative study between Hong Kong and Mainland China

Presentation on the 2nd SIG Gender Balance Research Conference, 7.9.2015, Barcelona/Spain

This study addresses the question of whether or not teachers' gender may affect teacher-child interactions and if yes, how cultural discourses may impact upon the 'gendered' teacher-child-interactions. There is an increasing recognition that culture plays an important role in shaping 'gendered' behaviours in early childhood settings. To widen understanding of this cultural impact, the current study aims to provide empirical perspectives from two under-researched contexts - Mainland China and Hong Kong. The research identified 5 kindergartens in Tianjin City (Mainland China) and Hong Kong respectively. In each kindergarten, there is a group of children aged 3-5 years old and taught jointly by a male and a female teacher. Both the teachers and children participated in the study, so as to explore their perceptions of gender and teacher-child interactions. Methods used include interviews with the teachers, observations of daily activities in the settings, and pictorial activities/conversations with the kids. Based on the research findings, it will be discussed how teachers of both genders can work together to deliver gender-diversified early childhood programs to children.

* The University of Glasgow, United Kingdom

Xu, Yuwei (2015).

Exploring Gender, Culture, and Early Childhood Education & Care in Chinese Societies: A comparative study between Hong Kong and Mainland China.



Research Questions

--- What are interactions between teachers and children like in early childhood settings in Scotland, Hong Kong, and Mainland China? Whether these interactions are gendered or not? And if yes, how?

--- What are teachers' and children's perspectives of their (gendered) interactions with each other in early childhood settings in the three comparison cultures?

--- What are the cultural-specific gender discourses that impact on teacher-child interactions in the three comparison cultures? And how?

Theoretical Framework

--- Post-structuralism

Xu, Yuwei (2015).

Exploring Gender, Culture, and Early Childhood Education & Care in Chinese Societies: A comparative study between Hong Kong and Mainland China.



Research Methods

· Methods Triangulation (Patton, 1999)

--- *Observation* on the whole of a typical, coherent daily life in early childhood settings;

--- *Interviews* with both teachers and children about their perceptions of teacher-child interactions;

--- *Pictorial research activities with children* to ask them about their views of the teachers, and with the assistance of certain pictures.

--- *Complementary methods to understand the culture and context*



Research Process & Difficulties

1. Edinburgh (*pilot study*);

--- From Glasgow to Edinburgh & Aberdeen;

--- Men in Childcare;

2. Hong Kong;

--- No access to international schools;

3. Tianjin.

--- Timing

Xu, Yuwei (2015).

Exploring Gender, Culture, and Early Childhood Education & Care in Chinese Societies: A comparative study between Hong Kong and Mainland China.



Ethical Issues

- Inconsistencies in the three cultures

(Edinburgh; Hong Kong; & Mainland China)

- Compliance with some of the basic ethical principals as required (mainly) in the Western world

--- General practice;

--- Ethical practice with young children, i.e gaining consent; recording.



Sampling

- A *'First-come-first-researched'* approach;

· Those men teachers who only teach one subject in the settings were excluded;

· Children's age group expanded from the expected 4-5 years old to 3-6 years old.

See the tables for details.

Xu, Yuwei (2015).

Exploring Gender, Culture, and Early Childhood Education & Care in Chinese Societies: A comparative study between Hong Kong and Mainland China.



Selected provisional themes/topics from the observations

Teacher

--- **Disciplinary behaviours** (to be expanded later);

--- **Caring**, including:

- **Taking children to the toilet;**
- Eating, i.e distribution of dishes, feeding;
- Afternoon nap;
- **Hair braiding (for girls);**
- **When children are crying;**
- Other caring behaviors.



- **Dealing with Conflicts Between Children**
- **Asking Children for Help with Minor Stuff**
- **How Teachers Treat Boys and Girls Differently (if any)**
- **Interactions with Colleagues**
- **Labor Activities**

Xu, Yuwei (2015).

Exploring Gender, Culture, and Early Childhood Education & Care in Chinese Societies: A comparative study between Hong Kong and Mainland China.



Children

- **Complaining Behaviors ('Gaozhuang')**
- **Seeking for Help from Teachers**
- **Teachers' Connections with Mothers and Fathers as Perceived by Children**
- **Children's Own Gender Conceptions and Behaviors**
- **Teachers in Children's Eyes**



Children's Emotional Expressions

Children's Interactions with the Researcher (Me)

- Treating me as a teacher;
- Treating me specifically as a man;
- Other relevant interactions.

Xu, Yuwei (2015).

Exploring Gender, Culture, and Early Childhood Education & Care in Chinese Societies: A comparative study between Hong Kong and Mainland China.



Both

--- Physical Contacts

--- **Hierarchical Power Relationship**, including:

- Hierarchy between teachers (*as perceived by children*);
- Teacher's power difference (*through children's reactions*).

--- Physical Activities & Education

--- Teacher-Child Relationships

--- Dressing and Outlook; & Its Impact on Teacher-Child Interactions



Teacher-Child Interactions in General Activities, including:

- Roll call;
- Free activities, i.e play, corner activities;
- Teaching activities;
- Story telling;
- **Line up**;
- Morning/Afternoon exercises;
- Other activities, i.e singing, reading poetry.

Xu, Yuwei (2015).

Exploring Gender, Culture, and Early Childhood Education & Care in Chinese Societies: A comparative study between Hong Kong and Mainland China.



Data Analysis (Example)

Disciplinary Behaviors, including:

· Stop the children talking during group activities or otherwise;

--- Who is behaving children? Teachers of both genders?

The one who is either more experienced, or who is a leading teacher (in most cases women teachers, but with a few exceptions);

--- How children respond to teachers' disciplinary behaviors? Which teacher is more authoritative in the classroom?

'The kids are more than clever to figure out who is the "boss" in this class, and how to respond correspondingly.'



• The ways and languages (& tones) that teachers used to discipline children;

(Read, 2008)

--- **A 'traditional' disciplinarian discourse;** (a more common way in Chinese and HK kindergartens)

--- **A more 'progressive' liberal discourse.**

--- **Direct 'assertive' language;**

'XXX, I am counting down and you should stop doing this before I say 1.' (By a man teacher in TJ)

'XXX, Ms Z does not appreciate this, you must stop doing it.' (By a woman teacher in HK)

--- **'Threat';**

'XXX, if you do not stop talking, I will take you to the low-level classroom.' (By a woman teacher in HK)

'XXX, if you do not behave yourself, I will ask you to get out of the classroom.' (By a man teacher in TJ)

Xu, Yuwei (2015).

Exploring Gender, Culture, and Early Childhood Education & Care in Chinese Societies: A comparative study between Hong Kong and Mainland China.



- Calm and/or 'Measured' tones;
- Strident tones and/or shouting.

Masculinity and disciplinary (Read, 2008).

It is common but amazed to see how teachers of both gender can shift swiftly between a 'tough' disciplinarian and a 'gentle' carer and friend.

And this is particularly obvious among the more experienced women teachers.

'Gender as performance.'

'Doing gender, doing masculinity/femininity.'

(Butler, 1990;1995;1997)



- Men's power as used in disciplining children;
 - Reward & punishment used by teachers as disciplinary strategies;
 - 'Gendered' competition between boys and girls as a disciplinary strategy.
- Only seen in TJ kindergartens;
- Any forms of competition are not allowed in HK kindergartens as required by the government.

Xu, Yuwei (2015).

Exploring Gender, Culture, and Early Childhood Education & Care in Chinese Societies: A comparative study between Hong Kong and Mainland China.



Thank you!
y.xu.1@research.gla.ac.uk