

# Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Development Paths from a Cultural Ecology Perspective



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**Abstract:** Exploring the path of early childhood teachers' professional development from the perspective of cultural ecology is in line with the lifelong education advocated by the state, and is also beneficial to teachers' professional and long-term development. Based on this paper, we analyze the significance of cultural ecology to the professional growth of early childhood teachers and the three factors that affect their professional development, with a view to finding the paths of professional development of early childhood teachers from the perspective of cultural ecology from the following three perspectives: creating a superior material culture, constructing a strict institutional culture, and creating a positive spiritual culture.

**Keywords:** early childhood teachers; cultural ecology; professional development

## 1. Introduction

As the saying goes, "You learn and live to be old", and now the state advocates lifelong education, i.e., the professional development and lifelong development of teachers have become the trend and main trend of education reform. Teachers of early childhood education, as a very important part of the entire teaching force, also face the need for professionalization to better meet the trend of lifelong education. In addition, China now requires the construction of a team of early childhood teachers with high moral character, excellent business skills, reasonable structure, and love for early childhood education, and the National Professional Standards for Early Childhood Teachers (for Trial Implementation) also clearly states that early childhood teachers should improve their inner quality in order to promote the overall quality of preschool education as a whole.

And in such a social context, it has some theoretical and practical significance to study the professional development of early childhood education teachers from the perspective of cultural ecology.

## 2. The connotation of cultural ecology

Cultural ecology comes from ecology and is an emerging cross-cutting discipline that integrates ecological

research methods with cultural research concepts. (Wang, 2014) In short, it is a theoretical discipline that studies the environment, resources, and state of cultural existence and development. The concept of cultural ecology was first proposed by American scholars in 1955, and is based on the interaction of human, natural, social, and cultural variables, and focuses on the impact of various variables, especially technology, economic systems, and social organization, on people in the process of cultural development. At present, cultural ecology has received a lot of attention from scholars and is gradually forming a new research discipline.

Cultural ecology mainly pursues the connection and balance between culture and ecology, that is, by studying the adaptive process of culture to the environment and the influence of the environment on culture, in order to achieve the ultimate goal. (Gao, 2011) It is important to note, however, that the process of adaptation is not passive, in which humans, as individuals with subjective agency, play an active and interactive relationship between culture and ecology. Therefore, it can be said that culture is the most special educational ecosystem, because it is the accumulation and inheritance of human production practices, permeates all aspects of life, and is a very important educational resource in education and teaching. Based on this, culture is not only the environment in which educational activities are carried out, but also provides specific content for education. This means that the purpose

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of training the next generation is to maintain cultural values and to allow the educated to be impregnated by the cultural ecology. Of course, in this process, teachers must conform to a quality cultural ecology and learn to proactively change and create a superior cultural ecology. As the initiators of education, early childhood teachers should pay attention to their professional development from the perspective of cultural ecology, which is the inevitable way for them to adapt and transform the cultural ecology, as well as a necessary strategy to improve the quality of preschool education.

### **3. The significance of cultural ecology for the professional growth of early childhood teachers**

Ecology is a grand concept and category that encompasses all aspects, especially the complex relationship and influence between organisms and their living environment. Cultural ecology is a concept based on ecology, which pursues an overall harmonious, open, and balanced relationship between culture and the environment, focusing on the influence of culture as an ideology on the entire environmental system. Culture plays an irreplaceable role in the whole of human history and constitutes the most important ecological environment of social life, (Xu, 2008) therefore the study of human development is inevitably inseparable from the study of the specific cultural environment in which it is located and the process of people's participation in it. Based on this, there is some value in studying from the perspective of cultural ecology. In order to study the professional development of early childhood teachers from the perspective of cultural ecology, we should not only focus on individual teachers, but also expand the scope and broaden the horizons of the study, and go beyond the previous research paths to study the influence of culture and environment on the professional growth of early childhood teachers, and gradually refine it to emphasize the relationship between the growth of early childhood teachers and their own environment and culture. The study of the influence of culture on the professional growth of early childhood teachers is based on a focus on the interaction between culture and environment. On the basis of this, we should pay attention to the construction of the culture of the kindergarten teachers' work, and the creation of the cultural atmosphere to drive the teachers' professional development.

### **4. Factors of professional development of kindergarten teachers in cultural ecology**

The analysis of the kindergarten environment from the perspective of cultural ecology includes three main aspects: basic material conditions institutional conditions and spiritual conditions. First of all, the infrastructure and equipment of kindergarten construction, as well as the curriculum and teaching materials used are the material conditions for the professional growth of early childhood teachers; while the management system and behavior norms of kindergartens are the institutional conditions; the management style, interpersonal relationships, and teacher

culture formed on this basis are the spiritual conditions, and these three basic conditions constitute together.

These three basic conditions together constitute a complete ecosystem for the work and professional development of early childhood teachers, which will continue to accumulate in their future educational practices and gradually form a commonly accepted value system in the garden.

This system is the common culture of kindergartens, and these three dimensions together play a pivotal role in promoting the professional development of early childhood teachers.

#### **4.1 Material culture is the basic condition**

For a kindergarten, material culture refers to the various facilities in the kindergarten, including outdoor facilities, classroom layout, equipment used for education and teaching, and living facilities needed by children, which is the explicit culture of the kindergarten. The existence of these infrastructures in material form is the manifestation of the unique cultural characteristics of kindergartens and is also a fundamental part of the ecological environment of early childhood teachers. (Sun & Kang, 2006) Material culture directly influences the way kindergarten teachers work, their attitudes, and their teaching styles, and is also one of the prerequisites for their professional development.

#### **4.2 Institutional culture is a strong guarantee**

As mentioned above, in the whole ecological culture circle of kindergartens, institutional culture includes various management rules, regulations, and behavioral norms, or the unique traditional style and characteristics of kindergartens formed in the long-term educational and teaching activities. Among them, physical rules and regulations and scientific and educational codes of conduct are required to be observed by all and are important material assets in the construction of institutional culture, (Jiang & Wang, 2000) while the latter, i.e., the unique characteristics of kindergartens, are their implicit rules and regulations in terms of moral cognition, values, and educational ideas. This is conducive to the formation of a good institutional culture in kindergartens and is certainly one of their important spiritual assets. Both the external spiritual culture and the internal institutional culture strongly support the long-term development of kindergartens and play a very important role in the professional development of kindergarten teachers.

#### **4.3 Spiritual culture is an inexhaustible motivation**

Spiritual culture often exists in an implicit way, but it plays an extremely important role in the professional growth of early childhood teachers. Specifically, spiritual culture includes the democratic atmosphere, values, teachers' ideology, and interpersonal relationships in the garden, which play a pivotal role in early childhood teachers' dedication, work attitude, and conceptions of education and teaching. (Dong, 2010) Early childhood teachers who live with a healthy and noble spiritual culture for a long time will form the correct three views, standardized education and teaching methods professional

beliefs, and attitudes, which provide inexhaustible motivation for the professional growth of early childhood teachers.

### **5. The professional development path of early childhood teachers from the perspective of cultural ecology**

To find a path for the professional development of early childhood teachers from the perspective of cultural ecology, we need to start building from the three aspects mentioned above: material culture foundation, institutional culture guarantee, and spiritual culture as a driving force, in order to create an excellent cultural atmosphere for the long-term development of early childhood teachers.

#### **5.1 Creating a superior material culture**

Superior material culture is a fundamental condition for the professional development of early childhood teachers. As one of the important educational factors in early childhood education, early childhood teachers are influenced by the material environment in a subtle way. In this sense, the construction of material culture not only provides a good living environment for young children, but also provides an excellent environment for early childhood teachers to develop, and it will help to realize the function of the environment to nurture people, so that teachers can enjoy the beauty in their work, and thus be more passionate to devote themselves to their work, and, of course, get professional growth in the process.

#### **5.2 Building a strict institutional culture**

The institutional culture is a powerful guarantee for the professional growth of early childhood teachers. Sound rules and regulations, various disciplines and regulations in the kindergarten can make the whole kindergarten's work efficiency to be improved, which can make the work achieve a rule to follow, (Qiu, 2015) can improve the efficiency of management in normal order, and then achieve the purpose of improving the quality of kindergarten education and teaching. In the management of kindergartens, the main focus is on the teachers, therefore, in order to achieve the long-term and sustainable development of teachers, it is necessary to build a more strict and standardized institutional culture as a guarantee to promote the professional development of early childhood teachers.

As mentioned above, cultural ecology is a complete system, and its focus is on the interrelationship and influence between culture and ecology. The management of the kindergarten is one of the most important factors in the professional growth of early childhood teachers. In this regard, based on the institutional culture of kindergartens and the needs of teachers' professional development, a democratic management approach should be implemented, i.e., "people-oriented", in which teachers can participate democratically in the management process, (Long, 2016) changing from the previous role of being managed and obeyed to the active formulation and participation of the system, and actively participating in it, in order to The humanization of the system can be achieved, so that

teachers can consciously comply with the rules and regulations of the school and internalize a sense of self. In addition, the administrators of the school should guide the teachers properly and make the system based on the professional development of the teachers, so that the system can serve the teachers and serve to realize the humanistic culture of education.

#### **5.3 Creating a positive spiritual culture**

Spiritual culture is an inexhaustible motivation for the professional development of early childhood teachers. A harmonious and pleasant working atmosphere is conducive to creating a healthy working environment for teachers, purifying their hearts, purifying their minds, and enhancing their personalities so that a positive spiritual culture will play an emotional role for teachers in a subtle way. For this reason, kindergarten managers need to create a good, relaxed, and pleasant explicit and implicit spiritual culture for teachers, so that they can help each other in their work and form a culture of solidarity and cooperation. At the same time, it is also necessary to create an open culture for the teachers, because it is difficult to promote their growth by self-enclosure, and an open atmosphere is conducive to mutual communication among teachers, allowing them to achieve innovation and development in cooperation and sharing, and to bring out the collective wisdom.

### **6. Conclusion**

Focusing on the development of early childhood teachers from a cultural ecology perspective is appropriate to the current educational environment and necessary for individual teachers to achieve their lifelong learning goals. Culture and ecology are inseparable whole, and by enhancing early childhood teachers from three perspectives: material culture, institutional culture, and spiritual culture, they create a good environment for their personal development and achieve sustainable long-term development. Cultural ecology provides a new research path and a new development concept for the professional development of early childhood teachers.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

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