



Current Situation and Countermeasures for Children's Participation in Class Environment Creation

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Abstract: Children's participation in creating the classroom environment not only helps develop children's intelligence and improve their ability to appreciate aesthetics, but also enhances their hands-on skills. Therefore, studying the current situation of children's participation in creating the material environment in the class is of great significance. The observation method is the main approach used in this study, focusing on children's performance during the creation of the classroom environment. According to the results, at this stage, children's participation in the creation of the classroom material environment still includes: low independence in the participation process, a relatively monotonous participation process, and unequal opportunities for participation among children. This paper explores the underlying factors affecting children's participation in the creation of the classroom's physical environment, and attempts are made to propose corresponding countermeasures from different perspectives to help teachers improve existing problems and promote better participation among children.

Keywords: children, early childhood participation, physical environment of kindergarten classes

1 INTRODUCTION

The kindergarten environment, as a kind of "hidden curriculum," is the children's "third teacher," playing a significant educational role in developing children's intelligence and promoting their personality development [1]. The significance of children's participation in class creation lies not only in effectively using their rich imagination to expand creative paths and thus establishing diverse creative forms [2]. At the same time, it can make the environment more suitable for children's lives and learning, enhance their sense of collective honor, and encourage them to cherish their surroundings more [3]. However, currently, children tend to follow the crowd during participation and are often arranged by teachers [4]. Moreover, most kindergartens currently do not pay enough attention to children's participation, and children pay little attention to environmental creation [5]. Some researchers have pointed out that children's participation time on themed walls is too short and participation time is scattered [6]. After identifying existing problems with young children, many researchers have proposed strategies to promote children's participation in the creation of the physical environment in the classroom. Some researchers suggest that teachers should correctly recognize that children are important participants in the process of creating the

environment [7]. Some researchers believe that teachers should give children ample encouragement and affirmation, creating a relaxed and free atmosphere that encourages children to participate and actively participate [8]. Others argue that parents are also an important part of the environment creation process, and parents should proactively share children's situations with teachers, encourage children to express different opinions, and encourage children to participate in the creation of the classroom environment [9]. During the preparation phase, researchers collected literature and found that existing studies only pointed out some problems in children's participation in environmental creation, but there was little research on the real reasons affecting their participation and corresponding solutions. In response to the above issues, the researchers conducted this study.

2 RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 CONCEPT DEFINITION

2.1.1 CHILDREN

In this paper, 'children' refers to those who have reached the age for kindergarten enrollment and have already entered kindergarten, generally children aged 3-6 or 7.



2.1.2 CHILDREN PARTICIPATE

In this paper, children's participation refers to the ability to express their own views and participate in hands-on activities during the creation of the classroom's material environment. Specifically, this includes children's participation in actions, emotions, and cognition.

2.1.3 MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT OF KINDERGARTEN CLASSES

We can divide the kindergarten environment into two main aspects: the external environment and the internal environment. The material environment of the class studied in this paper belongs to the indoor environment included in the internal environment of the kindergarten, that is, various material decorations outside the public areas of the kindergarten, mainly including wall environments, corner environments, and decorative environments [10].

2.2 RESEARCH METHODS

The observation method is the main approach of this study, primarily observing the process of children's participation in creating the material environment of the class.

2.2.1 RESEARCH SUBJECT

This study selected four kindergartens of different types in Zunyi City as observation samples. Each kindergarten randomly selected children from three classes of different ages as the main observation subjects, mainly observing and recording the entire process of children's participation in the creation of the classroom physical environment, in order to understand the current status of children's participation in the creation of the classroom material environment in Zunyi.

2.2.2 RESEARCH TOOLS

The observation record sheet used in this study mainly references the observation record sheet from Tang Feng of Zhejiang Normal University's master's thesis "Current Situation and Countermeasures of Young Children's Participation in Creating the Material Environment in the Class," and some modifications have been made based on the specific requirements and actual conditions in the "Guidelines for Learning and Development of Children Aged 3-6."

2.2.3 RESEARCH PROCESS

The researcher was randomly assigned to one of the kindergartens for a four-month observation period, while the other three kindergartens arranged for teachers from their respective specialties to observe and record the observations. During this process, the researcher was non-participant and observed the participation of children in the class material environment creation at the large, medium, and small classes. At the same time, the prepared observation form was used to record the children's behavior in daily life participating in the material environment creation in the class, as well as the teacher-child interaction during the classroom environment creation process. The researcher tried to observe with a fair and objective attitude, without personal subjective emotional bias, to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the collected information.

3 CURRENT STATUS OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN CREATING THE MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE CLASS

In the process of creating the physical environment in kindergartens, if teachers blindly choose to create a place for the children, it is easy for them to develop negative feelings. At the same time, the children's central role is not reflected, which is detrimental to the cultivation of children's sense of agency and participation, and also separates them from the kindergarten environment, making it difficult to better integrate into and protect their daily life. Through this observation and research, researchers found that there are still the following problems in children's participation in the creation of the material environment in the class.

3.1 CHILDREN'S LACK OF INDEPENDENCE DURING PARTICIPATION

Children's independence in participation is reflected in both doing their own things and thinking independently. This requires children to complete tasks within their ability and think independently during the process of creating the classroom environment. However, a series of surveys have found that at this stage, children rarely complete tasks or think independently during participation; most of the time, it is adults who can complete the class environment, so their independence is relatively weak.

Case 1: During an art activity in the middle class themed "My Favorite Sport," a child called out to me, "Teacher, can you tell me what sport I want to draw?" I told him he could think about what sport he usually likes. The child glanced at the classmate next to him; the one on the left was drawing swimming. The child continued to say to me, "Then I want to draw swimming. Can you help me draw it?"

Analysis of Case 1 shows that during the process of participating in the creation of the class's material environment, children are greatly influenced by others, easily influenced by peers, and rely more on adult help, rarely engaging in independent thinking, and have poor independence.

3.2 THE PROCESS OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IS RELATIVELY SIMPLE

When children participate in creating the classroom's physical environment, the process they should take part in includes discussing and selecting themes, collecting and creating materials needed for the creation, displaying their works, and hands-on activities. When creating the classroom physical environment, teachers should first solicit children's ideas based on the theme, allowing them to participate from start to finish. During this process, teachers should guide children to find ways to complete the tasks in front of them and to operate hands-on, thereby enhancing children's sense of task and increasing their participation and initiative. However, after actual observation in

kindergartens, researchers found that children's participation in creating the classroom's material environment is relatively simple, and in most cases, their participation is limited to the stages of displaying works and collecting materials. (See Figure 1.)

In interviews with kindergarten teachers, they also mentioned that most of the children's involvement consists of two stages: showcasing works and collecting materials related to the creation of themes, such as:

Teacher C (Middle Class): "Actually, most children nowadays participate in the process of displaying their works. On one hand, it reduces the teachers' workload, and at the same time, children are happy to see their works displayed." "

Teacher E (Junior): "For example, in our class's themed activity 'Into Autumn,' the children participated very actively. They used the Mid-Autumn Festival holiday to find autumn flowers, fruits, and vegetables related to autumn with their parents. By presenting the collected materials, the children could directly experience autumn. "



FIGURE 1: THE PROCESS OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION MOSTLY INVOLVES COLLECTING MATERIALS AND DISPLAYING WORKS

PARTICIPATION

Every child is the master of the classroom environment, so every child's opportunity to participate in creating the classroom environment should be equal, and teachers should also ensure that every child can participate. However, due to differences in children's developmental levels, teachers often assign tasks based on the children's developmental level when creating environments. Children with better abilities participate more often than those with weaker abilities, which has long led to unequal opportunities for participation.

Through on-site observation in kindergartens, researchers found that some teachers only allow some children to participate in the creation of the classroom's physical environment for reasons such as aesthetic reasons, high cost of environmental creation materials, or speeding up the completion of environmental creation.

Case 2: During a "My Motherland and I" activity in the junior class (see Figure 2), the teacher needed to collect children's works to improve the themed wall. Therefore, an art activity was organized to color the national flag. The teacher distributed coloring paper to every child in the class. After collecting the children's works, the two teachers selected several neat and beautiful works to put on the wall, while the remaining children's works were placed in their own work bags.



FIGURE 2: NATIONAL FLAG COLORING WORKS FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Analysis of Case Two shows that not all children have the opportunity to participate in creating the material environment of the class. Although sometimes the whole class can participate in creating works, teachers are still influenced by adult aesthetics and select works that meet the teacher's requirements for display. Sometimes children are directly designated to participate, and most of the designated children are usually well-behaved, obedient, and have strong hands-on skills. Compared to children with weaker hands-on skills, their opportunities to participate are unequal.

3.3 UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN'S



4 ATTRIBUTION OF ISSUES AFFECTING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE CREATION OF THE CLASS'S MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT

4.1 REGARDING TEACHERS

4.1.1 *TEACHERS PLAY A DOMINANT ROLE IN CREATING THE MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE CLASS*

After investigation, it was found that there are still several issues with children's participation: first, teachers take full responsibility for the environmental innovation work, while children only assist and observe the work. Second, because teachers do not recognize children's abilities, tasks are rarely assigned to the children. Finally, at present, environmental innovation in kindergartens is led by teachers, and children's participation is often passive, with few opportunities to express independent opinions and ideas throughout the process.

Case 3: During the middle class's "My Motherland and I" theme week, teachers were tasked with creating environments related to the theme on top of the existing environmental creation. Three teachers used the children's area time and lunch break to complete a series of themed environmental creations. During this period, many children came to the teacher expressing their desire to participate, but most were rejected. A few only helped the teacher with coloring or applying tape.

From Case 3, we can see that one factor affecting children's participation is that teachers occupy a dominant position in creating the material environment of the class, depriving children of the initiative in creating and placing them in a passive position.

4.1.2 *TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN CREATING THE CLASS'S MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT IS ONE-SIDED*

If we divide the creation of the classroom physical environment into preparation and implementation, during the survey we found that most teachers believe children's understanding of participation is limited to implementation, and that their participation is limited to the aspects of displaying works and collecting production materials. This can mainly be reflected in the following interviews:

Question: How do you understand children's participation in creating the classroom environment?

Teacher A (Senior Class): "I think it's about children and teachers working together to complete the class's environmental creation. Those with works can display them, and those who can do wall decoration are definitely better. But generally, children are rarely allowed to do wall decoration, since layout and aesthetics are important." "

Teacher C (Middle Class): "In our class, children usually participate by drawing or doing crafts. The main frameworks for theme creation are all done by our teachers themselves.

Occasionally, if a child wants to help, if there's a simple task, we'll let them do it." "

Teacher E (Junior): "Let's show the children's works, lead them in creating on as many themes as possible, and then present them." "

Based on the above teachers' answers, it is clear that teachers have a single-minded role in children's participation, believing that children are merely assistants in creating their own environment. Their main tasks are simple creations with little mental or thinking involved, which leads to a one-sided understanding of the concept of child participation.

4.2 *TEACHERS LACK THE ABILITY TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTS THEMSELVES*

The "Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers (Trial)" mentions that among all required abilities for teachers, environmental creation ability ranks first, indicating that environmental creation is an important component of preschool teachers' educational competence [10]. Therefore, teachers' own literacy in creating the class environment directly affects children's participation. Designing the classroom's material environment requires teachers to base their efforts on the developmental level of the children in their class, which greatly tests teachers' professional competence. If teachers can promptly identify children's needs and adjust according to current situations, children's attention to the environment will increase, and opportunities for participation will increase.

However, researchers in kindergartens have observed that most teachers, upon receiving the environment creation task, immediately search for existing cases online and copy them, or simply download and print the images needed during the creation process from the internet. They rarely think independently during the creation process, and most of the time, they make minor adjustments based on cases already done by others, just to complete tasks assigned by superiors, rather than hoping that creating a particular environment will promote the growth and development of children in the class.

As a result, many environmental creations are merely to cope with inspections without practical significance. These environmental creations have little significance for promoting children's development but greatly affect their opportunities to participate in the process. Teachers' own ability to create environments is insufficient, resulting in poor guidance for children, and over time, children's participation decreases.

4.3 *KINDERGARTEN ASPECTS*

4.3.1 *KINDERGARTEN AFFAIRS CONSUME A LOT OF TEACHERS' ENERGY*

A survey of many kindergarten teachers found that many are troubled by the same issue. Kindergarten teachers have many heavy tasks to handle every day, which drain a lot of teachers' energy and reduce their focus on environmental innovation:

Teacher E (Junior): "What exactly is the purpose of us teachers creating environments?" It's definitely for the children, but the kindergarten has a lot of strict focus on various tasks. It's very



difficult to truly develop and complete a kind of environmental creation together with the children. The results need to be seen in the short term, so we teachers have to handle things ourselves. ”

"Moreover, the kindergarten has many meetings and training sessions. From Monday to Friday afternoons, after work, we have to stay at the kindergarten for an hour to study, and even on weekends, we have to clock in on our phones for classes. We can't really relax or rest all seven days a week."

Teacher C (Middle Class): "There are a lot of trivial matters in daily life. Our kindergarten often faces inspections from higher-level leaders, and other kindergartens visit several times a month. Plus, for various daily activities, teachers also have to do new environmental innovation, and most of these activities are one-off." ”

Over 60% of teachers believe that the workload of creating the classroom environment is currently too heavy. Many teachers say that most of their daily activities are spent leading the class, and creating the classroom environment often requires overtime to complete. [11]

4.3.2 THE KINDERGARTEN DOES NOT GUARANTEE TEACHERS' AUTONOMY OVER THEIR CURRICULUM

As professionals, teachers have curriculum autonomy, meaning they can organize and implement teaching plans based on students' physical and mental development characteristics and their own teaching objectives [12]. One important reason affecting children's participation in creating the material environment of the class is whether teachers' curriculum autonomy can be guaranteed.

During interviews, many teachers also mentioned that the courses arranged in kindergartens are sometimes too tight, leaving teachers without sufficient time to prepare, which greatly reduces children's participation. However, teachers are sometimes hesitant to easily adjust the already scheduled curriculum, and most of the time, activities are arranged based on the textbooks and themes chosen by the kindergarten, such as:

Teacher A (Senior Class): "Sometimes the themes arranged by the kindergarten change too quickly. I originally wanted to lead the children to continue exploring, but the next week the theme changes, and the subsequent exploration parts can only be done in the corner activities." ”

Teacher C (Middle Class): "Once the kindergarten leadership assigns tasks, we teachers have to finish them quickly, such as changing the theme wall or enriching the content. But with so little time each day, there is often no time for children to participate, so we have to complete the checks ourselves." ”

From the above interview analysis, it can be concluded that teachers currently can only carry out teaching activities within the scope of the planned teaching plan, and have little autonomy to make decisions. When the week's theme does not meet the children's current needs, children's enthusiasm for participation decreases, so the kindergarten's lack of curriculum autonomy

affects children's participation in the creation of the material environment in the class.

5 STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN CREATING THE MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE CLASS

5.1 REGARDING TEACHERS

5.1.1 TEACHERS SHOULD GIVE CHILDREN MORE TRUST

During the classroom creation process, teachers should give children more trust, believe in their abilities, and let them participate in the creation of the classroom's material environment. This requires teachers not only to encourage children to collect materials and display works, but also to participate in topic selection, framework design, and spatial layout. Teachers can flexibly adjust the theme according to children's needs, encourage them to boldly express their interests, and provide more opportunities for participation in theme selection. After confirming the theme, children should also be encouraged to participate in framework design and spatial layout, encouraging them to boldly express their ideas, use imagination and creativity, and exercise their own initiative to participate, truly becoming masters of their environment.

5.1.2 TEACHERS SHOULD FURTHER DEEPEN THE CONCEPT OF "CHILD-CENTEREDNESS" AND RESPECT CHILDREN'S SUBJECTIVITY

"Child-centeredness," as the core concept of early childhood education, is something every kindergarten teacher should keep in mind and implement this principle in their daily work. During the process of creating the environment, respect children's ideas, put children first, and meet their actual needs. Focus on the participation and performance of most children, rather than focusing only on a small group. At the same time, teachers should provide necessary help and support when children need help, allowing them to participate in creating the material environment in the class in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere. This encourages children to be more willing to express their ideas and opinions, which maximizes their sense of agency, because the needs children generate are the real needs.

5.1.3 TEACHERS THEMSELVES SHOULD CONTINUOUSLY LEARN TO ENHANCE THEIR EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND ENVIRONMENTAL INNOVATION CAPABILITIES

Children are constantly developing individuals, and as teachers, we must keep learning to better meet their diverse needs. Teachers can strengthen their theoretical learning by attending expert lectures in relevant fields, participating in teacher training organized by kindergartens, and online expert courses. Continuously deepening their professional knowledge, teachers should pay more attention and self-reflect in their daily work. Pay more attention to their surroundings and ask themselves how to use the environment to increase their connection with children. Through this approach, teachers can better adapt their



educational philosophies to children's needs, and apply the concept of "child participation" more broadly and deeply in their work. In terms of environment creation, only by improving their own creative abilities can teachers better involve children and provide them with proper help and guidance.

5.2 REGARDING THE KINDERGARTEN,

5.2.1 STREAMLINE TASKS TO REDUCE TEACHERS' PRESSURE

Kindergarten managers should deeply embrace the "people-oriented" management philosophy, appropriately reduce unnecessary tasks to ease the work pressure on kindergarten teachers, clearly separate administrative and teaching tasks, assign specific tasks to dedicated personnel, and allow teachers to focus on their teaching work.

Efforts to make teachers work overtime during inspections and visits should be reduced, giving teachers more time to themselves so they can devote more energy and time to research and think about the creation of environments. Kindergartens should consider issues from the teacher's perspective to the greatest extent possible to protect teachers' legitimate rights and interests, and safeguard teachers so they can fully devote themselves to education.

5.2.2 KINDERGARTENS SHOULD EMPHASIZE CONTINUOUS TRAINING IN TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN ENVIRONMENTAL CREATION

With the continuous advancement of kindergarten curriculum reform, teachers' understanding of classroom environment creation is constantly evolving, but there are still some doubts and confusion. Therefore, kindergartens should persist in carrying out theoretical teaching and practical training in environment creation, inviting expert lecturers in environment creation to give lectures on campus; Or hold regular mutual visits and learning with nearby cooperative kindergartens to see how other kindergartens in the same environment can discover the value of materials and reflect the theme; Kindergarten teachers can also be provided with opportunities to study outside and visit excellent kindergartens in more developed cities. At the same time, kindergartens should regularly organize seminars for teachers to engage in professional exchanges on problems encountered in practice. During these exchanges, teachers should be encouraged to speak freely and think about solutions together, promoting mutual learning and progress among teachers through this brainstorming process.

5.2.3 KINDERGARTEN LEADERS SHOULD CHANGE THEIR EVALUATION MINDSET AND ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO PARTICIPATE IN CREATING THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

The evaluation criteria for creating a classroom environment that a kindergarten upholds will have a significant impact on the daily work of kindergarten teachers. Therefore, to encourage as many children as possible to participate in the creation of the physical environment in the class, the previous evaluation standards should be changed. When evaluating the creation of the classroom environment, kindergarten leaders should move away from their previous focus on aesthetics and aesthetics, and instead consider issues from the children's perspective, focusing

the evaluation on whether children participate. Leaders who randomly visit the class can better observe and understand the real situation of children's participation, and, as leaders, lead the teachers in the class to encourage children to participate in the creation of the material environment.

5.3 PARENTS SHOULD SUPPORT TEACHERS' WORK AND ENCOURAGE YOUNG CHILDREN TO PARTICIPATE

Parents' educational concepts have an important influence on children's attitudes toward participation. First, parents should recognize the importance of child participation. Children's involvement in creating the kindergarten classroom environment is a proper exercise of their rights, and their involvement helps them become more familiar with and care for their surroundings. Second, parents should pay more attention to the environmental creation and works their children participate in regularly, using the environment to interact more, encouraging children to participate boldly, express their ideas, and give positive feedback to help children feel more confident in participating.

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