

## **A Review of Sex Education for Preschool Children in Mainland China from 1992 to 2012**

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### **Abstract**

In this article, research literatures on sex education for preschool children in Mainland China from 1992 to 2011 were briefly reviewed; researchers' study focuses and changes were analyzed; problems and shortage in research recognition, methods, contents, thoughts and so on were revealed and future research orientation is also explored.

**Keywords:** Mainland China, Preschool Children, Preschool Education, Review, Sex Education.

### **Introduction**

Sex education for preschool children started from western countries such as the America, Sweden etc. Many American kindergartens started to offer sex education curriculum early in the late 1960s(Xie Ni,2003), and Sweden implemented sex education for all children and adolescents in the 1970s(Huang Fufu,1989). After 50 years' development, greater achievements have been obtained in the theoretical exploration, empirical study and practical activities of sex education for preschool children in western countries. By contrast, in Mainland China, the opinion of facing up to early childhood sex education(Huang Yongxin,1982) and its study necessity(Zhan longze,1985)were put forward in the 1980s, but it aroused less response at that time. Until 1992, necessity (Yang Xiaoping, 1992, Z1), contents (Yang Xiaoping, 1992, 10) and methods (Yang Xiaoping,1992,11) of sex education for preschool children were expounded in papers by a scholar, then studies on it gradually spread

out in the academic community, but due to late start and impact of inertial power from traditional culture, in contrast with western countries there is still certain gap. To promote deepening of further studies and smooth development of practical activities, the authors retrieved relative literatures of Mainland China sex education for preschool children from 1992 to 2012 in Chinese Journals full text database (CNKI), VIP database and Wan Fang digital database, taking "preschool children (infants or early childhood)" plus "sex education" as subject words and keywords. Based on briefly reviewing, researchers' focus and its changes were analyzed, existing problems and disadvantages were discovered and future study orientation was explored.

## **1. Summary of Sex Education Studies for Preschool Children**

Based on analyzing literatures on sex education for preschool children from 1992 to 2012, it's found that scholars' studies were focused on its necessity, objectives, principles, contents, ways, methods, implementing status, reason and so on.

### **1.1 Necessity of Sex Education for Preschool Children**

There're disputes between scholars on whether sex education is carried on preschool children. Supporters think that sex education is lifelong education, adolescence is the key period, 2 to 3 years old is another important period (Wang Yuhong, 2004); sex opinions and sex principles gained from individual early years are the sex psychology foundation of teenagers and grownups and they play direct and important influences on individual sex behaviors in his life (Jin Ying, 2007). Opponents think that performing sex education too early not only destroys children's virginity, but also stimulates sex psychology to forward for their immature sex physiology. Although sex education's necessary, it should be carried on in the late years of primary school. Furthermore, it should be limited in some basic sex physiology knowledge introduced in other relative courses and there's no need to offer an independent course (Zou Shunkang, 2004). Disputes also exist in sex education starting time. Some scholars think sex education is more effective on 14-year-old children or younger than 5 years old (Jin Ying, 2007; Ouyang Baoyi, 2006); some think sex education should be carried on from childhood (Lee Yueru, 2001; Shun Xiaomian, Xie Yi et al, 2007; An Huijuan, 2012); some think sex education should start from birth (Wang Yuhong, 2004; Guan Yonghong, 2007).

### **1.2 Objectives and Principles of Sex Education for Preschool Children**

At the end of last century, objectives of sex education for preschool children were seldom explored and even involved, more introduced research achievements in western countries, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Until early 21 century, objectives of sex education for preschool children were studied by Mainland China's researchers. For example, based on education theory, regarding the general objectives of Mainland China's young children education and health education and referring to young children educational objectives of western countries and Taiwan, Huang Jinhua constructed a three-dimension (emotion, recognition and action skill) and four-level (terminal objectives, category objectives, age stage objectives and activity objectives) young children sex education objective system (Huang Jinhua, 2008). Wei Hanbing et al pointed that preschool sex education objectives should focus on distinguishing sex, confirming sex role and cultivating sex concept (Wei Hanbing, Wang Yongjie, 2011).

Majority of scholars in Mainland China think the following principles should be followed during study, that is, timely and appropriate principles (Zhang Aifang, 2007; Fang Fan, 2004;

Li Jun,2006), positively educating principles (Zhang Jianren,2000; Feng Ming,2012),naturally educating principles (Feng Ming,2012), synchronicallyeducating with sex development (Zhang Jianren,2000) or earlier principles (Feng Ming,2012), school, family and society mutual participation principles (Wu Jianzhong,2010; Huang Ying,2005), scientific principles (Li Jun,2006;Huang Ying,2005) and parents cooperation principles (Zhang Jianren,2000;Feng Ming,2012).

### **1.3 Contents of Sex Education for Preschool Children**

There is more discussion on contents of sex education for preschool children among scholars in mainlandChina. Initially, most scholars believe that sex education for preschool children includes educating sexual physiology knowledge and cultivating healthy sexual psychology, sexualphysiology knowledge education just tells children life origin, scientific names of male and female genital organs, and gender differences of physiological structures and how to set up good sex health habits and protect their bodies; healthy psychosexual cultivation is to help childrenform positive and nice attitudes on sex, eliminate sexual mystery, prevent sexual depression and sexual evil occurring, identify their own genders,learn their gender roles in conformity to social regulationsandso on (Wang Yuhong,2004; Jin Ying,2007; Lee Yueru,2001). And developing healthy sexual psychology should be emphasized and sexual physiology knowledge should be provided as simply as possible during sex education (Wang Yuhong,2004; Jin Ying,2007; Lee Yueru,2001).

With times changing and sex education knowledge deepening, baby's sex education (ZouShunkang,2004; Huang Ying,2005) and sexual morality education for preschool children (ZouShunkang,2004; Zhang Aifang,2007; Fang Fan,2004; Li Jun,2006; Zhang Jianren,2000; Wu Minbo, Chen Yanna,2008) are also concerned.Some scholars have briefly discussed contents of sexualphysiology and psychosexual education for infants and sexual morality education for preschool children and attempted to resolve the problems in stages and cohesion of sex education contentsfor infants and early childhood (ZouShunkang,2004;Zhang Aifang,2007;Xie Yi, Shun Xiaomian et al,2008).

### **1.4 Ways and Methods of Sex Education for Preschool Children**

In ways of sex education, it's emphasized that following the mutual participation principles of school, family and society, but opinions differ in who's playing the leading role. Some scholars believe that parents should be responsible for sex education for preschool children and school and society only support parents (Wang Yuhong,2004). Some believe that its preschool teachers that should be in charge of sex education (Wang Yuhong,2004. Some believe that onlyadultswith a scientific sex concept are eligible to be educators, because parents are not born educators(Wang Yuhong,2004).

In respect of education methods, scholars have summarized some good teaching methods. Some scholars proposed some children family sex education methods like life guidance, gender identification, emotional integration, regulation demonstration and psychological guidanceetc (Wei Wei, LuoXiaofei,2007). Some scholars concluded kindergarten sex education methods like discussion, game, model demonstration, perception experience and so on(Huang Ying,2005).

## **1.5 Implementation Status of Sex Education for Preschool Children and its Cause**

The current implementation status of sex education for Mainland China's preschool children was studied by some scholars. For example, a questionnaire investigation was done on 150 child parents and 160 child teachers in Lanzhou in 2003 by Xie Ni. It was found that parents and teachers were aware of the importance of sex education for children and also had certain qualification basis and intelligence support, but sex education actions lagged behind seriously and almost no parents and teachers implemented formal and intended sex education for children (Xie Ni, 2003).

Scholars analyzed lag reasons. The main reason pointed out by Wu Xiangqi et al. was that inadequate awareness of early sex education and parents and teachers lacking corresponding knowledge; in addition, lacking teaching materials and appropriate ways and methods also contributed to unsuccessful early sex education (Wu Xiangqi, Shun Xiaomian et al, 2008). Xie Ni thought that the main reasons of sex education for preschool children seriously lagging behind in actions were outmoded sexual morality concept, adults themselves with blind sex knowledge, adults' lacking understanding or denying children sex and particularity of children sex education (Xie Ni, 2003).

## **2. Study Limits and Future Study Direction**

From the above, some progress has been made in sex education for Mainland China's preschool children after 20 years' efforts, but compared with foreign countries, Hong Kong and Taiwan, there are still some limits need to be improved.

### **2.1 Divergent Views need to be Unified and Clarified**

Ideas are the guidance of actions. Unified understanding is prerequisite of deepening study on sex education for preschool children and smoothly carrying out sex education activities. Disputes still exist in current studies on necessity, starting time, and school, family and society to cooperate with each other in sex education for preschool children, which is harmful for unifying various social thoughts to form education join force to promote the development of sex education for preschool children. In the future, the scholars should start from the actual situation of Mainland China's preschool children sexual physiology development, combine with research results on the children psychological development, sex psychology and preschool education and Chinese talents cultivating targets, demonstrate the significance of sex education for preschool education further in theory, clarify respective education duties of school, family and society at different development stages of preschool children. In addition, some small education experiments and follow-up studies should be carried out to prove the value and effect of sex education for preschool children in different age stages and by different subject in order to demonstrate the significance and clarify the respective responsibilities further from the empirical point of view.

### **2.2 Single Research Methods need to be Diversified and Scientific**

Sex education for preschool children is the educational activities with rich connotation including facts, value and significance and due to different study contents, the emphasis is definitely different. Therefore study methods should also be different. For example, for the

studies focusing on describing facts of sex education for preschool children, revealing its laws, explaining and predicting its future development prospects, it's appropriate to adopt empirical research and action study methods; for those focusing on understanding the value and significance of sex education for preschool children, judging the value and constructing significance, non-empirical study methods like experience conclusion and logical thinking will be better. For Current study no matter what its content emphasis is, experience conclusion and logical thinking are the most often adopted methods, less empirical study and least action study are adopted, the problem comes from single method and low scientific degree. Methods adopted in future study on sex education for preschool children should be diversified (PengHailei, Yao Guohui,2007) and scientific(Sun Xiaoke,2007). Researchers should not only have divergent, multidimensional and reverse thinking ways and focus on functions of intuition, inspiration, imagination and logical thinking, but also adopt appropriate study methods according to different contents, especially have abilities to master various methods comprehensively to verify issues elaborately and thoroughly.

### **2.3 Narrowed and Shallowed Contents need to be Expanded and Deepened**

As everyone knows, the psychological development of children has both stages and continuity, previous stage is the premise and preparation of the later stage, the later stage is the continuation and promotion of the previous stage. This rule should not be ignored for effective education for children and sex education should also be the case. The existing study involved the stages of children's psychological development, but ignored its continuity and concerned more on sex education for children but less for babies and young children connecting problems; Contents of sex education for babies should be strengthened in the future studies and babies and young children connecting problems should be dealt with properly. Secondly, with the deepening of education study, people have realized that sex education should cover sexual physiology, sexual psychology and sexual moral education, so does sex education for preschool children. Current study on preschool children's physiological, psychological education is relatively deep, while research on sex moral education relatively shallow; sex moral education for preschool children should be the future study focus. Furthermore, education objectives, education contents, education methods are interdependent relationship, education objectives are the foundation of determining education contents and selecting education methods ,while education contents and education methods are the fundamental guarantee of realizing education objectives, and education contents as education objective's extension and specification provide more specific guidance for selecting education methods. Current studies focus more on education contents and less on education objectives and more separately study education objectives, education contents and education methods and lack system integration; future study should integrate education contents, education methods and education objectives.

### **2.4 Narrow and Less Flexible Ideas need to be Changed and Updated**

Most current studies mechanically apply study experience of education psychology knowledge, abroad sex education for preschool children and domestic adolescent sex education, so lack flexibility. For example, taxonomy of educational objectives theory and foreign experience were mechanically applied in the construction of sex education objectives system for preschool children, which led to mass contents and levels of objective system, discordance with national situation and poor operability. And in the construction of

education content system and the determination of sex education contents, researchers took the laws of children sexual development revealed by Freud(Wu Jianzhong,2010;Li Xuelian,2012) and Kohlberg(Huang Ying,2005), not the subjects of sex education —babies' and children's current actual situation of sex development as the basis; like domestic adolescent sex education,voice rights of teachers and parents, especially parents were deprived, their opinions and views not like in Japan(Liu Lu,2007)and Singapore (LuoFeng,2001) be adopted during constructing content system, or their rights to select education contents during sex education implementation process not like in U.K(Wu Weiping,2011) be appropriately given, which contributes to theoretical study and practical operation seriously apart and the great value reduction of application research.Therefore we should change and renew research ideas, actively learn and draw lessons from successful experience of western countries, Hong Kong and Taiwan, respect our national conditions, fully listen to sex education implementers' views for further digestion and absorption; also should emphasize multiple subjects'integration and link education, preschool psychology, sex psychology, sex science and ethics together to undertake a comprehensive study.

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