

Original Research Article

A Study on teachers' observation skills in kindergarten outdoor independent play*Yuan Ma**School of Preschool Education, Changsha Normal University, Changsha, Hunan, 410100, China*

Abstract: The outdoor independent play of young children cannot be separated from teachers' observation, which plays an important role in understanding the development of young children and guaranteeing the quality of outdoor independent play. In this study, kindergarten teachers in a school in Changsha City were selected as the main research subjects, and the survey method was used to understand the current status of teachers' observation ability in outdoor independent play. The results found that the purpose of teachers' observation lacked relevance, their records were easily subjective, their analyses were superficial, and their evaluation methods and tools were relatively single. Based on this situation, this study proposes suggestions from both teachers and kindergartens to improve kindergarten teachers' observation ability in outdoor independent play.

Keywords: Outdoor independent play; Teachers' observation ability; Play observation

1. Introduction

In recent years, more and more kindergarten educators are aware of the importance of "giving play back to the children" with the continuous promotion of new concepts such as "Anji play". For this reason, they have begun to pay attention to children's outdoor independent play and how teachers can become a qualified "observer" in children's outdoor independent play. Outdoor independent play is a "playground" for children, but also a "learning ground" for children. Some scholars have pointed out that outdoor free play can meet the needs of young children's physical activity, make them experience the joy of free activity, and promote the development of young children's physical health and motor ability^[1]. Some scholars have points out that outdoor activities are a promising learning environment, and that the ever-changing outdoor environment provides a variety of manipulative materials that can stimulate children's imagination and creativity and improve problem-solving skills^[2]. It can be seen that outdoor autonomous play is of great value in promoting the all-round development of young children. Therefore, teachers should have the awareness and ability to observe, and through observing the various behaviors of children in activities, provide educational guidance that is more suitable for children.

In this study, 21 kindergarten teachers in a park in Changsha City were randomly selected to distribute questionnaires. The survey mainly included five aspects: teachers' basic information, teachers' awareness of observation, teachers' observation records, teachers' observation analyses, and teachers' use of observation results, with a total of 23 questions. Each question item was designed with five options and a five-point scoring system was used. The obtained data were selected for comparison with the mean and standard deviation. In this case, the mean value is at 1-2 points which is a low level, 3 points which is a medium level and 4-5 points which is a high level. The value of the standard deviation reflects the degree of difference in the level of competence between teachers, the smaller the value, the smaller the difference; the larger the value, the larger the difference.

2. The situation of teachers' observation ability in kindergarten outdoor autonomous games and problems

2.1. Generally have a strong sense of observation, but the purpose of observation lacks specificity

The results of the questionnaire show that the average score of teachers' overall observation awareness in outdoor autonomous play is 3.43, which is at a moderately high level. Most teachers were generally aware of the importance of observation and had a strong sense of observation. However, the score of "whether they pay more attention to the activities" (1.38) is below the mean, which indicates that some teachers may still ignore the children's main position when observing and focus on the activities themselves. The standard deviation of this item (1.07) was high, indicating that the level of teachers' competence in this area varied greatly.

2.2. Able to master basic observation methods, with a single observation tool

Most of the teachers have mastered basic observation methods and can flexibly use a variety of observation methods according to the actual situation, but they prefer to use simple, flexible and adaptable methods to conduct observation. Teachers mainly rely on their senses when using observation tools, as well as mobile phones to take photos and videos to record observations. Mobile phone recording is indeed convenient and easy to implement recording, but the single tool also has great limitations.

2.3. Observations are more complete, recording ability needs to be improved

Through the researcher's in-depth observation and interviews, it was found that kindergarten teachers' observation in outdoor autonomous play was mainly carried out in three aspects. Firstly, it is the safety of young children, which includes two aspects: on the one hand, it is the safety of young children's play process; on the other hand, it is the safety of the environment, which includes whether the venue is safe or not, and the play materials and so on. The second is the children's play status, such as the children's interest in the game, their emotional state during the game, and their motivation to participate in the game; and the third is the children's play content, such as who the children play with, how they play, and what materials they will use, and so on. Overall, teachers were clearer and clearer in their choice of observation content, and the content was overall more comprehensive.

However, teachers' scores in objectivity of recording, recording method and recording period were lower than the overall average, reflecting that teachers still have some deficiencies in these areas and have room for improvement. Moreover, the standard deviations of these three aspects are relatively high (0.91, 1.19, 0.8), which indicates that the teachers' abilities in these three aspects vary widely and their levels show unevenness.

2.4. Analysis methods are varied but lack depth, and evaluation methods are limited

During the observation, it was found that there were three main methods for teachers to analyse the observation results: firstly, the work analysis method, in which teachers analyse children's game works to understand their game level; secondly, the case analysis method, in which they analyse the development of children's ability by combining their behavior and performance in independent games; and thirdly, the theory analysis method, in which they analyse children's game behaviour by combining relevant theoretical knowledge.

The findings show that teachers' ability in observation and analysis is good overall, with an average score of 4.14 points, which is at a high level. However, there are two relatively obvious problems in teachers' specific analyses: the first is that they are easily influenced by previous experiences, and the second is that there are cases of using uniform standards to measure different children. The mean scores in these two areas are significantly low (both 2.57) and have high standard deviations (1.29 and 1.50 respectively). This suggests that teach-

ers' overall level of performance in these two areas is low and that there is a wide variation in performance. It shows that when teachers conduct analyses, they tend to ignore the fact that young children have individual differences, which leads to less in-depth analyses.

2.5. The use of observation results is not integrated into the enhancement of self-development

The study found that the average score of teachers' ability to use observation results was 4.47, which was on the upper end of the scale. The higher than average scores for providing play guidance (4.57) and adjusting play materials (4.52) indicate that teachers focus on providing support and guidance for children's next play session and on adjusting the outdoor self-directed play environment. The scores for feedback with parents (4.33), although slightly lower than the mean value, show that the teachers are aware of the importance of co-education in the observation of outdoor independent play. The standard deviation values for all three dimensions were relatively low (0.51, 0.51, 0.58), indicating that there was little difference in teachers' ability to use the observation results.

3. Influencing factors of teachers' observation ability in kindergarten outdoor independent play

3.1. Teacher level

3.1.1. Teachers' own limited professional ability development

The study found that in the daily work of kindergartens, teachers have to undertake multiple tasks such as teaching activities, garden activities, professional training, teaching and research meetings, and so on. As a result, teachers have very few opportunities to participate in outdoor independent play observation, and the time available for professional development is compressed, limiting the improvement of observation skills.

3.1.2. Backwardness of teachers' educational philosophy

It was found in the research that many teachers' educational concepts were backward. Teachers' educational philosophy directly affects the development of observation ability. In the interviews, when asked what they thought about outdoor independent play, some teachers thought that outdoor independent play was a "free activity", and because of its "free" nature, observation was the best way to ensure the safety of children. Some teachers thought that outdoor independent play was a "free activity" and because of its "free" nature, observation was to ensure children's safety. Such a perception ignores the essence of observation and is not conducive to the improvement of teachers' observation skills.

3.2. Kindergarten level

3.2.1. Limitations of the kindergarten's teaching philosophy

Educational philosophy is the key to the development of kindergartens and teachers. A good and advanced educational philosophy can point out the direction for the development of kindergartens and teachers and provide a constant forward momentum. For example, a high-quality kindergarten adheres to the "real culture" philosophy of seeking truth from facts, and encourages teachers to exchange and share their observation experiences. Some kindergartens, however, do not pay attention to observation and treat it as a "formal task". Such "pseudo-observation" is meaningless and is not conducive to the improvement of teachers' observation ability.

3.2.2. Insufficient training for teachers' observation skills

In the process of promoting the development of teachers' teams, kindergartens' incentives and support are crucial. If kindergartens do not pay attention to the professional growth of teachers, especially the cultivation of

observation skills, it is naturally difficult for teachers to improve their observation skills. In the reality survey, most kindergartens failed to give teachers adequate professional support and guidance due to conditions. For example, the lack of training in observation skills and the insufficient communication and cooperation among kindergartens can limit the development of teachers' observation skills.

4. Suggestions for improving teachers' observation ability in kindergarten outdoor autonomous games

4.1. Teachers' own level

4.1.1. Valuing observation and practice and promoting conceptual innovation

Firstly, teachers need to deeply understand the multiple values of observation on children's development; secondly, they should grasp the opportunity of observation practice and actively record and analyse observation; finally, teachers should uphold a reflective and open mind, and while verifying the existing theories through observation, they can also further develop the theoretical viewpoints through observation analysis.

4.1.2. Integrate resources to broaden observation perspectives

Firstly, parents' resources. We can collect data on children's family behaviors through parent-teacher meetings and questionnaires, and analyse their developmental characteristics through play observation. Second, garden resources. Kindergarten teachers should also strengthen communication and exchange among themselves and share their advanced experience with other teachers, so as to promote the growth of teachers' overall observation level^[3]. Third, social resources. Teachers should take the initiative to pay attention to advanced concepts such as "Anji Game", learn advanced observation tools and analysis frameworks, and broaden their observation horizons.

4.2. Supporting level of the centre

4.2.1. Promote the construction of a supportive cultural atmosphere

Kindergartens should attach importance to the cultivation and support of teachers' observation ability, and endeavour to create an environmental atmosphere in which everyone enjoys and values observation. In order to improve teachers' observation ability, kindergartens should take observation ability as an important criterion for evaluating teachers' professional level, and let teachers take the initiative to improve themselves in this way. In addition, in order to better support teachers' observation work and reduce the pressure of their observation records, kindergartens can, from a practical point of view, give certain help and support in observation tools.

4.2.2. Adjusting time and space arrangements

In outdoor independent play observation, it is very important to ensure the stability and continuity of observation time. In order to ensure the effectiveness of observation, kindergartens need to give teachers sufficient observation opportunities and time. Therefore, the kindergarten should ensure the stability of the time and space of the outdoor independent play, and avoid frequent changes as much as possible, so as to ensure the consistency of teachers' observation. Kindergartens need to guarantee teachers' observation time and fully support them in observing children's activities, as on-site recording can better guarantee the accuracy and authenticity of the records than recalling the records after the event^[4].

4.2.3. Strengthening professional development support

Kindergartens should focus on strengthening teachers' observation skills training, actively exploring and introducing diversified observation techniques, and improving accuracy of observation data. Kindergartens should also pay attention to strong co-operation with higher education institutions and educational research

institutes in order to provide professional guidance. Through continuous theoretical study and practical application, help teachers transform and optimize their observation methods in practice and improve their observation skills^[5]. Teachers' observation skills have a direct impact on their understanding of children's development, preferences and needs in the learning environment. In order to improve this ability, kindergartens should focus on developing training programs that comprehensively enhance teachers' observation skills^[6].

In order to improve teachers' observation skills in outdoor independent play, it is necessary to make joint efforts from both teachers and the management of the kindergarten. By strengthening the accumulation of practice, optimizing the support and integration of resources, and building a cooperative network, teachers can gradually change from "experience-based observation" to "professional observation", which is conducive to the gradual formation of a more complete set of theoretical systems of outdoor independent play observation, and ultimately This will be conducive to the gradual formation of a more complete set of theoretical systems of outdoor independent play observation, and ultimately promote the joint development of the quality of outdoor independent play for young children and teachers' professional ability.

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