



Qualitative Research on Structure of Chinese Preschool Children's Sense of Belonging

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Supported by the Key Project of 2012 Southwest University Faculty of Education Scientific Research "Research of the Approval Standards of Preschool Education Teachers' Qualification Training Institutes"; Wins the Financial Support from Yiyang Education Research Institute.

Received 12 May 2014; accepted 6 July 2014
 Published online 31 August 2014

Abstract

The structure of Chinese preschool children's sense of belonging can be explored locally with the normal form of qualitative study. In order to search for the local structure of preschool children's sense of belonging, the research adopts the general procedures of fundamental theories, collects materials with open-ended questionnaires, and uses Nvivo 10 qualitative analysis software to code the text. 384 reference points are gained through free coding of 30 texts, which are coded into 53 free nodes, 13 tree nodes, and 6 core nodes, then six elements of preschool children's sense of belonging structure are initially gained: class identification, self-consciousness, fondness, attachment, involvement, contacting. Hereafter, the scale of Chinese preschool children's sense of belonging will be compiled by based on this, as well as further exploration for study and validation of universal problems of research conclusion.

Key words: Preschool children; Sense of belonging; structure; Qualitative research

Liang, Y. J., & Liu, Y. Y. (2014). Qualitative Research on Structure of Chinese Preschool Children's Sense of Belonging. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 10(5), 55-59. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/cc/article/view/5326>
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/5326>

INTRODUCTION

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, belonging needs will be highlighted after the satisfaction of physiological needs and security needs. As to individuals, the period of entering into kindergarten is just the key phase when the physiological needs and security needs are satisfied and belonging and loving needs are highlighted. The sense of belonging gained in infancy refers to the feeling like part of group, the feeling of being cared about and helped by teachers and companions, loving group life, willingness to abide by all kinds of code of conduct, which are all the internal needs for healthy growth of preschool children.

A. Connotation and Structure of Sense of Belonging

Since 1950s to 1960s, scholars have made series of researches on sense of belonging from the psychological perspective. The definition on sense of belonging develops from emotion to belief, participation, behavior, and perception and so on. For example, Hagerty and Lynch-Sauer (1992) defined sense of belonging as psychological experience; Baumeister and Leary (1995) defined it as driving force from the functional perspective. The changes of sense of belonging from emotion, feeling, to drive force and psychological experience reflect the changes and expansion of research perspectives.

As to the structure of sense of belonging, the initial researches tended to regard it as one-dimensional structure (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Aris, 2004) to make static study which lacked the overall mastering of sense of belonging. The recent researches has transformed from one dimensional to multidimensional in the cognition of sense of belonging structure (Yonezawa, Jones, & Joselowsky, 2009), and they think that sense of belonging contains multiple dimensions, aspects, and start to understand sense of belonging as a whole and make a comprehensive study on sense of belonging. In the

structure of sense of belonging, belonging, attachment, fondness, relations between students and teachers, identification and involvement are main components.

B. The Influential Factors and Effects of Sense of Belonging

The influential factors of sense of belonging include not only the internal factor like personal features, but also external factors like organizational characters, community environment, and school environment and so on. The attention on external factors reflects the gaining and development of sense of belonging is influenced by exterior environment, especially by the group they belong to. Considering the influential effects of sense of belonging, the satisfaction of belonging needs will influence the realization of higher level of needs (Maslow & Xu, 2007); sense of belonging generates the sense of attachment to and related to a group, which makes the individual feel more safe and happy; which is also beneficial to student's study in school and individual's labor corporation in working place, as well as to the development of group and community (James and so on, Wang, 2010). Individuals will feel isolated, lonely with lack of sense of psychological security if they have no groups to belong to (Li & Feng, 2013); the lack of sense of belonging will generate depressed, sad and negative emotional experience, leading to sense of loneliness and psychological illness, even suicidal behaviors. (Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007; Baumeister & Leary, 1995) .

C. The Problem Posing and Research Idea

The researches on the structure of sense of belonging takes the qualitative researches as the principle, while as a kind of emotional experience, the application of qualitative method can reflect the structure of sense of belonging from an all sided, multidimensional, more reliable and real perspective. On the other hand, considering the research objects, the researches on preschool children's sense of belonging is less. Comparing with other age periods, is there any particularity in the structure of preschool children's sense of belonging? Under the background of Chinese culture, what is the structure of

sense of belonging of Chinese pre-school children like? The research attempts to apply the method of grounded theory, collect materials with open-ended questionnaires, takes Nvivo 10 qualitative analysis software as the assistant instrument, and makes localized exploration on the structure of preschool children's sense of belonging in the mind of Chinese kindergarten teachers without presupposition.

1. METHOD

The research makes surveys on 30 kindergarten teachers in Chongqing, Sichuan, Shandong with the method of open-ended questionnaire, and requires them to choose one preschool children with strong sense of belonging and one preschool children with weak sense of belonging from the preschool children they are familiar with and describe in detail the characters and behavior performance of preschool children's sense of belonging; and then introduce tests into QSP Nvivo (simplified as N10) qualitative analysis software, for three levels of coding as to texts according to degree of gradual abstraction. First, make open coding based on the key words in original materials, and make each sentence coding as to characters and performance of preschool children's sense of belonging to generate free nodes. Then, make relevant coding bases on open coding to form tree nodes. Finally, make core coding to form core nodes, initially establishing the model of preschool children's sense of belonging.

2. RESULTS

2.1 Overall Situation

The research makes free coding as to 30 texts and gains 384 referential points, and codes them as 53 free nodes, 13 tree nodes, based on which the core coding is made, then making systematic analysis and generalization on coded concepts to generate 6 core nodes. The core nodes and their quality, as well as tree nodes and their quality can be seen in Table 1. The proportion of each core node in total free nodes can be seen in Figure 1.

Table 1
Results of Tree Core Coding

Core nodes		Tree nodes	
Name of node	Quantity of nodes	Name of nodes	Quantity of nodes
Class identification	28	Sense of honor	20
		Sense of ownership	8
Self-consciousness	44	Self experience	24
		Self expression	20
		Delightful	47
Fondness	82	Accepting kindergarten	35
Attachment	35	Intimacy	27
		Seek help	8
Involvement	87	Participate in activities	71
		Class service	16

To be continued

Continued

Core nodes		Tree nodes	
Name of node	Quantity of nodes	Name of nodes	Quantity of nodes
Contacting	108	Communication	56
		Friendly	37
		Cooperation and sharing	15

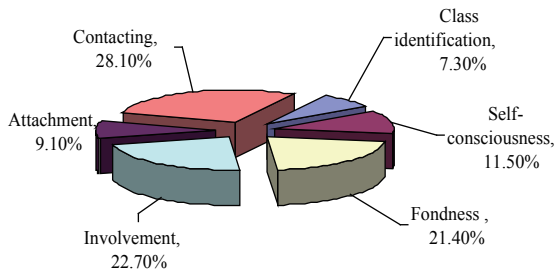


Figure 1
Pie Chart of Proportion of Each Core Node in Total Free Nodes

2.2 Components of Preschool Children's Sense of Belonging

2.2.1 Class Identification

Class identification is made up of sense of honor and sense of ownership. Seen from material source and referential points, eleven teachers have referred to it for 28 times, which occupy 7.3% in all referential points. For example, have the sense of class honor, feel pride of being in XXX kindergarten outside, and children can feel that themselves are important parts of the kindergarten and can automatically defend the kindergarten, be keen in affairs of kindergarten, pay attention to all kinds of public tasks of class, have strong sense of group and often do some beneficial thing to kindergarten, try one's best to win in the competition with the same grade, and be happy once winning the game, feel happy for good changes of class such as the changes of decoration in class, pay attention to all kinds of public tasks in the class: managing plants, weather records, clearing up of class materials, cherish class materials and protect the environmental sanity of the class.

Class identification refers to the consistent and similar psychological process and behavior performance generated by class members to the class. This kind of identification psychology often shows as members' sense of identity, honor and so on to class. The identification behaviors are often manifested in members' care and support for the class. The class identification of preschool children manifests in that they consider themselves to be identification objects, as well as part of class based on the acknowledgement, acceptance, and appraisal of preschool children towards class, and regard the honor of class as part of theirs with care for group affairs and sense of ownership.

2.2.2 Self-Consciousness

Self-consciousness is made up of self experience and projecting oneself. Considering from material source and referential points, 15 teachers have referred to for

44 times, occupying 11.5 % in all referential points. For example, be competent and full of confidence in all kinds of activities, feel like the most popular among teachers and children, feel that everything I do is right, be willing to express oneself in group, often express one's opinion.

Self experience is the interior emotional experience incurred by what principle understands about oneself, which is the subjective self's attitudes to objective self. Self respect and self confidence are the specific contents of self experience, which is internally connected and depends on self expression of people. The desire to express oneself is decided by the social nature of people which is the energy source of children's confidence and success in responding to all kinds of situations, helping them to hold a status in the group. The self experience in the research refers to the self respect and confidence of preschool children experiencing in the kindergarten, as well as the self expression such as self improvement, and self display in the group based on this.

2.2.3 Fondness

Fondness is made up of accepting kindergarten and pleasure. Considering from material source and referential points, 18 teachers have referred to for 82 times, which occupy 21.4% in all referential points. For example, be happy everyday in kindergarten, like the life in kindergarten, feel delighted in kindergarten, often jump or run into the classroom, with smile in face all the time, feel happy everyday in kindergarten and will always answer questions with smile, often talk about what happens in kindergarten with parents, be willing to share what happens in every happy day in kindergarten with parents.

In China, fondness means people or object's good impression and interests. While in the field of psychology, the definition of love is much more than that in China. For example, in Psychology Dictionary edited by Zhu Zhixian, he refers to that, love, as one term in sociopsychology, is the love exceeding the description by daily experience, which means the need for intimacy, acceptance, co-existence, continuous and profound sympathy, and resonant intimate emotion and so on (Zhu, 1989). Considering from the analysis on confronted materials, the main manifestation of fondness mainly lies in preschool children's acceptance of kindergarten and delighted emotion in kindergarten.

2.2.4 Attachment

Attachment is made up of intimacy and help. Considering from material source and referential points, 12 teachers have been referred to for 35 times, occupying 9.1% in all materials. For example, like to be around teachers,

talk about interesting things with teachers, like teachers and companions, ask for help from teacher actively when confronting troubles, appear to be happy when coming across companions, be willing to talk to teacher, ask for help from teachers when there is difficulty, share happiness with teachers, bring about water to teacher when teacher has a sore throat, when teacher are not in kindergarten for a period, actively inquire where the teacher has been, ask for teachers to tell stories.

In Chinese, attachment is explained as reluctant to leave. The definition about attachment in psychology include: a special emotional relation between individuals (mainly preschool children) and specified objects (mother or tender) (Bowlby, 1969/1982) ; the long term and continuous emotional relation of individuals to one specified individual (Zhang, 1999) and so on. In this research, attachment refers to the special, long term and continuous emotional connection between preschool children and kindergarten. The objects of attachment include teachers, companions and mainly manifest in being willing to approach to teachers; be unwilling to separate with teachers or leave the kindergarten; be happy or relaxed when reuniting; ask for comfort and help from teachers when confronting problems or threats.

2.2.5 Involvement

Involvement is made up of participation into activities and class service, which reflect preschool children' participation into kindergarten activities in behaviors. Considering from material resources and referential points, 19 teachers have referred to for 87 times, occupying 22.7% in all materials, for example, actively participate in class educational activities and games, such as put up hands to answer questions, remember the home tasks arranged by teachers with active accomplishment, participate in all kinds of activities in class, especially the corner activities, do something for group actively and compete for being class managers, such as student on duty, and book managers and so on, do something for class such as move stools and pick up trashes, be willing to do something for teachers, actively serve for the class, such as compete for being group leader, clear up reading corner and chairs in the class for helping teachers and companions, abide by the rules of games and daily life in class, and remind companions when companions violate.

In Chinese, involvement is explained as participating in, which means to join oneself in one thing, and is used to for care and help by putting oneself in other's position. In this research, involvement refers to preschool children' participation in kindergarten activities in the aspects of psychology and behavior, mainly manifesting in preparing the necessity for school, performance in activities, accomplishment for all kinds of activities, and class service.

2.2.6 Contacting

Contacting is made up of communication and friendly relations. Considering from material source and

referential points, 19 teachers have referred to for 108 times, occupying 28.1% in all materials. For example, tell one's emotion in time to teachers or companions, find appropriate solution for contraction with companions with little angry, share happiness with companions, care for companions actively, help companions up when they fall over themselves, share happiness with companions, enjoy communication with people, like teachers and what they say, enjoy communication with teachers, be willing to share one's toys and other things with others, be willing to tell about interesting things happening at home.

In psychology, contacting refers to the psychological contact or direct communication among people, for reaching certain cognition; the contact in sociology refers to the communicative behaviors especially finished, and specialized social contact formed through communicative behaviors. The contact in this research refers to the communication between preschool children and teachers as well as companions in the kindergarten, friendly relationship with companions and cooperation and sharing and so on. Contacting is one of the significant contents in individual's social life. Self development, psychological adjustment, information communication, satisfaction of different levels of needs, coordination of human relations, are all close to the interpersonal relationship. Contacting activities are the fundamental impetus for promoting social development of preschool children.

3. DISCUSSION

Preschool children's sense of belonging is a psychological state of preschool children which classifies oneself into one kindergarten. Through coding analysis of open ended questionnaires, the research finds that preschool children's sense of belonging is made up of six elements of class identification, self-consciousness, fondness, attachment, involvement, contact. The structure of preschool children's sense of belonging can be further divided into three dimensions of identification, emotion, and behavior. The dimension of identification includes class identification and self-consciousness, which belong to preschool children' identification as to kindergarten and self, including preschool children' understanding and identification as to class and their own identity, as well as the identification about their belonging relations. The dimension of emotion includes fondness and attachment, mainly refers to the emotional experience of fondness, warm and attachment generated due to preschool children' belonging to kindergarten. The dimension of behaviors includes contact and involvement, whose main contents are behaviors like communication and friendly relations with teachers and companions generated due to preschool children' sense of belonging to kindergarten, active participation in activities, and willingness to serve for class and so on.

Considering from material source and referential points, in six factors, the proportions occupied by three factors of contact, involvement, fondness are respectively 28.1%, 22.7%, 21.4%, with the total proportion reaching more than 70%, displaying obviously the significance of three factors in preschool children's sense of belonging. It indicates that in the eyes of kindergarten teachers, contact, involvement and fondness are significant factors for preschool children's sense of belonging, which are in need of sufficient attention. Among these factors, contact and involvement belong to the performance of preschool children's sense of belonging in behaviors, while fondness is the emotional performance of preschool children's sense of belonging, which indicates that in the structure of preschool children's sense of belonging, behaviors and emotion are important dimensions, and in the cultivation of preschool children's sense of belonging, preschool children behaviors and emotional guidance should be emphasized.

CONCLUSION

The research adopts grounded theory, collects materials with open ended questionnaire, and applies N10 software to code texts of open ended questionnaire and search for local concepts. The research initially generates 384 open ended coding, 53 free nodes, 6 core nodes, as well as forms six elements of Chinese preschool children's sense of belonging.

Based on the survey in kindergarten teachers, the research thinks that Chinese preschool children's sense of belonging can be divided into three dimensions of cognition, emotion, behavior and six factors of class identification, self-consciousness, fondness, attachment, involvement, and contacting.

The limitation of qualitative research lies in its external validity, and this research is no exception. The six factors of Chinese preschool children's sense of belonging are in need of further research due to lack of verification. Even so, through initial exploration, the research concludes

that the formation of six factors of Chinese preschool children's sense of belonging has excellent theoretical and realistic meaning. Later on, the scale of Chinese preschool children's sense of belonging should be edited based on this for further exploration on the structure of preschool children's sense of belonging in order to examine and verify the universality of the conclusion in this research.

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