

The Analysis of the Research Feature of the University-affiliated Kindergartens

—Take the Example of UA Child's Program

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Abstract—As an import part of the kindergartens, the university affiliated kindergartens enjoy good education and research resources and therefore usually have a better growing potential. This paper, based on five-month observation of the UA Child's Program and two semi-structured interviews with the professors and the director of the affiliated kindergartens of the University of Alabama, analyzed the research features of this type of kindergartens and draws the conclusion that the university affiliated kindergartens have the following features. First, most of the research projects are multi-disciplinary. Second, teachers and students work together to finish the projects. Third, a timely sharing of the research results.

Keywords—university-affiliated kindergartens; research resources; research features; multi-disciplinary

I. INTRODUCTION

The UA Children's Program is kindergarten that is affiliated to the Child Development Research Center of the College of Human Environmental Sciences of the University of Alabama. As the name refers, the UA Children's Program offers high quality education and research service to the teaching staff and the community residents. One thing worth mentioning is that the UA Children's Program is a high quality childcare center accredited by the National Association for Education of Young Children and reached the high standard level of the NAEYC.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Question

What are the research characteristic of University affiliated kindergartens?

B. Respondent Selection

I used purposeful sampling as my respondent selection strategy. In purposeful sampling, "the researcher selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon" [1]. I purposefully choose the director of the UA Child's Program and the head of the research programs in the Child Development Center.

C. Data Collection

My major qualitative data were three one-on-one interviews with the respondents. In addition, I have also conducted some observation notes in the UA Child's Program. Online data included the official website of this kindergartens.

D. Analysis Procedures

As for the coding, I followed both Creswell's and Patton's suggestions on data coding, category grouping and theme finding procedure [2] [3]. First, I "create and organize files for data". Second, I read through all my data to get a general impression of the information. I used marginal notes to start my initial organizing and coding. After several readings of the text, I used different color pens to start my open coding. Each different color represents a different category and I wrote shorthand codes on the relevant places in the text.

III. RESULTS

As an important part of kindergartens, the university affiliated kindergartens have their special features in terms of their organizations, the target customers and rich education resources. And how to make good use of these resources has a positive effect on the long-term development of the kindergartens. Therefore, this paper, taking the example of UA Child's Program, analyzes the research features of the university affiliated kindergartens.

The most distinctive feature of UA Child's Program is its research characteristics. Just as the director Michelle Darabaris emphasized that what differs UA Child's Program from other kindergartens is the fact that it is a lab school and its main purpose is to better understand the physical and psychological development of children and therefore provide advice and suggestions to the parents, teachers and childcare centers. Based on my five-month observation and two semi-structured interviews with the director and the professor, I have found that the research characteristics of UA Child's Program is demonstrated in the following aspects...

First of all, the research projects in UA Child's Program are multi-disciplinary. Every year, professors from different departments of the university lead their team to conduct various

research projects in the kindergartens. According to my interview with Dr.Scofield, the head of the research programs in Child Development Center, there are around 10 to 15 projects conducted in UA Child' Program annual. In order to conduct a research, one has to go through a very long process. First of all, the director of UA Child's Program and the head of the research programs will check the potential research projects. Once the researcher passes the preliminary check, he or she will hand in the first three chapters including the introduction,

literary review and methodology to be reviewed by Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to protect the privacy and rights of the respondents. If the school's IRB approve the project, the research will also get the approval from the parents and teachers before he or she collects the data. According to the following ten programs conducted in UA Child's Program in 2017, I have found that the research projects in UA Child's Program are multi-disciplinary. The details are as follows (Table I):

TABLE I. THE RESEARCH PROJECTS IN UA CHILD'S PROGRAM ARE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY

Department	Summary of the Research
Human Development and Family Studies	Preschool children frequently use things like toys, props and costumes to facilitate dramatic play. This study examined how the use of props during a story might influence the likelihood and complexity of a child's play and found that children who were introduced to props during the story were more likely to later use language from the story.
Human Development and Family Studies	In this study, children hear the name for an object that they touch (but don't see). Later they are asked to identify the object via sight rather than touch. Researchers want to know whether or not children can match information across different senses.
Human Development and Family Studies	This study examines the effects of massage for children's sleep difficulties. Parents massage their child(or read a book) at bedtime and then rate the child's sleep. Also, teachers rate the child's behavior and children are observed during the naptime. Finally, the researcher examines the child's problems solving and memory.
Human Development and Family Studies	Children's communication is affected by many variables. Things like the age of the conversational partner, the temperament of the child, and the age of the child can affect communication. This study isolated these variables to examine how they might uniquely encourage different gestures and language in infants and toddlers and found that each variable affected communication.
Human Development and Family Studies	Children with Autism often suffer from language impairments. This study asked whether these impairments, like difficulty leaning new words, might be related to deficits in joint attention (i.e., being able to focus on what someone else is focusing on). This study found that responding to bids for joint attention was the best predictor of word learning in children with Autism but did not predict world learning in children with typical development.
Human Development and Family Studies	This study aims to understand young children's development, including the influence of the family on children's readiness to start school. Information will be collected on children every six months as they transit from infancy, to toddlerhood, to preschool ages while at The Children's Program.
Human Development and Family Studies	Sweet drinks could pose serious health and nutrition problem for the kids. This study aims to find out the frequency of drinking sweet beverages and the reasons behind parents' restriction on their kids' drinking.
Psychology	This study uses a teacher questionnaire and games to explore the relationship between empathy, theory of mind, and fantasy orientation (i.e., being prone to imagination and pretend play)in children. Children who are high on fantasy orientation are expected to have a more mature theory of mind, which in turn is expected to lead to an earlier development of empathy.
Psychology	Individuals with Down Syndrome (DS) are usually in the lowest 2% of the population in intellectual ability and their language ability is often far lower. Findings from this study suggest that adolescents with Down syndrome perform below preschools in grammar use. Their poor grammar use is related in part to their memory skills and learning skills .
Communicative Disorders	Deficits in communication and social understanding and repetitive behaviors are common symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorders(ASD). When children with ASD do communicate, they often do so for the purpose of regulating behavior (e.g., requesting a toy) rather than for social reasons(e.g., Sharing or joining a game).

As showed above, among the ten research projects conducted in 2017, seven were conducted by the Human Development and Family Studies, three were conducted by the School of Psychology. As for the research areas, apart from the common linguistic studies (six), studies of games (two), health

studies (one) and family studies (one). Therefore, we can see that the multi-disciplinary feature of the research conducted in UA Child's Program. On one hand, the kindergarten provides a good place for professors to observe and collect the data and on the other, the professors can offer the most recent research

findings to the school and finally improve the all-round development of the children.

Second, professors and students work together to finish the project. In the ten projects listed above, seven was conducted by the teachers and students. During the research, professor mentor their students to help collecting and analyzing the data. When participating in the research project, the students can learn different methods to collect and analyze the qualitative and quantitative data, which could serve as a plus for their further academic study. For example, during my five-month observation, I took part in a program lead by Dr. Scofield on the linguistic development of children. There are three students in the project, the doctoral student took part in the design of the project, the master student is in charge of the testing of the linguistic software and the undergraduate student collects the preliminary data. The whole team meet regularly on Wednesday and talk about the current problems they face and through the cooperation between the professors and students, the professor can relieve the pressure of huge data input and at the same time help students to better understand the whole process of doing an experiment and thus improve their problem solving ability.

Third, a timely sharing of the research results. As the university affiliated kindergartens, UA Child's Program provide a golden opportunity for teachers to learn about the

latest research findings. Just as Michelle Darabaris, the director of UA Child's Program pointed out that one of the most important reasons that parents choose their kindergarten is because the parents believe that their kids will be taken very good care of. Various kinds of lectures will be accessible to all the teachers working here to improve their knowledge.

IV. RECOMMENDATION TO FURTHER STUDY

My suggestion for the further study is that the Chinese scholars could dip deep into the learning community between the university and the kindergartens. Further study could focus on the deepening of such research collaboration and find some practical guidelines to conduct such cooperation. Besides, researchers could also conduct quantitative study to find out the factors which impact such collaboration.

REFERENCES

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