

Learning from Abroad--A Comparison of Education in China and the United States: A Work in Progress

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Topic

The topic of my research is to determine the differences in education between China and the United States.

My research question: is there a difference in how China and the United States educate their young and, if so, how do these differences affect the children and what they do later in life?

I believe that this topic is important because China seems to be so much more advanced than the United States in math and science education, and I am curious about why and how. By answering this question, the United States may be able to again learn from its sisters abroad and be all the better because of it.

Differences in Classroom Setups

One of the main differences between China and the United States in early childhood education is the way classrooms are set up. Classrooms in China are usually filled with desks and chairs for each individual child, while in the United States, tables, as seen below, are much more of a recurring set up in early childhood education.



Classrooms in the United States



Classrooms in China

Abstract and Literature Review

How children learn best has always been an issue up for debate around the world, mainly because countries differ in culture. Because of people like Friedrich Froebel, Lev Vygotsky, Maria Montessori, and Reggio Emilia, however, the world has come to see that we can learn from each other's successes and implement them into our own education programs. The main goal of this research is to discuss the differences in early education programs between China and the United States and assess the impact that these differences have on the children. I am interested to see if the emphasis China puts on its children actually pays off and, if so, how we can adjust education programs in the United States to incorporate some of China's ideas.

- A. What America has learned from abroad
 - American childhood education originated from international ideas and influences.
 - From Germany we got kindergarten.
 - From the former Soviet Union we got Lev Vygotsky and his ideas on socially constructed knowledge and scaffolding.
 - From Italy we got both Maria Montessori and Reggio Emilia. \
- B. Many ideas about education that are used by the United States are now being rethought.
 - The prominence of play
 - Curriculum
 - Services for young children
- C. The Going Global Project
 - Defining the project
 - A six-nation program funded by UNICEF that focuses on three aspects of education: content, values, and process, and their impact on early childhood education.
 - Countries involved: Brazil, Ghana, Jordan, Paraguay, the Philippines, and South Africa
 - Worked to validate and implement early learning standards in these countries.
 - From this the United States should learn that individual states are different and their early childhood programs can be, too.
- D. China's three types of early childhood programs
 - Nurseries: they serve children under the age of three; they tend to be small and the teachers are actually trained as nurses rather than teachers.
 - Kindergarten- full-day programs: serve children from three to six years old; generally grouped by age (juniors, middle, and seniors)
 - Pre-primary classrooms: a half day program that is actually part of the elementary school; places greater emphasis on academics than other areas
 - No matter which school, singing and dancing are major components of the curriculum.
- E. How China's classrooms differ from the traditional U.S. classroom
 - Unlike the setup of U.S. classrooms, those in China are not organized into special interest areas.
 - Equipment is scarce or not easily accessible by the children and small chairs and tables occupy the most space in the classroom
 - Daily Schedule: Children rarely work independently on self-selected tasks. Instead the teacher leads most things through total group instruction. All children are expected to do the same thing at the same time. If they do not keep up, it is usually blamed on the child "not working hard enough"
 - Discipline often consists of public correction and criticism. There is the threat of "losing face" which would then reflect badly on the child's entire family.
- F. Teachers and their practices
 - Although the East has produced wonderful knowledge bearers, they are often viewed as stifling creativity.
 - Their teachers are content masters first, focusing on content rather than activities.
 - Teachers are often ranked based on their teaching performances and seniority. This correlates into society and their ranking there.
 - China bases many decisions, like who to allow into college, on test scores.
 - With No Child Left Behind Act, the U.S. has begun to place more emphasis on testing as a basis for funding
- G. Why are East Asian students so far advanced?
 - Asian students spend lots of time and money outside of school on school subjects
 - A school day is much longer in China than in the United States
 - Students spend much more time on homework than do the students in the United States



Methodology

My methodology for this research will be to interview and poll students at the University of North Texas who received an education in China and students who received an education in the United States, and record their answers. I will ask them about how much time they think they spent each day doing school or homework, rate the amount of family involvement or encouragement, and get them to sign a waiver that releases their grades and test scores to me for my research. With all this information, I will be able to see if there is a correlation between where the child received their education, what their early childhood education was like, and how high their test scores are.



Words to Live By

"Who dares to teach must never cease to learn."
-- John Cotton Dana



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Photographs

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