

# 行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫 成果報告

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行政院國家科學委員會補助專題研究計畫

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幼稚園同儕文化的發展

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## 中文摘要

關鍵詞：社會化、同儕、兒童、幼稚園、台灣

本計畫的目的為探討兒童初始同儕文化的發展。本研究為之前研究之延續，對同一批小孩進行總共二至三年的長期觀察，對於小孩的幼稚園生活深入瞭解。由於臺灣幼稚園就學率的提高，同儕在兒童生活中扮演的角色也日趨重要。台灣父母通常認為自身在孩子社會化的歷程中扮演非常重要的角色，同儕的角色相對較不重要。雖然許多研究指出同儕關係和友誼對兒童的學校適應和學業表現有重大的影響，我們對台灣兒童同儕文化的發展過程所知非常有限。台灣兒童社會化歷程的研究著重於大人，關於大人和兒童如何共同影響和參與同儕社會化歷程則相對被忽略。本次報告以年紀社會化為焦點。

## 英文摘要。

Keywords : socialization, peer, children, preschool, Taiwan

The goal of this study is to investigate the development of children's initial peer cultures. As an extension of an ongoing project, the longitudinal data obtained in the project is especially important to our understanding of the development of children in their preschool years. Because the increasing number of children who now are attending preschools in Taiwan, the role of peers becomes very significant in children's daily life. Taiwanese parents often consider their role in children's socialization a very significant one. Peers are not considered as important as parents. Although studies have pointed to that children's peer relationship and friendships are key to school adjustment and academic performance, little is known about the development of peer cultures in the preschool. The literature concerning children's socialization in Taiwan has tilted toward the direction of how adults, mainly parents and teachers, influence children's socialization. How adults and children jointly influence and participate in children's peer socialization process is relatively neglected. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating how children's peer cultures change over time through their preschool life. The results focus on the age socialization process in the preschool.

### Purpose of the study

The goal of this project is to investigating the development of children's initial peer cultures. The original proposed two-year project included two parts: (1)

analyzing the development of children's peer cultures in the first two years of their preschool life, and (2) conducting fieldwork during the children's last year of preschool life. Because of the budget cut into half, the goals were reached partially.

The body of literature on Taiwanese children's transition from families to school peer groups is rare. Current studies have shown that contemporary Taiwanese parents believe that their role as a socializing agent is a very significant one. They take many opportunities to teach their children and feel that they themselves must set an example for their children's moral character. These views are consistent with the Confucian emphasis on teaching. How children make a transition from families to preschool and how they construct peer cultures in the preschool is largely unknown. The present study aims to fill this gap to investigate how parents, children themselves and their peers jointly participate in the socialization process in the home and school contexts.

### Method

The research project is ethnographic in approach, involving thorough observation and investigation of children's preschool life. This is an extension of an ongoing longitudinal study aiming to study children's entry to initial peers cultures. The current project includes two parts: (1) a year of fieldwork phase during the children's third year of preschool life, and (2) intensive data analysis.

#### Part I: Fieldwork

The focus of the first year of the project is on children's third year of preschool life. Fieldwork, audio and video recording were conducted in the preschool. About 40 children from two classrooms were observed during this phase of the project. More than half of them knew each other from the previous year. The children were 5 to 6 years of age. Most of the children known the researcher for three years and have been friends of the researcher.

Recordings were made of the children as they interacted with other children and teachers under conditions that were as natural and undisturbed as possible. The children were video and audio recorded one day per week over the year. Daily tapings lasting 6 to 8 hours were made.

#### Part II: Intensive Data Analysis

Because the original two-year project was cut short to one year, data analysis was partially finished. In addition, one needs long hours of training to become a skillful transcriber to capturing the children's voices and movements. An hour of tape often takes 20 to 40 hours of transcribing time for an experienced transcriber. Obtaining and maintaining reliable labor force to do the transcribing is

another issue. More details of the results will be described in the following section.

## Results

The results focus on the age socialization process.

Developing age appropriate behavior and concepts is an important task for young children in Taiwan. “To revere the aged and honor the wise” has been an important idea in the Confucian tradition. One’s status is often advanced with age. Chinese kinship terms clearly pointed out the relative age of family members. The relationship of age, status and power is an important issue in interpersonal relationship.

The part provides understanding of the role of age in young children’s life and how cultural meanings about age are produced and reproduced in children’s everyday communicative practice through which socialization proceeds (Miller & Hoogstra, 1992; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Vygotsky, 1987). By observing children’s daily activities, the description focuses on children’s socialization process through age-related mundane practices in the preschool.

It is necessary to understand the background information because this information enables a process to disentangle the cultural meanings of the mundane socialization practice. This section is organized as follows. It begins with a brief description about morning activities, providing a description of the background information and illustrating the age-related mundane practice in the preschool. The second part provides descriptions about how kinship terms are used in the preschool. Socialization practices based on age are illustrated in the third part.

### Morning activities: Defining a child’s self based on age

Children are assigned into different groups based on age. Groups of children lined up for morning activities when the music is on at around 9 AM. Each group has an assigned spot according to age, from 2 to 5. The youngest group is at the far left and the oldest at the far right. The 3 and 4 year olds are in the middle. 3 to 4 children of 5-year-old groups are chosen to lead part of the morning activities. One or two lead the morning exercise on a 1-meter high stage, another two take charge of the flag during the flag ceremony. The 3 or 4 children receive a small gift after their good performance. During my two-year observation period, all children performed well on stage and received their small gifts. Younger children know that when they become big brothers and sisters, they will have opportunities to lead the morning exercise and handle the flag.

A child’s self seems to be defined based on age in the morning routine and other activities. From 2 to 5 year olds, like children’s assigned physical space, their position and moving path is clear. Children are immersed in an environment silently telling the

relationship of age and ability, responsibility, honor and status. Younger children look forward to becoming older, as they often say, “Wait until I grown up, I will...” It may not be an exaggeration to say that children are reminded every morning about who they are based on age.

### Kinship terms in the preschool

In general, adults encourage children of different age groups to refer to each other by kinship terms. For example, “the Duck group’s elder brothers and sisters” refers to children of the Duck group. This naming practice defines children’s relative status in a “sibling hierarchy” in the “preschool family.” Children usually follow this naming practice especially when they talk to adults. Among children, they may at times use “the Duck group’ folks.”

Children of the same age group usually consider each other as equals and refer to each other by names. Exceptions occur when children have other interaction opportunities outside of school. An example was that two girls who used to share a babysitter. At their babysitter’s place, they referred to each other as younger sister and elder sister. In the preschool, they followed the same practice. Although they were in different groups in the past two years, they often visited each other’s classroom. The younger one sometimes asked the older one to intervene in a dispute.

### Age-based socialization practice

#### Encouragement

The “sibling hierarchy” is usually encouraged and celebrated. The older children are encouraged to help the younger ones to illustrate their status as elder siblings who are capable to help and who are nice to nurture the younger ones. Younger children who help the older ones are praised as being capable and nice. Younger children are usually proud of being able to accomplish tasks to show that they are growing up.

#### Shaming

Children may be teased or shamed by applying to the framework of sibling hierarchy. Older children are expected to take care of themselves. When they do not meet expectations of their age, shaming practice may be implemented. For example, when a 4 year old does not eat the meal properly, the teacher may illustrate examples in the younger group to push the child to perform well. An extreme case occurred when two 2 year olds were brought to the 4-year-old group to “help” an “elder brother.” Because the 4 year old boy ate extremely slowly, the teacher “invited” a 2-year-old girl to feed the elder brother. This 2 -year-old girl had finished eating and she ate very well according to the teacher’s judgment. She had received praise from

her own teacher and other adults in the preschool. The other 2 year old who ate pretty well accompanied his friend to the 4-year-old group. Children in the 4-year-old group engaged in energetic private discussion about the arrival of the two “little siblings” and warned each other to eat properly to prevent being fed by the “little siblings.” Occasionally a few children of the 4-year-old group were fed by their teacher and I have never heard so much discussion about being fed. While the teacher praised the “little siblings” who were capable of feeding the elder brother, a strong sense of shame was activated. During the process of feeding, the 4-year-old who was fed was quiet and cooperative. At the end of feeding, the teacher praised the two 2 1/2 year olds and announced that the two “little siblings” might be invited again to feed the elder brothers. Many children said, “I don’t want that!” In the following several weeks when I visited the preschool, children of this group seemed to finish eating timely. This practice of bringing in younger children seemed to be effective.

#### Peer feedback to “age-inappropriate” performance

Children usually give feedback to peers’ “age-inappropriate” performance very quickly. Acting like a younger child is easily to be teased as “like a baby.” Performing like people who are older may caused objections. For example, during play, a 4-year-old girl warned the other one not to take play objects to a spot caused objection:” Don’t talk to me like that. You are not an adult!” Younger children’s try to control older children may be ignored. One time a 2-year-old asked a group of 4 year olds to stop playing toys of the 2-year-old group, a 4-year-old girl said to me, “Don’t listen to her! She is in the little group!”

#### Discussion

Age is an important status maker in Chinese tradition. From young age, preschoolers in the middle-class community are sensitive to their age and age-appropriate behaviors. The daily practice constantly reminds children who they are based on age and the standard that they need to meet. Using kinship terms in the preschool supports a sibling hierarchy which provides a framework about what behaviors are age-appropriate especially in mix-age encountering. Adult strategies of encouragement and shaming practices seem to be effective by adopting the framework of sibling hierarchy. It may need special attention that the shaming practice in the preschool is implemented in a loving and humorous atmosphere as Fung (1999) has pointed out in the socialization of shame in the family setting.

In the peer group, the fact that age brings status and power is obvious. Children considered older children to be more powerful and capable than the younger ones. They usually perform the positive side in front of the younger ones. They also know

well that they have the authority to direct and help the younger ones. The sibling hierarchy or pseudo-kinship relationship defines what behaviors are appropriate as an elder or younger sibling. Children of different ages often engage in positive interactions under the framework of good siblings.

The cultural practice of shaming in the preschool revealed a complex set of cultural conceptions about appropriate training. Teachers and parents express the need to train children to be both cooperative and independent to become competent members in the modern society. Training children to become confident, outgoing and autonomous were among the goals that seemed quite “Westernized.” Still, the training tools were with a strong flavor of cultural traditions.

Cultural expectations about children from age 3 to 5 influenced the pace of children’s adjustment to a new classroom. At age 5, an expectation jump occurred and children faced a challenging transition to a new classroom in their last preschool year. The culturally supported age hierarchy and kinship terms were important in the children’s transitions that a sense of “growing up” and becoming more capable than the previous year provided strong support at each transition to a new classroom. Adults’ encouragement and shaming practices seem effective by adopting the framework of age hierarchy. Friendships were important support systems that facilitate children’s adjustment in the preschool on a daily basis and in challenging situations such as moving to a new classroom.

This cultural case indicated several educational implications. For educators, it is beneficial to understand children’s socialization process through cultural practices. A kinship framework emphasizing age and development may provide children ways to understand the trajectories of appropriate behaviors. Interacting with children of different ages may provide children opportunities to perform different aspects of the self and children may be willing to take up more responsibilities. A caveat is that educators need to be culturally sensitive to determine which practice would be compatible with the local cultures.

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