

Literature Review on Practical Knowledge of Family Life Educators

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Abstract

The family life educators are the main force to carry out family education and collaborative education, but in the process of carrying out practical activities, there is an embarrassing phenomenon of disconnection between theory and practice. Many scholars agree that practical knowledge is the key to solve the problem of disconnection between teachers' theory and practice. The same is true for family life educators. Practical knowledge can solve the problem of disconnection between theory and practice. However, the definition, components and influencing factors of practical knowledge are still not clear at present. Therefore, this study clarifies the above issues.

Keywords

Family life educators; Practical knowledge; Literature review.

1. Introduction

Practical knowledge is the knowledge basis for the professional development of family life educators (Wang and Liu, 2018). The practical knowledge of family life educators helps guide them to complete education work with high quality (Ji & Wang, 2018). Xie (2019) points out that the amount of practical knowledge of family life educators determines their adaptability, flexibility, and artistry in family education work, which are essential knowledge for them. At present, there are few researches on the practical knowledge of family life educators in China. The relevant literature about the practical knowledge of family life educators is searched on the authoritative academic website of China National Knowledge Internet (CNKI, <https://www.cnki.net/>). The keywords searched were family life educators and practical knowledge. The retrieval time is May 1, 2022. A total of 13 relevant literatures can be retrieved. These researches mainly focus on the role and significance of the practical knowledge about family life educators. For example, Yan (2021) discusses practical knowledge from the perspective of professional development. She points out that practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge together constitute the professional knowledge system of family education counselors. However, people pay more attention to the growth of theoretical knowledge but ignore practical knowledge. Yang (2020) points out that the outstanding problem is that the pre-family life educators lack awareness of practical knowledge and pay insufficient attention to it. Therefore, colleges should attach great importance to practical knowledge in the process of training family life educators, and improve their awareness of practical knowledge.

These studies have paid attention to the important role of practical knowledge about family life educators. It has aroused the attention of family life educators and colleges to practical knowledge. However, these researches only focus on the role of practical knowledge about family education instructors. There are few researches on the definition, components, influencing factors, cultivation strategies, and generation models of practical knowledge. These questions remain unclear. The existing researches on these issues mainly focus on primary and secondary school teachers, kindergarten teachers, and university teachers. What is the practical

knowledge, What are the components, What are the influencing factors, and What are the cultivation strategies. What is the generative model. These questions were discussed in turn.

2. Definition of Practical Knowledge

As for practical knowledge, many scholars have been thinking about it since the 1960s. Schwab (1969), an American curriculum expert, is one of the originators of practical knowledge research. He coined the term practical style. In the 1980s, Schon (1983), an American scholar, advocated replacing the orientation of skilled teachers with reflective practitioners. This led other scholars to realize that practical knowledge is another important part of teachers' professional knowledge. Later, Elba (1983), a British scholar, introduced Polanyi's research results on tacit knowledge into teacher research and formally proposed the concept of practical knowledge for the first time. The important contribution of Elbaz is to uncover the mystery of teachers' practical knowledge for the first time and to initiate the research on teachers' practical knowledge.

What is practical knowledge that's the foundation of practical knowledge research. At present, many scholars put forward different views on the definition of practical knowledge based on theoretical perspectives. These views which have not reached consensus have different emphases, which can be roughly summarized as the following categories.

First, some scholars define the definition of practical knowledge from the source of teachers' practical knowledge. This kind of definition emphasizes the function of practical knowledge in practice so that practical knowledge is regarded as the experience, knowledge, or opinion generated in response to the situation of educational practice. For example, Lin (1999) regards practical knowledge as a kind of knowledge related to the classroom situation. He pointed out that this kind of knowledge is the accumulation of the teacher's teaching experience. Wan (2006) made a more detailed elaboration of practical knowledge along this line of thinking. In his opinion, practical knowledge refers to the knowledge that teachers have which is closely related to the classroom situation and can be quickly invoked in teaching practice. Shi (2005) believes that practical knowledge is a kind of effect knowledge summarized by teachers in the process of education in specific teaching practice. Li (2005) defined practical knowledge from the perspective of the generation path. He thinks that teacher's practical knowledge is a unique view of educational practice which is gradually accumulated based on the life history of the practitioner and the reflection of the teacher's practice.

Secondly, some scholars define practical knowledge from the nature of teachers' practical knowledge. This kind of definition captures the fundamental characteristics of the connection between practical knowledge and practice, to distinguish it from other knowledge such as general basic knowledge, subject knowledge, and educational professional knowledge possessed by teachers. For example, Elbaz (1983) believes that practical knowledge refers to the knowledge uniquely possessed by teachers. It is the knowledge that teachers integrate all other professional theoretical knowledge with their values and beliefs, and are guided by the actual situation. She highlights the attributes of practical knowledge regarding situational action and decision orientation. Chen (2003) believes that teachers' practical knowledge is the knowledge that teachers truly believe in and use in their teaching practice. She believes that from the view of performance, practical knowledge exists in the heart of teachers, in plans and actions, and throughout the process of teachers' practice. Wu (2006) believes that practical knowledge refers to the comprehensive understanding and behavioral ability of education formed in teaching practice, and it can be continuously enriched and developed in practice.

Finally, some scholars define teachers' practical knowledge from their behavioral performance. These scholars interpret practical knowledge according to the behavioral results and external representations of teachers' practical knowledge and regard practical knowledge as a form of

knowledge about what teachers should do and how to do it. For example, Liu (2006) pointed out that practical knowledge is a form of knowledge about what teachers should do and how to do it based on their understanding of theoretical knowledge. Jin and Li (2009) believe that practical knowledge refers to the knowledge form that teachers know what they should do and how to do it in a specific situation. Cao (2004) believes that teachers' practical knowledge is the guiding knowledge for specific problems based on the reflection of educational life experience. With the deepening of research on practical knowledge, the significance of practical knowledge for teachers has been very obvious, but there is still no consensus on what practical knowledge is. As Liu (2008) compares practical knowledge to wind, he points out that although it can be felt, it is elusive. Although the definition of practical knowledge has not formed a consistent view, they have formed some consensus on practical knowledge. It includes: first of all, teachers' practical knowledge is the special knowledge that teachers construct in their unique way; secondly, experience is the source of generating teachers' practical knowledge, and reflection is the main way of generating teachers' practical knowledge; thirdly, practical knowledge comes from and can guide practical activities; finally, practical knowledge plays a guiding role in teachers' educational activities. Although the above studies did not discuss the definition of practical knowledge of family life educators, they laid a foundation for the study of this issue.

3. The Components of Practical Knowledge

Elbaz (1983) discussed the components of practical knowledge based on his definition of practical knowledge. He argues that practical knowledge consists of five components. The first is knowledge of self. In other words, self as resource and self as an individual. The second is knowledge of the milieu. It mainly includes the relationship between teachers and leaders, the political relationship, and the creation of social environment. The third is knowledge of the subject matter. Take English teaching as an example, it includes English subject content knowledge, learning and research skills, reading, and writing. The fourth is knowledge of the curriculum. It includes the development of the learning curriculum, the stages of the development process, curriculum development as a group activity, and curriculum development as a reading center. The fifth is knowledge of instruction. It includes learning theory, teaching belief, teaching organization, teacher-student relationship, and evaluation. She believes that these five types of knowledge are interconnected and integrated. When it relates to practice, it becomes dynamic knowledge. Elbaz's division of practical components has greatly influenced the research of other scholars. Many scholars directly use her theory, and some scholars take her classification standards as the framework to form a new classification of practical knowledge components.

Clandinin (1986) inherited Elbaz's views. He also thinks that image is an integral part of personal practical knowledge, and tries to construct the concept of the image from three aspects: dimension, source, and function. He pointed out that images consist of moral dimension, emotional dimension, personal private dimension, and professional dimension. The source of imagery is mainly related to watershed experience and reflection. The function of the image is reflected in teachers' philosophy and helping teachers deal with classroom situations. Chen (2003), a famous Chinese scholar, divided the components of practical knowledge into six aspects: teachers' educational beliefs, self-knowledge, interpersonal knowledge, situational knowledge, strategic knowledge, and critical knowledge through theoretical analysis and deduction of existing practical knowledge. She believes that teachers' educational beliefs are reflected in their understanding of the following questions: what is education, what is the purpose of education, what is good teaching, and what kind of education students should receive. Teachers' self-knowledge includes teachers' self-concept, self-teaching efficacy, self-

evaluation, and self-regulation. Teachers' interpersonal knowledge includes the following. The first is teachers' perception and understanding of students. For example, whether teachers pay attention to students and can respond appropriately to students' needs. The second is passion. It refers to whether the teacher has a desire to find the answer and explain it to others; The third is Enthusiasm. It refers to whether the teacher is willing to take the initiative to understand the needs and difficulties of the students and is willing to help the students. The fourth is teachers' control over course management. It includes the class management system, the arrangement of classrooms, and the control of student group dynamics. The fifth is teachers' strategic knowledge. It is mainly reflected in teachers' choice and arrangement of course content and teaching method. The sixth is the critical reflective knowledge of teachers. It mainly shows that teachers combine their own experience, reflect on their teaching skills and reflect on their ways of reflection. Chen believes that teachers' educational beliefs occupy the most central position in teachers' practical knowledge. Therefore, it has the greatest influence on other knowledge. In addition, each component of practical knowledge is interrelated and influences each other.

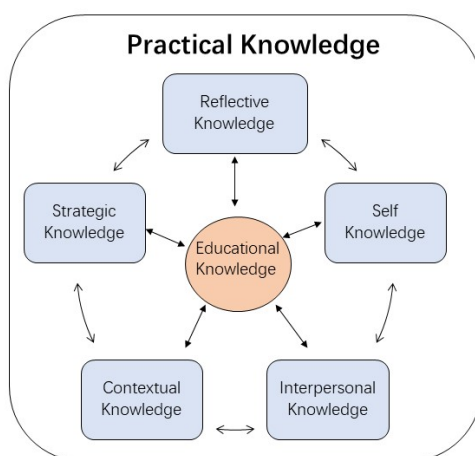


Figure 1. Six components of practical knowledge
(Source: Chen, 2003)

In 2006, Chen integrated the six components of practical knowledge proposed by her in 2003 and proposed four aspects: self-knowledge, discipline knowledge, student knowledge, and educational situation knowledge. Self-knowledge refers to teachers' self-identification, self-understanding, self-efficacy, personal educational concepts, and values. Subject knowledge includes teachers' subject knowledge, curriculum knowledge, teaching knowledge, and subject teaching method knowledge. Student knowledge refers to teachers' understanding of students' learning motivation, learning ability, academic performance, academic attitude, cognitive form, and cognitive process. It is manifested in teachers' understanding of students' characteristics, learning motivation, family background, and advantages and disadvantages of learning.

In addition to these studies. Representative studies also include Jiang (2021) classification of practical knowledge into five elements: subject content knowledge, subject teaching method knowledge, general teaching method knowledge, curriculum knowledge, and teachers' self-knowledge. Chen (2021) divides practical knowledge into the knowledge of course evaluation, knowledge of students, knowledge of teaching methods, and knowledge of the teaching environment.

Through the analysis of the components of practical knowledge at home and abroad, it can be found that scholars analyze teachers' practical knowledge based on different cognitive dimensions. Their results were somewhat different, though. But they all believe that the components of practical knowledge should include: teachers' self-knowledge, knowledge of

subject content, knowledge of curriculum, knowledge of teaching environment, and knowledge of students. These categories of practical knowledge are mainly aimed at school teachers and teachers who undertake the task of teaching courses. Little researches discuss the practical knowledge of teachers engaged in education outside the school, such as family life educators. The question of what are the components of the practical knowledge about family life educators remains unclear. But the above research has played an enlightening and foundation role for the research on this issue.

4. Influencing Factors of Practical Knowledge

Teachers' practical knowledge is not formed in one single day. Its influence factor is multifaceted. It is not only influenced by teachers' factors, but also by many factors from society, school, and family. Johnston (1994) adopted the case study method to follow up with three teachers for four years and found that those teachers with reflective ability developed their practical knowledge faster than those without.

Driel, Beijaard, and Verloop (2001) believe that pedagogical content knowledge is a part of teachers' practical knowledge. Therefore, the influential factors in the development of pedagogical content knowledge are also influential factors in the formation of teachers' practical knowledge. They believe that the most important factor affecting the development of pedagogical content knowledge is the teaching experience. They came to this conclusion by comparing novice and experienced teachers. In addition, they believe that curriculum and school culture also affect teachers' practical knowledge.

Butt and Baymond (2010) used the case study method to study two teachers, Lloyd and Glenda. They found that Lloyd's practical knowledge was influenced by factors of survival, safety, and success. Glenda's practical knowledge is influenced by her international background and multicultural class. Therefore, they conclude that teachers' practical knowledge is highly personalized, and different professions will have different influencing factors (Pan, 2013).

Jiang and Wang (2020) made an in-depth analysis of the life histories of 28 primary school teachers and believed that the influencing factors of teachers' practical knowledge were as follows. The first is the teacher's personal life history. It is about the history of teachers' education and life. It is not isolated and sporadic personal memories but in a certain social culture and historical context. It refers to the events and experiences of teachers in their life and education. The second is experienced as a student. Most of this experience comes from school, but some may also come from home and daily life. The third is teachers' teaching experience. Teachers can develop practical knowledge from their own teaching experience. Teaching experience can not only strengthen and consolidate teachers' original practical knowledge but also provide important opportunities for teachers to acquire or create new practical knowledge. The fourth is Experience in pre-service and post-service training. Teachers' pre-service training and post-service training experience are also factors affecting practical knowledge.

Liao (2021) analyzed the practical knowledge of 30 college teachers. In his opinion, the influencing factors of practical knowledge include two aspects: teachers' internal factors and external environmental factors. Among them, the internal factors of teachers include the following. The first is vocational motivation. It is the power source for teachers to construct practical knowledge. It restricts the quality and effect of the formation of teachers' practical knowledge. The second is life experience. Teachers live in different social environments and life situations, so different experiences often directly or indirectly affect the formation of teachers' practical knowledge. The third is teaching experience. Teaching experience can provide more self-guarantee for teachers to identify and create new practical knowledge. The fourth is reflective ability. Teaching reflection is the catalyst of teachers' practical knowledge and an

important means to transform implicit practical knowledge into explicit practical knowledge. External factors include the following. The first is campus culture. A good campus culture can motivate teachers to reform and innovate constantly and build a good development platform for the construction of teachers' practical knowledge. The second is teacher training. Teachers can acquire rich practical knowledge through training.

To sum up, many factors affect teachers' practical knowledge. There are both personal and impersonal factors. Personal factors include personal life, learning experience, career motivation, teaching experience, teaching reflection, and peer interaction. Non-personal factors include pre-service training and post-service training. But the above research has ignored an important factor - environmental factors. Teachers' practical activities are carried out in a specific environment. For example, school teachers' environmental factors include school culture, classroom environment, and the relationship between teachers' teams. The environmental factors of family life educators include cooperative education situation and the relationship between home, school, and community. These environments affect the formation and development of practical knowledge, so environmental factors are also a factor that cannot be ignored. Therefore, when discussing the influencing factors of the practical knowledge about family life educators, this study will not only consider the influencing factors mentioned in the above literature but also consider the working environment of family life educators.

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