Cultural Ideology Matters in Early Childhood Curriculum Innovations: A Comparative Case Study of Chinese Kindergartens between Hong Kong and Shenzhen

Journal:	*Journal of Curriculum Studies*
Manuscript ID	TCUS-2017-0151.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	early childhood curriculum, school-based curriculum development, cultural ideology, Hong Kong, Shenzhen

Abstract

This study forms part of a wider comparative research project investigating the mechanisms and outcomes of school-based curriculum (SBC) development in kindergartens between the two neighbouring cities of Hong Kong and Shenzhen, under the umbrella of 'one country, two systems'. This comparison will help to clarify how sociocultural contexts may affect early childhood curriculum (ECC) innovations by comparing the kindergartens of socialist and capitalist China. Data are presented from qualitative case studies of four kindergartens – two in each city – corresponding to the three levels of curriculum analysis and comparison: intended curriculum, implemented curriculum and curriculum ideology. Comparative analyses revealed that the SBCs of the four cases were different but all tended to balance and integrate diverse approaches in terms of curricular and pedagogical practices. The commonalities of SBCs in Hong Kong and Shenzhen kindergartens were due to shared cultural values, propelled by both 'modernisation' and Chinese traditions, while the unique characteristics of SBC practices in each society were shaped by different social contexts. The educational philosophy of progressivism has greatly influenced ECC innovations in the Chinese kindergartens to varying degrees and in different ways. Implications of this comparative study are also presented for future research and practice.

Keywords: early childhood curriculum; school-based curriculum development; cultural ideology; Hong Kong; Shenzhen

Cultural Ideology Matters in Early Childhood Curriculum Innovations: A Comparative Case Study of Chinese Kindergartens between Hong Kong and Shenzhen

Introduction

School-based curriculum (SBC) development (SBCD) has gradually become more common in Chinese kindergartens since the 1990s. SBCD has received much attention from early childhood professionals in China, as a process of democratisation and decentralisation of curriculum decision making that can help improve their curriculum practices. Underlying sociocultural forces have inevitably shaped institutional curriculum innovations in the context of early childhood (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Li & Chen, 2016), but how do these effects happen? What are the commonalities and differences of early childhood curriculum (ECC) innovations across different social contexts?

To address these questions, we conducted an in-depth analysis and comparison of the curriculum innovations of selected kindergartens from Hong Kong and Shenzhen, two neighbouring Chinese cities with different political-societal systems. The economic status, population and degree of internationalisation of the two cities have similarities, and from the cultural perspective they all belong to the Chinese cultural sphere. Hong Kong was colonised by the UK for over a century before its return to China in 1997. The city retains the original political-societal system under the 'one country, two systems' umbrella representing capitalist China, whereas Shenzhen is a city of the socialist mainland. This unique pair of cities provides a possibility of comparison when addressing how ECC practices have been shaped by sociocultural forces.

Social culture and early childhood education

'One of the major purposes of schooling in any society is to socialise the young into the dominant culture; that is, to teach the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and beliefs that will enable individuals as adults to become productive members of society' (Kessler, 1992, pp. 22-23). In general, we use 'social culture' to refer to a complex set of values, beliefs, customs and behaviour norms that exists in a social group of people as well as the social environment in which the population lives. To understand the effects of social and cultural forces on early childhood education (ECE) practices, Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1991) studied preschools in three cultures: Japan, China and the United States. Their study presents a unique cross-cultural comparison that explores how these preschools interact with cultural ideologies of child-rearing and child-educating (Tobin et al., 1991). Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa (2009) revisited the preschools around 20 years later to examine the change and continuity of practices and the cultural effects. They found that the ideologies and practices of ECE were underpinned by local cultures, and had to achieve a balance between the local and global forces to deliver traditions for their children and to cope with the new social challenges.

Rao, Ng, and Pearson (2010) studied the influence of local culture on ECE in Hong Kong and found that Chinese cultural values and traditional pedagogies had considerable effects on ECE practices. They concluded that four contextual factors influenced classroom practices in Chinese kindergartens: the educational policy, traditional cultural beliefs, national development and globalisation. Chan and Rao (2010) provided a framework for examining multiple components (e.g., traditional values and contemporary notions) and their interactions, which may influence 21st century Chinese young learners.

Imported culture may also affect ECE practice. Cheng (2006), for example, found that the early childhood teachers in Hong Kong had learned Western models (e.g., the HighScope curriculum and the Project Approach) with the aim of improving their own pedagogical practices, although the expected improvements were not achieved by simply shifting Western practices into Chinese classrooms. Pearson (2011) proposed that culture-based values and practices could be promoted to mediate the implementation and effect of imported approaches on ECE to avoid the global re-colonisation of policy and practice.

ECE ideologies and practices have thus been re-examined from the perspective of cultural and contextual appropriateness. The empirical studies conducted to review the cultural and contextual appropriateness of pedagogical practices in Chinese contexts have focused on locations such as Beijing, Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Singapore (Li, 2013; Li & Rao, 2000, 2005; Li, Rao, & Tse, 2011, 2012). **Li, Rao, and Tse (2012), for instance, found that the Chinese traditional culture such as Confucianism that advocates the cultivation of learners' conformity, self-control and diligence, had profoundly influenced Chinese teachers' views of young children, early childhood learning and favourable teacher-child relationships. These views are actually the ideological and philosophical bases of the Chinese literacy pedagogy. Also, the social environment, such as large class size, teacher-centred classroom setting, parents' demands, academic-focused society, and fierce competition for academic success, has strongly affected the pedagogical practices in ECE (Li, 2013).** Consistently, it has been found that the social culture does influence pedagogical practices, but very few empirical studies have explored how social culture can influence ECC innovations. A recent case study by Yang and Li (2017) indicates that Chinese philosophies such as the Doctrine of the Mean may contribute to the integration of traditional Chinese and imported Western approaches.

To further understand the link between culture and ECC, this study compares four informative kindergartens in two Chinese cities under different political-societal contexts: Hong Kong and Shenzhen. In the next section, the sociocultural contexts of these two neighbouring cities are analysed.

China's windows on the world: Hong Kong and Shenzhen

Hong Kong is an international megacity located on the southern coast of China, facing the South China Sea. Hong Kong became a new entity of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1997 under the 'one country, two systems' principle and designated the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) (State Council of China, 2014). Under this constitutional arrangement, Hong Kong continues to possess its own political, economic, educational, legal, military, monetary and postal systems (Yang, Wang, & Li, 2017). It has been frequently ranked as the top free market economy in the world, with democracy and freedom safeguarded by the Basic Law of HKSAR.

Shenzhen is only separated from Hong Kong by the narrow Shenzhen River. From its inception in 1980, Shenzhen was earmarked for the great economic reform in China and regarded as a potential replica of Hong Kong. The past 30 years have witnessed its success in implementing the 'reform and opening-up' policy, and its economic reform has further and greatly accelerated the modernisation, globalisation and openness of China. Shenzhen **can be regarded as** the socialism version or mirror image of Hong Kong in mainland China. Therefore, the two cities are comparable in many domains. Comparing the ECC innovations between Hong Kong and Shenzhen can provide significant insights into the effects of social culture on the curriculum and may have substantial methodological implications for other ethnic groups.

ECC evolution in Hong Kong and Shenzhen

Hong Kong kindergartens typically provide half-day programmes (about three hours per day), and some also run whole-day programmes. Young children are enrolled in three levels of class by age: nursery (K1, aged 3-4), lower kindergarten (K2, aged 4-5) and upper kindergarten (K3, aged 5-6) (Education Bureau, 2015). Although all are private institutions run by individuals, private enterprises or non-governmental organisations (Li, Wong, & Wang, 2008), Hong Kong kindergartens are classified into 'charitable' or non-profit-making kindergartens (NPMKs) or 'profitable' private independent kindergartens (PIKs) (Yang et al., 2017). The colonial British Government of Hong Kong did not issue an official curriculum guide for local kindergartens until the 1980s (Cheng, 2006; Hong Kong Government, 1982). In 1982, the Llewellyn visiting panel proposed the direction of ECC, 'learning through play', for the ECE in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Government, 1982), which was subsequently endorsed by the government's Education Commission report in 1986 (Hong Kong Government, 1986). The favoured Euro-America pedagogy was then advocated in the 1990s, with the widespread promotion of the child-centred approach in the curriculum (Li et al., 2012). The first version of the *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* (GPC) was published in 1996 in response to the latest global education developments. The second version was released in 2006 to incorporate constructivist learning theory into the curriculum framework (Curriculum Development Council of Hong Kong, 2006). The third version was issued in 2017, with a greater emphasis on SBCD and moral education in kindergartens. SBCD has been gradually introduced into the ECE sector since 1994 (Li, 2005). It was initially regarded as a measure for decentralising curriculum decision making and promoting teacher professional development and school-based improvement (Li, 2006; Yang, He, Liu, Fan, & Wang, 2015). Many pedagogical approaches and curricular models have been imported from

Western countries since the 1990s, such as the Project Approach, the Montessori Method, Reggio Emilia and HighScope. These have been widely adopted, localised and integrated into the SBCs of Hong Kong kindergartens (Li, 2005).

Shenzhen has almost the same ECE context: young children between 3 and 6 years old are typically enrolled in three levels of class by age. Shenzhen, however, has public kindergartens funded by governmental bodies and private ones funded by private groups or individuals (Li, Yang, & Chen, 2016), and all provide whole-day programmes. The most recent wave of ECC reforms in mainland China began in the 1980s, when the country began its transformation into a market-economy-based society (Li & Rao, 2005; Liu & Feng, 2005). The publication of *Regulations on Kindergarten Education Practice* in 1989 by the National Education Committee (the former Ministry of Education) blew the battle horn of progressive ECC reform in China (Li & Chen, 2016). The following values/notions were considered as the trophies of this battle: (1) respect for children, (2) active learning, (3) teaching for individual learning needs, (4) play-based teaching and learning, and (5) teaching and learning through daily life in kindergartens (Liu & Feng, 2005). The *Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial Version)* (Ministry of Education of China, 2001) was issued in 2001 to consolidate the curriculum reform by suggesting five domains (i.e., health, language, society, science and art) for kindergarten curricula. Since the 1990s, many educational theories and curriculum approaches from developed countries, particularly the US and European countries, such as the Montessori method, the project approach, Reggio Emilia, multiple intelligences theory and HighScope, have been widely imported and used experimentally in mainland China (Li et al., 2012; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). The SBCD campaign promoted by the educational authorities of China since 1999 has become the catalyst for this ECC transformation in China (Li, 2005). Chinese kindergartens have

gained some control over their curriculum and have accordingly imported many Western approaches and models to develop their own curricula, mainly due to the lack of theoretical and practical guidance from the Chinese government (Yang & Li, 2017). Examining how the sociocultural context may affect recent ECC innovations is significant, along with the fashion for SBCD in both Hong Kong and Shenzhen kindergartens.

Theoretical framework for curriculum analysis and comparison

In this study, we developed and used a framework based on the theories about curriculum focus and manifestations (Adamson & Morris, 2014). This framework has three aspects/levels: (1) intended curriculum, (2) implemented curriculum, and (3) curriculum ideology. These three aspects can be examined in further detail.

Intended curriculum, or planned curriculum, refers to a set of learning goals and specific objectives to be achieved in terms of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviour. Typical examples of constituents include curriculum documents, lesson plans and assessment materials (Adamson & Morris, 2014). Implemented curriculum refers to the actual teaching and learning activities taking place in schools through interactions between learners and teachers and between learners to achieve the intended curriculum. Typical manifestations of the implemented curriculum include teacher and learner action (e.g., use of materials), learner involvement (e.g., activity engagement) and classroom interaction (e.g., activity types and procedures) (Adamson & Morris, 2014).

The specific system of ideas, or ideology, is less tangible than the intended and implemented curricula. It is a critical and implicit set of beliefs or values that forms the basis of intended and implemented curricula. Ideology as the basic element of a curriculum may significantly influence its development and products. To systematically examine the ideologies

underlying curriculum practice, we established a multi-level analytic framework comprising (1) a micro-level analysis – curricular and pedagogical orientations, (2) a meso-level analysis – the psychological and social foundations, and (3) a macro-level analysis – the philosophical foundations. In terms of the micro-level analysis of curriculum ideology, educators' curricular and pedagogical orientations are the main areas for consideration. For curricular orientations, the prescriptive model (emphasising objectives, transmission and products) (Stenhouse, 1975) and descriptive model (emphasising process, praxis, and means) (Tyler, 2013) are the two representative types of curriculum development and implementation. The two main focuses of pedagogical orientations are child-centredness and teacher-directedness (Mascolo, 2009). In terms of the psychological foundations, behaviourism, constructivism and humanism are the main theories considered in learning psychology (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2016). The political, ethical, cultural and social contexts are also related to the social foundations of curricula. Lastly, four main theories used to interpret the philosophical foundations include perennialism, essentialism, progressivism and reconstructionism (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2016).

Based on the above theoretical framework for ECC analysis and comparison, this study aimed to answer the following questions.

(1) What were the commonalities and differences between the intended curricula in the studied kindergartens of Hong Kong and Shenzhen?

(2) What were the commonalities and differences between the implemented curricula in the studied kindergartens of Hong Kong and Shenzhen?

(3) How did these commonalities and differences come about in the two contexts? What were the ideologies underpinning curriculum decision making?

Methodology

Settings and participants

Purposive sampling with criteria-based selection is a common technique for choosing appropriate targets for case studies, and it appears to provide the most information for our research questions (Patton, 2005). Therefore, any kindergarten selected to participate in this comparative-case study was required to meet the following criteria.

(1) It should be a local and registered kindergarten.

(2) It should be a non-profit-making kindergarten.

(3) The age range of the children should be 3 to 6 years old.

(4) It should be a kindergarten with its own curriculum.

Based on the official kindergarten profiles and in consultation with experts and local educators, two kindergartens in Hong Kong (HK1-KG, HK2-KG) and two in Shenzhen (SZ1-KG, SZ2-KG) were ultimately selected as the target cases for participation (see Table 1).

--- Insert Table 1 about here ---

The participants in the study were curriculum developers, including leaders (two from each kindergarten) and lead teachers (three from each kindergarten) participating in the SBCD. Three classes were randomly selected from each kindergarten to thoroughly explore their curriculum implementation. Four target children were randomly selected from each participating class to be observed.

Data collection

'Methodological triangulation' (Yin, 2013) was established, using multiple sources of evidence (see Table 2). Curriculum leaders in the target kindergartens were individually interviewed. Participating classes as a whole and target children from each class were observed

with advanced notification and consent from their parents and teachers. Lead teachers from each participating class were individually interviewed after the observations. The relevant curriculum documents were then carefully collected.

--- Insert Table 2 about here ---

Observations. The participating classes were observed for 1 week to explore the daily routine. Before the formal videotaping, a familiarisation period was arranged to allow the teacher and children to become accustomed to the presence of the camera and/or the observer (Li et al., 2012). Each classroom was continually observed for 2 to 4 hours (3 hours on average) over the course of a day. The classroom observations lasted 2 half-days (including morning and afternoon sessions) for each class, resulting in a total of 72 observation hours for the 12 classes in these 4 kindergartens. In addition to the classroom observations, target child observation (TCO) (Sylva et al., 2007) was carried out with a stratified random sample. TCO involved recording the daily routines of individual children within a given setting for 40 minutes per day. Forty-eight children from the four kindergartens were categorised by gender and ability and randomly selected in each kindergarten for TCO. The TCO was conducted throughout the day (morning-afternoon, indoors-outdoors), resulting in a total of 64 observation hours for 48 children.

Interviews. To gain a contextual understanding of the curriculum in each case, we interviewed the curriculum leaders individually for 1 to 1.5 hours before the observations. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to learn about the aims, philosophical or theoretical basis, content, approaches, developing processes and influencing factors of the curriculum. After the observations, all 12 lead teachers from the participating classes were interviewed individually for 45 to 60 minutes. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed, drawing on insights from observations and documents to encourage the teachers to

report the children's daily activities, their learning content and related resources, their pedagogical practices and their evaluations of curriculum quality and the children's development outcomes. All of the interviews were conducted, audiotaped and transcribed in Chinese (Cantonese in Hong Kong and Putonghua in Shenzhen).

Documents. Documents relevant to the SBC were collected as supplementary data (see Table 2).

Data analysis

Interview transcripts were analysed by adopting open coding and axial coding strategies (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Consistent with Creswell's (2014) guidelines for qualitative data analysis, the following procedures were carried out: (1) reading through transcripts, (2) coding (i.e., labelling portions of each transcript relevant to the research questions), (3) recording the emergence of themes and categories (i.e., clustering relevant codes to form themes and clustering themes to form categories), (4) tabulating the themes and categories, and (5) interpreting the findings. To analyse the observation data, we followed a well-established approach and first logged and organised the video data and on-site photos (Fleer, 2008, 2017). We then interpreted and described the data from a theoretical level. We analysed and compared the data to filter common themes and find meaningful patterns related to the research aims, and to develop new theoretical relations (Hedegaard, 2008). An analysis of documents was conducted to help clarify and complement analyses from both the interview and observation data.

We used several techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of our findings: member checking, peer debriefing and inquiry auditing (Creswell, 2014). To carry out the *member checking*, some participants (HK1-L1, HK1-T3; HK2-L2, HK2-T2; SZ1-L2, SZ1-T1; SZ2-L1, SZ2-T3) were interviewed again to check whether their opinions on SBCD remained consistent

with their responses in the initial interviews. The *peer debriefings* were conducted by an ECE doctoral candidate to provide comments on whether the codes and themes represented important parts of the interview transcripts and that the analyses of observation and document data were accurate. A senior scholar then took the role of *inquiry auditor*, responsible for ensuring that the processes of data collection and analysis were sufficiently rigorous for the comparative case study.

Findings and discussion

The intended curricula between Hong Kong and Shenzhen

Chinese early childhood educators commonly tended to expect their children to develop in all dimensions – personal, social (moral), life-skills and academic. First, all of the curricula investigated were found to focus on cultivating young children's good habits. These habits could involve personal, social and life-skill dimensions within a broad scope, including how to care for themselves and others, how to read books, how to behave and how to learn. Children also learned to be active and self-regulated in the curricula. They learned how to acquire knowledge and how to socialise with people. As the interviews reflected, all of the Chinese educators wanted their children to embrace a balanced and holistic development. However, there were some differences in the intended curricula between Hong Kong and Shenzhen kindergartens.

Hong Kong. According to the SBC documents collected, the thematic activities were high priorities in the Hong Kong kindergartens, possibly because thematic activities could be relatively diverse, which was consistent with Hong Kong educators' expectations of all-round education in terms of both children and the curriculum. For example, the Story Approach to Integrated Learning (SAIL) curriculum was imported and integrated into HK1-KG's SBC. SAIL is an integrated curriculum that uses stories as the framework and adopts transdisciplinary

teaching approaches (Li & Chau, 2010). It integrates diversified pedagogical approaches, various themes and rich activities. Likewise, HK2-KG also used thematic activities to integrate all areas of learning content for children's all-round education (see Figure 1).

--- Insert Figure 1 about here ---

As Figure 1 shows, within a certain theme, there are many areas of child development and branches of education that HK2-KG's educators regard as important for their children's holistic growth. In addition to the establishment of diverse learning areas, specific objectives were provided to represent each area in directing the curriculum implementation.

Shenzhen. According to the interviews and documents, systems of learning objectives or key experiences were intended to guide the curriculum content in the Shenzhen kindergartens. Additionally, two main areas of the body curriculum, learning-area and thematic activities, were emphasised as the 'two sides of a coin' in the intended curricula of the two Shenzhen kindergartens. For example, SZ2-KG established an objective system of 5 developmental areas, 12 indoor learning centres with 96 learning areas, an outdoor environment with 16 learning/play areas, and the inherent 7 learning dispositions (see Figure 2).

--- Insert Figure 2 about here ---

Thematic activities were also highly valued. For example, SZ1-KG established a whole system of thematic activity plans. As shown in Figure 3, the theme for March was 'The Sound of Music', and there were 16 daily activities divided into 4 weeks under this theme. Other objectives not shown in this web were also available for these activities. Likewise, SZ2-KG developed a system of key concepts for their school-based thematic activities to ensure the holistic learning of their children.

--- Insert Figure 3 about here ---

The implemented curricula between Hong Kong and Shenzhen

To encourage children to learn by doing and by playing with intrinsic motivations, the Chinese teachers worked to translate knowledge, skills, experience and other objectives into children's learning materials. The environment thus became valuable for early childhood active learning with the support of these well-designed materials. In terms of the procedures, individual, small-group, large-group and whole-class activities were embraced in the curriculum practices in the selected kindergartens. Critical principles of the HighScope preschool curriculum were also integrated into all four curricula. For example, learning areas, group activities, and plan-do-review steps were all available. Although analyses revealed that the four SBCs had all developed in the direction of promoting play-based learning, the Hong Kong kindergartens were more conservative than the Shenzhen kindergartens in terms of the retention of academic learning.

Hong Kong. The academic dimension was explicitly put into practice in the two Hong Kong kindergartens. Academic learning accounted for a specific percentage of the daily schedule in both kindergartens. For example, 4- to 6-year-old children (i.e., K2 and K3 children) would write Chinese characters during the writing activity following the teacher's demonstration (see Figure 4). The use of direct academic learning in Hong Kong kindergartens was confirmed by Principal HK1-L1 as follows.

> Every day is very happy. No homework, no pressure. But you cannot survive. If you asked me whether we ask kids to write [characters], I have to say, 'Yes, we do!' Our K1 kids don't write but our K2 and K3 kids must write. I should ensure they can survive [in the future]. Nevertheless, this is what they are able to do.

Similar sentiments were expressed by other Hong Kong teachers. They agreed that academic learning was important for children, at least for their children, to adapt to the primary school and even to society in the future. To motivate their children and promote cognitive development, Hong Kong educators may play an explicit role. As Principal HK1-L1 said, 'Both

story and toys are good for kids' cognitive development. We also have games with checkpoints (in this case, some learning games). … So I don't worry about our kids' adaptation to the primary school'.

--- Insert Figure 4 about here ---

In the Hong Kong kindergartens, the establishment of learning centres/areas was observed to follow the trend of packaging academic knowledge or pre-academic concepts as games for children. Participating Hong Kong teachers agreed it was done in this way to help children achieve basic cognitive development and prepare for primary school. This finding is consistent with the 'eduplay' (i.e., play with pre-academic purposes) activities observed in a previous study (Rao & Li, 2009). In addition, in terms of the procedures in these curricula, the Hong Kong kindergartens have made the time for academic learning to ensure that children can master some pre-academic concepts and skills. Teachers specifically carry out arithmetic and literacy teaching activities for children.

In addition to the direct academic learning explicitly observed, many other types of learning activities took place, such as thematic activity, moral/spiritual education activity, music, physical fitness, project activity and play (e.g., pretend play). Here, we provide the following clip of a thematic activity taken from a K2 classroom in HK1-KG.

> HK1-T2 read a story, *Crow Drinks Water*, with children following a picture story book sentence by sentence and word by word. In this story, a crow tried to drink the water in a glass bottle by throwing stones into the bottle to rise the water inside. After that, HK1-T2 discussed the colour of the bottle with the children.
>
> *HK1-T2*: What's the colour of this bottle? Any colour?
> *Few children, softly*: No.
> *HK1-T2*: Can you see stuffs (water and stones) inside?
> *Many children, together*: Yes.
> *HK1-T2*: Why can you see stuffs inside?
> *Kid A*: Because the bottle is *white*.
> *HK1-T2*: Actually the bottle is not white. It is …

Kid B: *Transparent*!
HK1-T2: Right. Kid B is so smart. Let's clap for him.

All of the children clapped together. HK1-T2 then focused on the two terms, 'transparency' and 'opaque', to discuss what was transparent and what was opaque with the children. She showed objects one by one to ask the children the same question: 'Is this transparent?' After talking about the concepts of transparency and opaque, HK1-T2 arranged children into pairs to operate, observe and compare two different bottles prepared in advance, and to verbally describe what the differences were. (Clip HK1 K2 01:19:09)

This excerpt further illustrates that Hong Kong teachers tend to deliver concepts to promote children's intellectual growth during the thematic activities. In this excerpt, although the concepts of transparency and opaque are not directed related to the story itself, teachers view them as hidden knowledge, which is beneficial for children to learn. During the dialogue with children in this clip, teacher HK1-T2 was the authority in her storytelling and explicit teaching of knowledge, although she acted as a friendly proposer of questions as well.

Shenzhen. Direct academic learning was excluded from the Shenzhen kindergarten curricula. According to the observations, there were neither academic teaching activities nor academic learning materials such as writing notebooks in SZ1-KG and SZ2-KG, although Shenzhen teachers reported that some basic knowledge/skills had been hidden in the operational materials in the learning areas/centres (see Figure 5).

--- Insert Figure 5 about here ---

The two Shenzhen kindergartens provided children's materials without any explicit academic purpose. SZ2-KG provided a large number of various kinds of open-ended materials in the learning centres, allowing the children to use them as they wanted and according to the properties of the material itself. The objectives of the materials were directed at not only cognitive development, but also the acquisition of diverse experience in multiple developmental areas. In the Shenzhen kindergartens, teachers did not conduct any academic learning activities

during the daily routine. Instead, they provided children with a considerable amount of time to play freely. Shenzhen participating educators reported that play without any direct purpose could be important for young children, a finding supported by the remarks made by Teacher SZ2-T3 in the following excerpt.

> Play is also very important. They (i.e., play and academic learning) are complementary. We believe that play comes earlier than the so-called 'learning.' …Ensure children's play before you say anything about learning. Of course, children also learn through play, although you may not be able to see it…

Enhancing the position of play has become a key goal for ECC innovations in Shenzhen kindergartens. Principal SZ1-L1's point of view supports this finding.

> Free play has more fun than the instruction, although it may be indirect to promoting kids' development, whereas the teaching activities may be more straightforward. However, even though the value of free play is implicit, I think free play is still important for kids.

Aside from learning-area activities and free play, thematic activities and physical exercise have also been focuses in Shenzhen kindergartens. As a comparison with the thematic activity clip from HK1-KG shown above, we provide the following clip of an on-going thematic activity, 'Where is My Hometown', under the theme 'Panda', taken from a K2 classroom in SZ1-KG. The teacher who carried out this activity is not a lead teacher. We refer to this assistant teacher as SZ1-T4.

> 'My home looks like a rooster. Where is my hometown?' SZ1-T4 asked. 'China', a child said. Another child said 'Shenzhen'. Then, SZ1-T4 brought out a board pasted with the rooster-shape map of China in front of the children and showed a sticker of a panda. She started to discuss the hometown of the panda with the children.
>
> *SZ1-T4*: Where is panda's hometown?
> *Kid A*: Chengdu!
> *Kid B*: Giant panda habitat!
> *Kid C*: Bamboo forest.
> *Kid B*: What's the 'bamboo forest'?
> *Kid C*: *Sichuan*!
> *SZ1-T4*: You are so smart! Panda says, 'My home is in *Sichuan*, China'. Well, why is panda's home in *Sichuan*?

Many children raised their hands. SZ1-T4 chose two of those who raised hands to share their answers. They both said Sichuan had the giant panda habitat.

SZ1-T4: Yes, you are right. So, now where should we paste the sticker of the panda [on the map]?
Many children, together, pointing at the area with green bamboos: Sichuan!

SZ1-T4 invited a child to paste the panda sticker on the right place. She further said, 'Now, panda is happy to find its hometown. We all have our own hometown. Do you know where your hometown is?' Many children said 'Yes!' 'Now, please tell you friends where your hometown is'. The children then actively communicated with their peers sitting around them. SZ1-T4 walked around to listen to children's sharing. Nearly a minute passed.

SZ1-T4: Well, everyone knows his/her hometown. But, can you find your hometown on the map?
Several children: Yes.
Kid D: No.
SZ1-T4: Okay. Kid C, where is your hometown? Come here and point it out.

Kid C went to point out his hometown, 'Heilongjiang', on the China map. SZ1-T4 then invited several other children to find their hometowns in front of the whole class. After that, she gave each child a paper slip to write down his/her name and glue it in the area of his/her hometown on the map. (Clip SZ1 K2 00:16:39)

We can see from this excerpt that Shenzhen teachers tended to carry out a collective activity with a relatively stronger emphasis on children's interests and active learning. In this activity, children were encouraged to locate their own hometowns on the map based on the experience of finding panda's hometown. The exercise was guided by teacher SZ1-T4, who helped in the class to encourage the children's activities, such as by finding their hometowns on the map and by listening and supporting the children.

Understanding curriculum ideologies with multi-level analyses

Commonalities and differences of ECC innovations between Hong Kong and Shenzhen kindergartens were further analysed and discussed with a three-level framework to reflect the underpinning curriculum ideologies: (1) micro-level analysis – the curricular and pedagogical

orientations, (2) meso-level analysis – the psychological and social foundations, and (3) macro-level analysis – the philosophical foundations.

The micro level: The integration and balance of approaches. The above actual-empirical analyses revealed that each curriculum of the four cases embraced a school-based fusion of diverse curriculum approaches. Chinese educators tended to tailor and transform imported approaches during the integration process to reduce the tension between imported and traditional practice. This micro-level finding on Chinese curriculum developers' motives is consistent with those in other studies of the Chinese context (e.g., Ng & Rao, 2008; Rao et al., 2010; Yang & Li, 2017), which have demonstrated that the fusion and balance of curricular and pedagogical approaches does exist in Chinese kindergartens.

In terms of the curricular orientations, prescriptive and descriptive models of curriculum implementation have been combined in the curricula. During the 'absorption' of imported good-practice, no single, exclusive method of curriculum construction has been used to support school-based innovations in these cases. As shown in Table 3, curriculum approaches in the studied curricula, such as **the CPM Toy Library, SAIL, Orff Music Education, the Montessori Method and English Immersion Education are closer to the prescriptive model, emphasising that (1) learning objectives should specify learning outcomes regarding specific and measurable behaviours; (2) content, materials and approaches are derived from the objectives; and (3) evaluation is done continually according to the objectives (Tyler, 2013). In contrast, the HighScope curriculum, project approach, Reggio Emilia approach and project spectrum are more descriptive, emphasising process, praxis and means in curriculum development and implementation. These descriptive curriculum**

approaches tend to be integrated by pulling many subjects together and adopting problem-based and experiential learning through dynamic learning processes (Stenhouse, 1975).

--- Insert Table 3 about here ---

In terms of pedagogical orientations, analyses revealed a pedagogical fusion of child-centredness and teacher-directedness. The pedagogical practices in the studied SBCs were neither purely child-directed nor purely teacher-directed (see Table 4). In Table 4, we roughly present the pedagogical orientation of the whole curriculum for the four cases in the frame of early childhood programmes (see Figure 6).

--- Insert Table 4 about here ---

--- Insert Figure 6 about here ---

As shown in Figure 4, SZ2-KG's curriculum has the highest child-directedness compared with the other three, while SZ2-KG's curriculum has the highest teacher-directedness. However, all of the SBCs under investigation have relatively high teacher and child engagement, although the degree of teacher- and child-directedness differs. The four SBCs thus all feature an open, interactive and dynamic system with diverse approaches in terms of their curricular and pedagogical orientations. This finding is closely related to the psychological, social and philosophical foundations of the curricula.

The meso level: Social and cultural contexts reflected in the curricula. Against the background of globalisation and the spreading of Western culture, progressive ECC reforms in China have shifted ECE into constructivism- and humanism-based practices. This comparative study reveals that in addition to new contemporary ideas, social settings and culture have greatly influenced the ECC innovations in Chinese kindergartens. The psychological influences can even be regarded as the modern culture of globalisation and cultural monopoly of the West. Hence,

the commonalities of ECC innovations in the Chinese kindergartens of Hong Kong and Shenzhen result from the 'modernisation' and the cultural values of educators inherited from the Chinese traditions. However, the different social contexts include the political system, policies and social resources, which have led to the unique characteristics of ECC practices across the societies. Commonalities and differences of the ECC practices and related influencing factors between the Hong Kong and Shenzhen kindergartens are briefly presented in Table 5.

--- Insert Table 5 about here ---

Table 5 highlights the main commonalities and differences of ECC innovations between Hong Kong and Shenzhen in terms of the social and cultural foundations. Through the almost synchronised historical transformation of borrowing and learning the international curricular and pedagogical approaches for early years, Hong Kong and Shenzhen kindergartens, although in different social contexts, have embraced a number of common practices and similar structures in terms of SBC. As we identify, SBCD has become a trend in early childhood settings of both societies since the 1990s. Various curriculum approaches, such as the Montessori method, project approach, Reggio Emilia approach and HighScope curriculum, have been imported and implemented in Chinese kindergartens in the two contexts (Li, 2005). The kindergartens have embraced a more child-focused approach in reforming their original practices (i.e., subject-based teaching) and notions such as 'play-based learning' and 'learning by doing' have been put into practice to some extent. A combination of diverse approaches has become increasingly common in the ECCs of both Hong Kong and Shenzhen. The similar evolution of curriculum reforms in Hong Kong and mainland China caused by the forces of globalisation could explain the common parts of the ECC practices of kindergartens across contexts. **When those imported approaches were firstly introduced into Hong Kong and mainland China, they were not familiar to**

Chinese early childhood educators and might be conflicting with the traditional and local practices. Chinese educators, therefore, had adapted and tailored these imported curricula to meet their own needs and expectations and to fit their own school-based curricula. The school-based fusion of diverse curriculum approaches, for example, has been observed in the cases and further demonstrates the existing research finding that the Doctrine of the Mean, an essential Chinese philosophical principle which advocates harmonisation and balance of everything, may contribute to the integration of Chinese and Western approaches (Yang & Li, 2017; Zhang & Heydon, 2015). The shared Chinese heritage culture has inevitably influenced the transformation of ECC practices in both locations, so more similarities between Hong Kong and Shenzhen kindergartens can be observed in their curricula.

Nevertheless, differences in ECC practices exist between the two contexts. According to the 'one country, two systems' principle, Hong Kong has a social context different from that of mainland China and thus Shenzhen, so the two thus have different ECE policies and systems (Li & Rao, 2000). Accordingly, there are societal differences in the emphases and practices of SBCs in kindergartens. For example, the views of the educational authorities in the two cities on early academic learning are very different. The educational authorities of mainland China prohibit kindergartens from performing academic learning activities such as Chinese reading and writing, whereas in Hong Kong reading and writing activities are recommended in the GPC (Li, 2014). The Hong Kong kindergartens had writing exercise and other academic learning activities every day to prepare their children for formal schools, to satisfy their parents' demands and to adapt to the Hong Kong social environment. The two Shenzhen kindergartens, however, tended to focus

more on play and unstructured learning activities. These societal differences thus led to different daily routines in the kindergartens between Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

The macro level: The extent of ideological progressiveness. The analyses reveal that progressivism has become the main philosophical foundation of ECC innovations shared by the four kindergartens. According to Ornstein and Hunkins (2016), progressivism argues that the teacher is the guide for students' problem solving, and the curriculum should focus on interdisciplinary activities and projects based on students' interests to lead their development. In contrast, perennialism emphasises the explicit teaching of traditional values and the curriculum focus of classical subjects and literary analysis; and reconstructionism requires the teacher to be an agent of social reform and the curriculum to deliver global issues and social responsibility (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2016). Both Hong Kong and Shenzhen educators reported that child-directed learning along with play-based and inquiry-based learning had become the key approaches of their SBCs. However, based on analysis of the implemented curricula, the extent of progressiveness differs between the Hong Kong and Shenzhen kindergartens. In the Hong Kong kindergartens, essentialism additionally supports the value of children's learning of essential skills and knowledge in their early years. Teachers are viewed as the authorities delivering knowledge and traditional values (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2016). For example, the authoritative matters of Chinese, maths, foreign language (i.e., English) and traditional or spiritual values have been explicitly taught in the two Hong Kong kindergartens. On the surface, Chinese culture might have influenced the ECC practices in Hong Kong more strongly than in Shenzhen; however, the essential differences in educators' ideological beliefs in terms of progressivism have resulted in significant differences in ECC practices across the different contexts. Thus, Chinese educators in Shenzhen have been more successfully *Westernised* by the

cultural hegemony in the field of ECE, while their Hong Kong counterparts still remain deeper within the ideology of Chinese values and essentialism. As such, Hong Kong early childhood educators may be relatively more traditional than their counterparts in Shenzhen.

Implications and limitations

Through an analytic framework comprising curriculum focus and manifestations (Adamson & Morris, 2014), the sophisticated ECC practices have been thoroughly analysed and the characteristics between two societal systems in China compared. Commonalities and differences have been found in the intended and implemented curricula between Hong Kong and Shenzhen. A multi-level analytic framework has been demonstrated to be effective and appropriate, revealing the ideologies behind the curricula. This hierarchy model classifies diverse dimensions into micro, meso and macro levels for curriculum analysis. Therefore, this study makes significant methodological contributions to future research in the field of ECC, and can inspire researchers and practitioners from other ethical or cultural contexts to better interpret the ideological and cultural meanings of their curricular and pedagogical practices.

Theoretical implications

This comparative case study describes the complex influencing mechanism of cultural conflicts and fusion on Chinese educators' curriculum ideology, and further on the design and implementation of the curriculum. It demonstrates that the 'melting pot' of culture (Gleason, 1964) has substantial and long-lasting effects on ECC. The local culture may assimilate and accommodate imported culture, so the curriculum is not the product of any single pure culture. As for future research into ECC, cultural self-consciousness and intercultural understanding should be the prerequisites for defining curriculum quality in a specific sociocultural context.

As shown in this comparative study, cultural explanation can theorise the commonalities of curriculum practice across societies due to the shared Chinese culture and globalisation, while meaning making can explain the differences stemming from contextual specificity and respective problem solving. Cultural explanation is an approach to curriculum development, as no educator can be independent from the discourse system of their specific societal age and cultural mix. Curriculum practice is thus the materialisation of culture through explanation. In addition to cultural explanation, meaning making is required to accommodate issues such as contextual specificity, subjectivity and multiple perspectives in curriculum development and implementation (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Heydon, 2007). Meaning making involves adopting new understandings and practices to mediate the process of achieving a new cultural explanation and to adjust the cultural ideology of the curriculum. This is consistent with Tobin et al. (2009), who find that 'some cultural practices have been replaced by practices borrowed from abroad, but other cultural practices have emerged unscathed from their encounter with globally circulating ideas, still others have evolved into hybrid forms, and along the way some new cultural practices have been invented' (Tobin, 2011, p. 18). Future curriculum research should therefore focus on the mechanism of cultural explanation and meaning making during curriculum innovations to accurately identify the complex and dynamic reaction between culture and curriculum. These endeavours should also lead the curricula of today and tomorrow to adapt to the current culture and scaffold the next phases of cultural development.

Practical implications

This study has many practical implications. For curriculum practices in early childhood settings, the principle of culturally, contextually and child-individually appropriate practices (3CAPs) (Li, 2008; Li & Chau, 2010) could replace notions of child-centredness and

developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) to balance the orientations of child development and social demands. DAP is based on cultural universalism, in which it is believed that universal quality standards for child development and education (including curriculum and pedagogy) should exist, whereas 3CAPs originates from cultural relativism and strongly advocates cultural equality, pluralism and mutual respect (Li & Chen, 2016). Therefore, child developmental norms should not be used as the main or whole foundation of ECC. Also, political, ethical, historical and economic factors have substantial effects on ECC innovations, so these innovations should serve as the processes of inheritance and the development of existing cultural practices. In these times of change, ECC innovations should also be improved along with the on-going development of culture. For example, to uphold social justice and equity, ECC should embrace the diversity of social culture to carry out curriculum development and assessment alongside teacher education, rather than unifying the quality standards and developing universal developmental norms for all early childhood settings (Heydon, 2013). Those who ignore the culture of their society will eventually be engulfed by it.

Limitations

This qualitative study has certain limitations, although it is firmly rooted in data from multiple sources with consistent findings. The multiple cases were selected using criteria-based purposive sampling, so generalising the findings to other situations should be done with caution. Due to limited data resources, no assessed/achieved curriculum (i.e., the product of curriculum implementation) was examined in the study. Future research could include more informative cases from other contexts for examination, with a focus on the assessed/achieved curricula.

References

Adamson, B., & Morris, P. (2014). Comparing curricula. In M. Bray, B. Adamson, & M. Mason (Eds.), *Comparative education research: approaches and methods*. Hong Kong: Springer.

Chan, C. K. K., & Rao, N. (2010). The paradoxes revisited: The Chinese learner in changing educational contexts. In C. K. K. Chan & N. Rao (Eds.), *Revisiting The Chinese Learner* (pp. 315-349). Hong Kong: Springer.

Cheng, D. P.-W. (2006). The translation of Western teaching approaches in the Hong Kong early childhood curriculum: A promise for effective teaching? *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 7*(3), 228-237.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2014). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (4th Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.)*. California: Sage publications.

Curriculum Development Council of Hong Kong. (2006). *Guide to the pre-primary curriculum*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

Dahlberg, G., & Moss, P. (2005). *Ethics and politics in early childhood education*. London and New York: Routledge.

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. R. (1999). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Postmodern perspectives*. London and Philadelphia: Falmer Press.

Education Bureau. (2015). Overview of kindergarten education in Hong Kong. Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/overview/index.html

Fleer, M. (2008). Using digital video observations and computer technologies in a cultural-historical approach. In M. Hedegaard & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Studying children: A cultural-historical approach* (pp. 104-117). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Fleer, M. (2017). Digital role-play: The changing conditions of children's play in preschool settings. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 24*(1), 3-17.

Gleason, P. (1964). The melting pot: Symbol of fusion or confusion? *American Quarterly, 16*(1), 20-46.

Hedegaard, M. (2008). Principles for interpreting research protocols. In M. Hedegaard & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Studying children: A cultural-historical approach* (pp. 46-64). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Heydon, R. (2007). Making meaning together: multi‐modal literacy learning opportunities in an inter‐generational art programme. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 39*(1), 35-62.

Heydon, R. (2013). Learning opportunities: The production and practice of kindergarten literacy curricula in an era of change. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 45*(4), 481-510.

Hong Kong Government. (1982). *A perspective on education in Hong Kong: Report by a visiting panel*. Hong Kong: The author.

Hong Kong Government. (1986). *Education Commission Report No.2*. Hong Kong: The author.

Kessler, S. A. (1992). The social context of the early childhood curriculum. *Reconceptualizing the early childhood curriculum: Beginning the dialogue*, 21-42.

Li, H. (2005). *Developing school-based curriculum in Hong Kong kindergartens: Insights, challenges and solutions*. Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Institute of Education.

Li, H. (2006). School-based curriculum development: An interview study of Chinese kindergartens. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 33*(4), 223-229.

Li, H. (2008). On the direction of early childhood education curriculum reform in China: A cultural perspective (in Chinese). *Early childhood Education (Educational Sciences)*(1), 1-3.

Li, H. (2013). Teaching Chinese Literacy in the Early Years: A Comparison of L1 and L2 Preschool Classrooms in Shenzhen and Singapore. *Asia-Pacific journal of research in early childhood education, 7*(3), 19-43.

Li, H. (2014). *Teaching chinese literacy in the early years: Psychology, pedagogy and practice*. London and New York: Routledge.

Li, H., & Chau, L. (2010). Story Approach to Integrated Learning (SAIL): A postmodernism curriculum for Hong Kong kindergartens. In L. E. Kattington (Ed.), *Handbook of curriculum development* (pp. 329-346). New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Li, H., & Chen, J. J. (2016). Evolution of the early childhood curriculum in China: the impact of social and cultural factors on revolution and innovation. *Early Child Development and Care*, 1-13.

Li, H., & Rao, N. (2000). Parental influences on Chinese literacy development: A comparison of preschoolers in Beijing, Hong Kong, and Singapore. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 24*(1), 82-90.

Li, H., & Rao, N. (2005). Curricular and instructional influences on early literacy attainment: Evidence from Beijing, Hong Kong and Singapore. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 13*(3), 235-253.

Li, H., Rao, N., & Tse, S. K. (2011). Bridging the gap: a longitudinal study of the relationship between pedagogical continuity and early Chinese literacy acquisition. *Early Years, 31*(1), 57-70.

Li, H., Rao, N., & Tse, S. K. (2012). Adapting Western pedagogies for Chinese literacy instruction: Case studies of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and Singapore preschools. *Early Education & Development, 23*(4), 603-621.

Li, H., Wong, J. M. S., & Wang, X. C. (2008). Early childhood education voucher in Hong Kong: perspectives from online communities. *International Journal of Early Childhood, 40*(2), 49-63.

Li, H., Yang, W., & Chen, J. J. (2016). From 'Cinderella' to 'Beloved Princess': The evolution of early childhood education policy in China. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy, 10*(1), 2. doi:10.1186/s40723-016-0018-2

Liu, Y., & Feng, X. (2005). Kindergarten educational reform during the past two decades in mainland China: Achievements and problems. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 13*(2), 93-99.

Mascolo, M. F. (2009). Beyond student-centered and teacher-centered pedagogy: Teaching and learning as guided participation. *Pedagogy and the Human Sciences, 1*(1), 3-27.

Ministry of Education of China. (2001). *Guidelines for kindergarten education (Trial Version)*. Beijing: The author.

Ng, S. S., & Rao, N. (2008). Mathematics teaching during the early years in Hong Kong: A reflection of constructivism with Chinese characteristics? *Early Years, 28*(2), 159-172.

Ornstein, A. C., & Hunkins, F. P. (2016). *Curriculum: Foundations, principles, and issues (7th Ed.)*. New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Patton, M. Q. (2005). *Qualitative research*: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Pearson, E. (2011). Avoiding Recolonisation in Early Childhood: promoting local values as mediators in the spread of globalisation. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 12*(3), 212-223.

Rao, N., & Li, H. (2009). "Eduplay": Beliefs and practices related to play and learning in Chinese kindergartens. In I. Pramling-Samuelsson & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Play and learning in early childhood settings* (pp. 97-116). Netherlands: Springer.

Rao, N., Ng, S. S., & Pearson, E. (2010). Preschool pedagogy: A fusion of traditional Chinese beliefs and contemporary notions of appropriate practice. In C. K. K. Chan & N. Rao (Eds.), *Revisiting The Chinese Learner: Changing Contexts, Changing Education* (pp. 255-279). Hong Kong: Springer.

State Council of China. (2014). *The practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*. Beijing: The author.

Stenhouse, L. (1975). *An introduction to curriculum research and development*: Heinemann Educational Publishers.

Sylva, K., Taggart, B., Siraj‐Blatchford, I., Totsika, V., Ereky‐Stevens, K., Gilden, R., & Bell, D. (2007). Curricular quality and day-to-day learning activities in pre-school. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 15*(1), 49-65.

Tobin, J. J. (2011). Implicit cultural beliefs and practices in approaches to early childhood education and care. *Asia-Pacific journal of research in early childhood education, 5*(1), 3-22.

Tobin, J. J., Hsueh, Y., & Karasawa, M. (2009). *Preschool in three cultures revisited: China, Japan, and the United States*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Tobin, J. J., Wu, D. Y., & Davidson, D. H. (1991). *Preschool in three cultures: Japan, China, and the United States*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Tyler, R. W. (2013). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago press.

Yang, W., He, H., Liu, S., Fan, L., & Wang, W. (2015). Integration of kindergarten curriculum development and teachers' professional development (in Chinese). *Early childhood Education (Educational Sciences)*(5), 32-34+44.

Yang, W., & Li, H. (2017). A school-based fusion of East and West: a case study of modern curriculum innovations in a Chinese kindergarten. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 1-21. doi:10.1080/00220272.2017.1294710

Yang, W., Wang, J., & Li, H. (2017). Achieving a balance between affordability, accessibility, accountability, sustainability, and social justice: The early childhood education policies in Hong Kong. In H. Li, E. Park, & J. J. Chen (Eds.), *Early childhood education policies in Asia Pacific: Advances in theory and practice* (pp. 51-71). Singapore: Springer.

Yin, R. K. (2013). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.

Zhang, Z., & Heydon, R. (2015). The changing landscape of literacy curriculum in a Sino-Canada transnational education programme: an actor-network theory informed case study. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 1-18.

Zhu, J., & Zhang, J. (2008). Contemporary trends and developments in early childhood education in China. *Early Years: An International Research Journal, 28*(2), 173-182.

Table 1

School information of the four cases

		Hong Kong kindergartens		Shenzhen kindergartens	
Kindergarten		HK1-KG	HK2-KG	SZ1-KG	SZ2-KG
Founding year		1973	1972	1992	1996
Public/private		Private	Private	Public	Public
Half/whole-day		Half-day	Half-day	Whole-day	Whole-day
Grade levels		K1: 3-year-olds; K2: 4-year-olds; K3: 5-year-olds	K1: 3-year-olds; K2: 4-year-olds; K3: 5-year-olds	K1: 3-year-olds; K2: 4-year-olds; K3: 5-year-olds	Mixed-age from 3 to 6 years old
No. of classes		8	10	10	12
No. of children		AM: 240 PM: 238	AM: 331 PM: 311	379	319
No. of teachers in each class	Lead teacher	1	1	1	1
	Team teacher	1	2	2	2
Academic qualification of class teachers	Degree holder	11	29	29	36
	Non-degree holder	7	4	1	0
Professional qualification of class teachers	Certificate holder	18	33	30	36
	Non-certificate holder	0	0	0	0

Note. Degree holder is the teacher who holds an associate degree or above in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Certificate holder is the teacher who holds a licence awarded by the educational authorities attesting the official permission for an individual to be a kindergarten teacher.

Table 2

Profile of databases

	HK1-KG	HK2-KG	SZ1-KG	SZ2-KG
Interviews (21 participants)				
Curriculum leaders	1 principal (HK1-L1) 1 vice principal (HK1-L2)	1 principal (HK2-L1) 1 vice principal (HK2-L2) 1 director (HK2-L3)	1 principal (SZ1-L1) 1 director (SZ1-L2)	1 principal (SZ2-L1) 1 director (SZ2-L2)
Lead teachers	3 lead teachers from K1, K2, and K3 (HK1-T1, T2, and T3)	3 lead teachers from K1, K2, and K3 (HK2-T1, T2, and T3)	3 lead teachers from K1, K2, and K3 (SZ1-T1, T2, and T3)	3 lead teachers from K1, K2, and K3 (SZ2-T1, T2, and T3)
Observations (12 classrooms and 48 target children)				
Classroom observations	3 classrooms from K1, K2, and K3	3 classrooms from K1, K2, and K3	3 classrooms from K1, K2, and K3	3 mixed-age classrooms
Target child observations	2 girls and 2 boys randomly selected from each class	2 girls and 2 boys randomly selected from each class	2 girls and 2 boys randomly selected from each class	2 girls and 2 boys randomly selected from each class
Documents				
Curriculum documents	Official website Curriculum pamphlet (2 pages) Teaching materials	Official website Curriculum monograph (2 brochures) Teaching materials	Official website Curriculum monograph (2 books) Teaching materials	Official website Curriculum monograph (1 book) Teaching materials
Others	Children's works and homework Field notes	Children's works and homework Field notes	Children's works Field notes	Children's works Field notes

Note. HK2-KG only allowed on-site observations; therefore, on-site photos and field notes were taken to replace the video data for the observations of curricular and pedagogical practice at this kindergarten. All of the other kindergartens allowed our videotaped observations.

Table 3

Curriculum approaches employed by the studied kindergartens

HK1-KG	HK2-KG	SZ1-KG	SZ2-KG
HighScope curriculum	HighScope curriculum	Montessori Method	HighScope curriculum
CPM Toy Library approach	Project Approach	Project Approach	Project Approach
Story Approach to Integrated Learning (SAIL)	Orff Music Education	HighScope curriculum	Reggio Emilia Approach
Project Approach	Montessori Method	English Immersion Education	Montessori Method
	Reggio Emilia Approach	Project Spectrum	

Table 4

Pedagogical orientations along with the daily routine of children in the four cases

HK1-KG		HK2-KG		SZ1-KG		SZ2-KG	
Activity	T/C	Activity	T/C	Activity	T/C	Activity	T/C
Daily-life activities (travelling to kindergarten, free time)	C	Daily-life activities (travelling to kindergarten, free time)	C	Daily-life activity (travelling to kindergarten, breakfast, using bathroom, etc.)	C	Daily-life activity (travelling to kindergarten, micro-community activities such as caring for plants and wiping tables, breakfast, using bathroom, etc.)	C
Collective PE/music activity	T	Church morning meeting	T	Learning-centre activity (individual and collaborative activity)	C+T	Learning-centre activity (collective planning, working across classrooms, sharing)	C+T
Daily-life activity (using bathroom)	C	Large group activities (English/Bible/PE)	T	Thematic activity/subject-based teaching	T+C	Outdoor physical exercise (exercise, free play)	C
Story-based thematic activity	T	Daily-life activity (morning tea)	C	Outdoor physical exercise (exercise, free play)	C	Daily-life activity (bathroom, lunch, after-lunch activity, afternoon nap, bathroom)	C
Group activities (learning-centre activities, writing, and small group activity guided by teachers)	T+C	Learning-centre activity	C+T	Daily-life activity (bathroom, lunch, after-lunch activity, afternoon nap, bathroom)	C	Group-teaching activities	T+C
Daily-life activity (morning tea)	C	Small group activities (operating activities, writing, and small group	T+C	Outdoor physical exercise (exercise or free play)	C+T	Outdoor physical exercise (exercise or free play)	C+T

		activity guided by teachers)					
Interest class (English/Putonghua)	T	Large group activities (music/Putonghua)	T	Daily-life activity (afternoon tea, bathroom, etc.)	C	Daily-life activity (leaving kindergarten)	C
Daily-life activity (leaving kindergarten)	C	Daily-life activity (leaving kindergarten)	C	English thematic activity	T+C		
				Daily-life activity (leaving kindergarten)	C		

Note. T = Teacher-directed; C = Child-directed.

Table 5

Commonalities and differences of SBCs between the Hong Kong and Shenzhen kindergartens

Uniqueness of SBCs in the Hong Kong kindergartens	Commonalities	Uniqueness of SBCs in the Shenzhen kindergartens
Social settings (e.g., higher academic requirement when entering primary schools, parents' academic requirement, limited educational resources, being religious schools)→ Half-day programmes, limited outdoor facilities and physical activities, morning/afternoon meeting, direct academic learning with writing in K2 and K3 grades, religion education, etc.	*Influence of globalisation*→ Child sensitivity, play-based learning, interest-based and personalised learning, teachers' scaffolding in the zone of proximal development (ZPD), imported curricular and pedagogical approaches/models, children's portfolio, etc. *Influence of Chinese culture*→ High and holistic expectations, integration and balance of approaches, play-based learning, etc.	*Social settings* (e.g., government's compulsory policy as the ban of academic teaching, lower academic requirement when entering primary schools)→ Whole-day programmes, more outdoor facilities and physical activities, morning/afternoon exercise, no direct academic learning and writing, no religious education, etc.

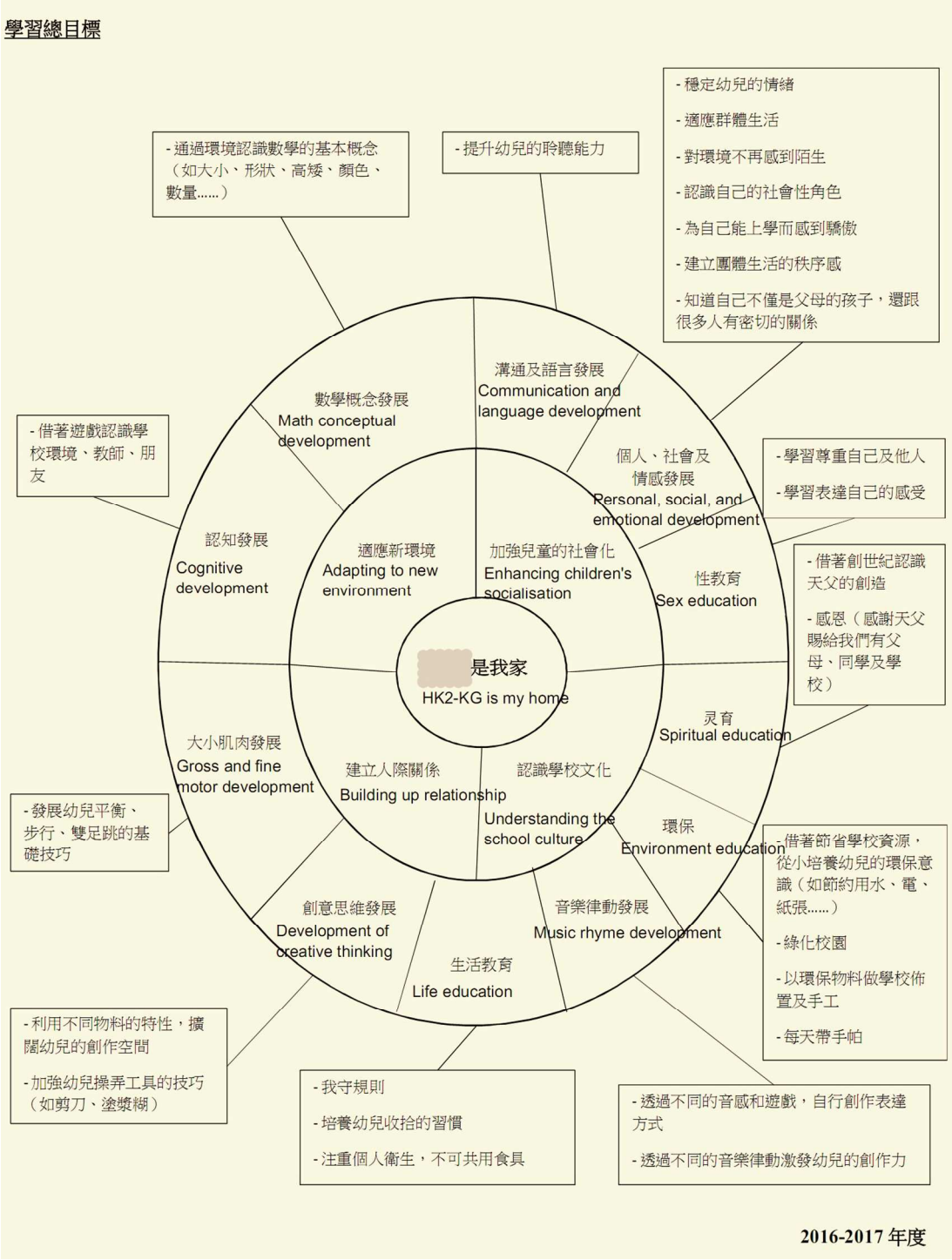

Figure 1. A learning web for HK2-KG's children under the theme 'HK2-KG is My Home'.

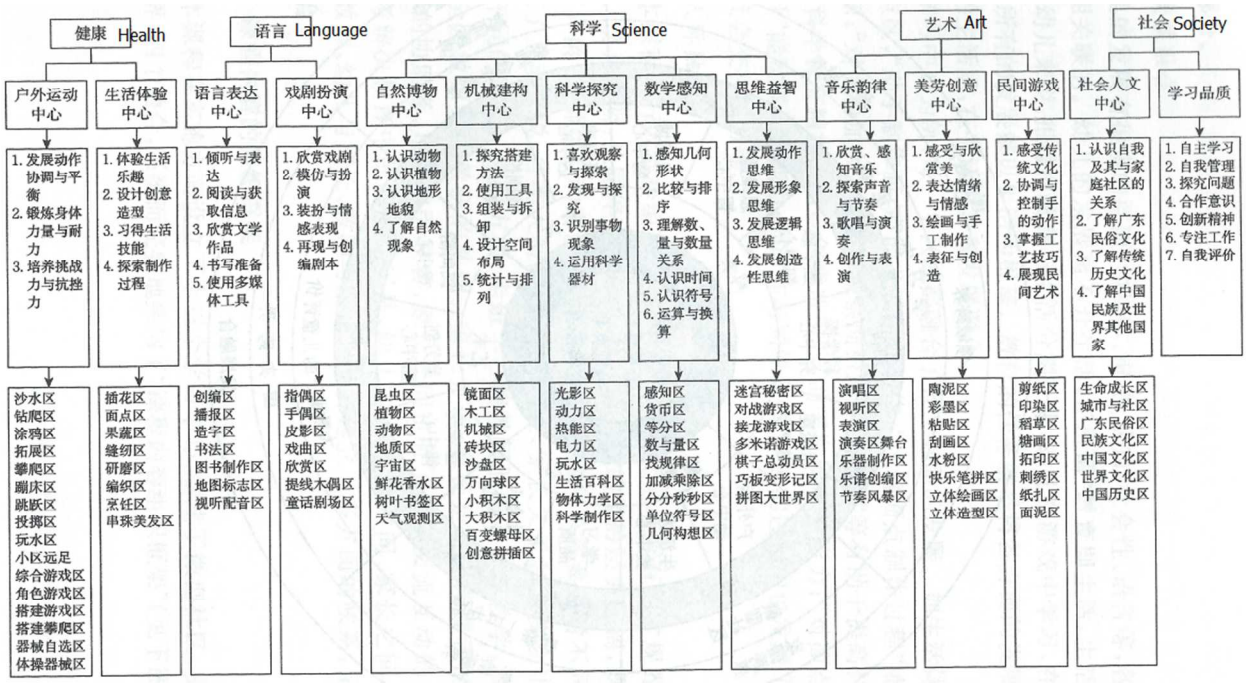

Figure 2. The objective system of learning centres and areas in SZ2-KG.

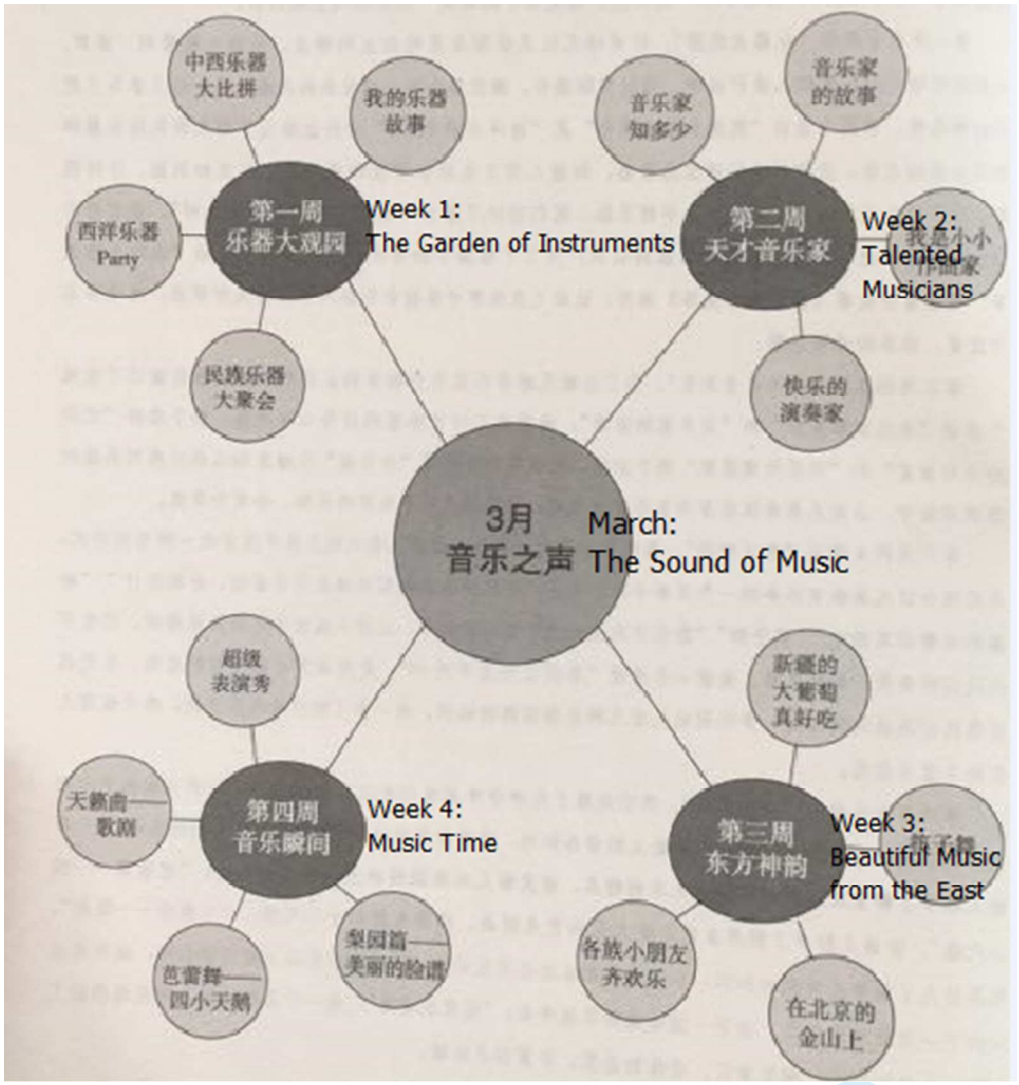

Figure 3. An activity web for SZ1-KG's children under the monthly theme, 'The Sound of Music'.

Figure 4. A 5-year-old child from HK2-KG was writing Chinese characters.

Figure 5. A child from SZ1-KG was using a set of paper-cutting material in the art corner.

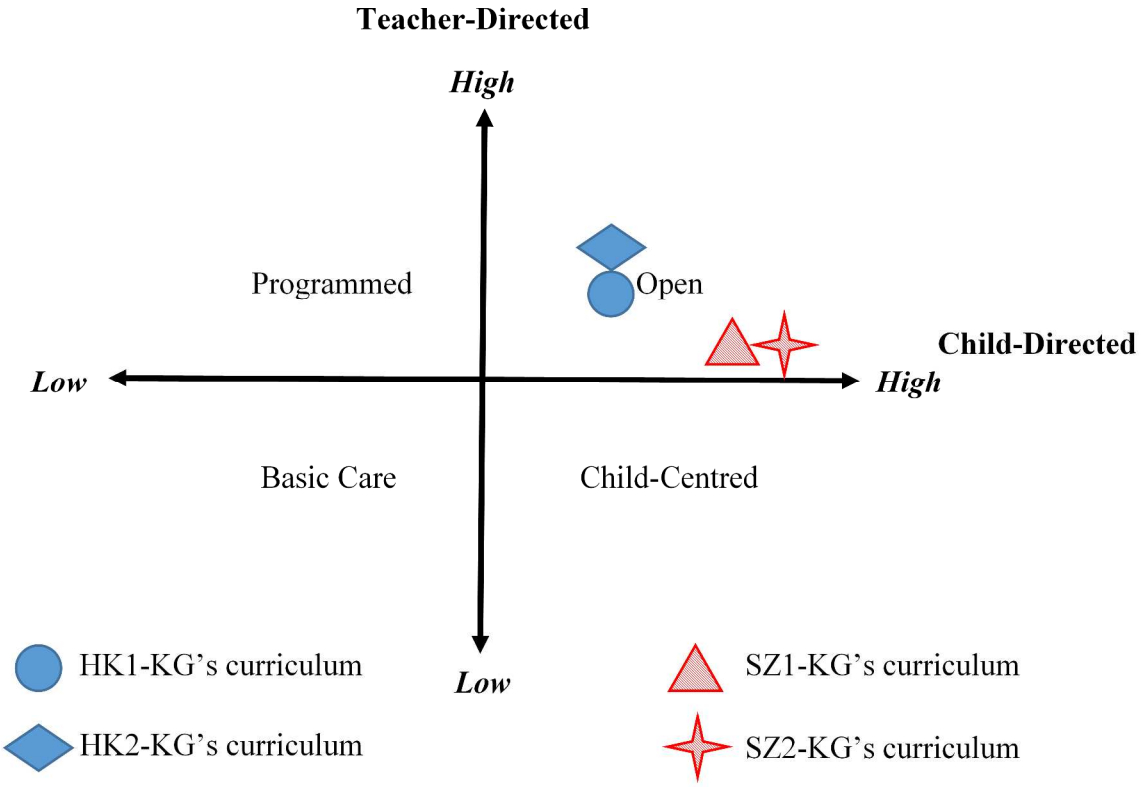

Figure 6. Pedagogical orientation of the whole curriculum in each kindergarten under investigation.