THE GLOCALIZATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM

GLOBAL CHILDHOODS, LOCAL CURRICULA

Philip Hui Li and Jennifer J. Chen

The Glocalization of Early Childhood Curriculum

With empirical evidence and theoretical critique, this book unveils the myths and debates (e.g., child-centeredness versus teacher-directedness) about early childhood curricula, revealing their unique social, cultural, and historical roots.

Analyzing globally advocated early childhood curricula and ideologies, such as the developmentally appropriate practice, the child-centered approach, constructivism, and globalized childhood, this book argues that the direct adoption of these contextually bound approaches in local environments may be inappropriate if social and cultural compatibility is lacking. The authors then examine how early childhood curricula may be implemented in a hybrid form. Featuring case studies from American and Chinese contexts, this book offers insights and recommendations for the future development and redeployment of early childhood curriculum studies and practices in a post-truth era.

This volume serves as a valuable resource for scholars and students of early childhood education and comparative education, as well as for key education stakeholders.

Philip Hui Li, Ph.D., is the Dean and Chair Professor of Shanghai Institute of Early Childhood Education, Shanghai Normal University. He is also an Honorary Professor at Macquarie University, Australia.

Jennifer J. Chen, Ed.D., is professor of early childhood and family studies at Kean University in New Jersey, USA. She earned her doctorate in human development and psychology from Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

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The Glocalization of Early Childhood Curriculum

Global Childhoods, Local Curricula

Philip Hui Li and Jennifer J. Chen

To our respective spouses and children (who thrive in the best of both worlds, global and local),

thank you for your continued support of our scholarly endeavors!

To all early childhood teachers and children around the world (who are shaping the future),

may you find and practice your own "best" globalized, localized, and/or glocalized approaches to teaching and learning!

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About the Authors

Philip Hui Li, Ph.D., is the Dean and Chair Professor of *Shanghai Institute of Early Childhood Education*, Shanghai Normal University. He is also an Honorary Professor at Macquarie University, Australia. He earned his doctor of philosophy degree (education) from the University of Hong Kong in 2000. His research interests include (but are not limited to) curriculum and pedagogy, developmental cognitive neuroscience, developmental psycholinguistics, early literacy and bilingualism, policy, school leadership, and teacher education. He has developed the "*3A2S*" (accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability, and social justice) and the "*3CAPs*" (culturally appropriate practice, contextually appropriate practice, and child appropriate practice) theories widely employed in early childhood policy and curriculum evaluation, respectively. In addition, he has established a set of large-scale child language corpora: *Early Child Mandarin Corpus* (Beijing), *Early Child Cantonese Corpus* (Hong Kong), and *Early Child Chinese-English Bilingual Corpus* (Singapore). He is the associate editor of *Early Education and Development*, *Early Child Development and Care*, and *Frontiers in Psychology*, and serves six other early childhood research journals as the editorial board member. Elsevier and Stanford University listed him in the *Global Top 2% Highly Cited Scientists 2020*. He has published 220 journal articles, book chapters, and monographs.

Jennifer J. Chen, Ed.D., is professor of early childhood and family studies at Kean University in New Jersey, USA. She earned her doctorate in human development and psychology from Harvard University Graduate School of Education. She was a Fulbright scholar in Hong Kong during 2013–2014, when she first started collaborating with the co-author of this book. Prof. Chen has contributed more than 70 scholarly publications to the fields of education and psychology. Her current areas of research interest include curriculum, policy, and pedagogical practices in early childhood education, as well as child development and learning. She is a co-editor of the National Association for the Education of Young Children's influential *Casebook: Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*

(published in early 2023), which is one of a kind. Prof. Chen has been honored with several awards for her scholarly work, including the *2020 Foundation Established Career Award for Research on Early Childhood Teacher Education* from the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE), the *2021 Kean University Presidential Excellence Award for Distinguished Scholarship*, and the *2022 Distinguished Scholarship in Early Childhood Teacher Education/Early Childhood Education Award* from the New Jersey Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NJAECTE). Prof. Chen has served in several leadership positions, including as former president of NJAECTE and former co-president of NJAECTE. Currently in 2022, she is a board director of the New Jersey Chapter of the Fulbright Association and the chair of the NAECTE's inaugural research committee.

Foreword

Foreword (English)

I read the book titled *Globalized Childhoods, Localized Curricula: The Glocalization of Early Childhood Curriculum*, co-authored by Philip Hui Li and Jennifer J. Chen. This book stimulates many thoughts and reflections in me. I found that the contents of this book rarely exist in mainland China. The topics discussed are precisely what educators, researchers, and scholars are most concerned about in the field of early childhood education (ECE). They include the problem of what ECE is; the values of a culture; the ideas of globalization, localization, and glocalization; the relationship between play and learning; and the relationship between children's independent development and teacher guidance.

I noticed that the main interest of this book focuses on the fundamental theoretical issues related to ECE based on authentic practices, particularly the early childhood curriculum. I think that in the field of ECE, the main reason for so many theoretical "misunderstandings" and practical "helplessness" is that we pay too much attention to children's independent development rather than other contextual factors.

When we assume different positions and see things from different perspectives, we will naturally come to different conclusions.

For those, whether scholars or teachers, engaged in early childhood education, who only think about ECE issues from the perspective of child development, it is not surprising that they would draw conclusions such as "education should be suitable for children's development," and "education should pay attention to children's spontaneous and autonomous play."

For those engaged in ECE think from the perspective of early childhood curriculum and pedagogy, they will inevitably pay attention to the socio-cultural attributes of the curriculum, involving primarily the question of "why educate?" and the philosophical underpinnings of the curriculum, involving mainly the question of "what to educate?" Of course, attention will also need to be paid to child development theories, making the connection to the question of "how to educate?"

As educators in ECE, we must first understand that we are studying education, not child development. Seeing child development as education is

equivalent to confusing the question of "what is" with "what should be." It is tantamount to emphasizing what children "can do" rather than what children "should do." The most valuable and meaningful aspect of education should be what children "should do." This aspect requires clarifications from the cultural, philosophical, and ethical perspectives. Today, many of the problems plaguing early childhood educators worldwide are based on this position and perspective, manifested in the substitution of method-level thinking with value-level considerations.

I have noticed that this book uses mainland China, Hong Kong, and the United States as cases based on the events that have occurred and the authors' personal experiences. In the spirit of critique and reflection for learning, the authors expound their views on various issues related to early childhood curriculum primarily at the macro-level rather than entangling them in micro, technical methods.

After reading this book, I believe that through the last 30 or 40 years of changes, all the "progress," "chaos," and "tribulations" that have occurred in ECE can motivate us to deeply reflect on the past, respond to the present, and face the future.

Jiaxiong Zhu
Faculty of Education
East China Normal University
Shanghai, China
6 August 6, 2022

Foreword (Chinese)

前言

我阅读了李辉和陈君丽合著的《全球化的童年，本土化的课程：幼儿课程的全球在地化》书稿，感受颇多。这是一本在中国大陆较少能看到的著作，而讨论的问题恰恰又是学前教育中人们最为关注的一系列重要问题，诸如学前教育是什么的问题、文化的价值问题、文化的儒化与涵化问题、游戏与教学的关系问题、幼儿自主发展与教师引导的关系问题……。

我注意到这本书主要是在论述以学前教育实践为基础的学前教育理论问题，主要聚焦于学前教育课程。我认为在学前教育领域，之所以会产生如此之多的理论上的"误区"和实践中的"无奈"，是因为面对我们特殊的教育对象时，我们过分关注了儿童自身发展而不是其他关联因素。

持有不同立场、不同视角的人，自然会得出不同的结论。

从事学前教育的人员，不论是学者，还是教师，如若只是从发展(developmentally)的视角去思考学前教育的问题，那么得出"教育要适合儿童发展"、"教育要关注儿童自发、自主的游戏"等一类结论就不足为奇了。

从事学前教育的人员，如若从教育和课程(pedagogically)的视角去思考学前教育的问题，那么就必然会关注课程的社会文化属性，主要涉及"为什么教育"的问题；也自然会关注课程的哲学基础，主要涉及"教育些什么"的问题；当然还会关注儿童发展理论，主要涉及"怎样去教育"的问题。

作为学前教育的研究人员，我们首先要明白自己在研究的是教育，而不是儿童发展。将儿童发展看成是教育，等同于将"是什么"的问题看成了"应当是什么"的问题；等同于强调了儿童能做什么，而不是儿童应该做什么。而儿童"应该做什么"才是最具教育意义的，更需要从文化、哲学和伦理学上来阐明。如今，在全世界范围内困扰学前教育工作者的诸多问题大多出于这种立场和视角，表现为将方法层面的思考替代了价值层面的考量。

我注意到这本书以中国大陆、香港特别行政区和美国为案例，以发生过的事件以及作者的亲身经验为依据，以学术批评的精神，阐述了他们对这些问题的看法。而他们对这些问题的看法大都是宏观层面的，而非纠结于微观的、技术方法层面的。

读完这本书以后，我深信，经历了近三、四十年的变迁，在学前教育中出现过的"进步"、"混沌"和"磨难"，终能使人们深刻反思过去、应对当前、面向未来。

华东师范大学教育学部朱家雄教授
2022年8月6日写于上海

Preface

Philip Hui Li (李辉) and Jennifer J. Chen (陈君丽)

Curriculum is the heart of education, and early childhood curriculum (ECC) is the heart of the heart or the "pearl on the crown." Since the 1990s, ECC has undergone a dramatic transformation prompted by the globalization of ECE. The globalization of ECE, in turn, has been driven by three interrelated and interactive forces of globalization: culture, capital, and technology (Rana, 2012). Consequently, early childhood, defined from the American-European, middle-class, and male (the "white-male norm") perspective, has been promoted as the ideal and universal for all young children worldwide, regardless of their race, society, and culture. According to this "norm," ECE should reflect certain characteristics, especially child-centeredness, constructivism, and "developmentally appropriate practice" (for example, see Chapter 5). Correspondingly, many ECC models, such as the High/Scope Curriculum and the Project Approach from the United States, as well as the Reggio Emilia Approach and the Montessori Method from Italy, have been advocated globally by UNICEF (originally known as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund and now officially known as the United Nations Children's Fund), UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children), and many international non-governmental organizations. Consequently, this trend has catapulted these ECE curricula and pedagogical models into the dominance of early childhood practices worldwide.

In this book, we analyze the latest global development in ECC illustrated by multiple case studies. In our endeavor, we encourage educators to be reflective and conscious of the fact that these globally promoted ECC models have their own social, cultural, and historical roots and limitations (for example, see Chapter 8 about the Reggio Emilia Approach in detail). As evidence, we present case studies (for example, see Chapters 6, 7, and 8) that illustrate the inapplicability and inappropriateness of the direct adoption of these contextually bound approaches in local environments that lack social and cultural compatibility. Hence, the implementation outcome in these cases was generally superficial and artificial. Instead, the findings from these case studies make a convincing case for a hybrid model of ECE curriculum and pedagogy as the "best" approach that balances both **localization** (local contextual needs) and **globalization** (global trends) into **glocalization**.

We believe that this academic book is one of a kind and systematically addresses the evolution and implementation of ECC in the era of globalization by focusing on its interaction with localization. We agree with Peters (2017) that, "[i]n the era of post-truth it is not enough to revisit notions or theories of truth, accounts of 'evidence,' and forms of epistemic justification as a guide to truth, but we need to understand the broader epistemological and Orwellian implications of post-truth politics, science and education" (p. 565). Instead, we urge educators to critically examine ECC development, implementation, and refinement against the backdrops of global trends as well as the historical, social, cultural, and contextual factors within a particular locality as efforts to understand "post-truth" ECE. Thus, we dedicate our efforts to reexamine, rethink, and reflect on the latest theoretical developments as well as practical implications and improvements in ECC in the context of the post-truth era. In particular, our goal in this endeavor is threefold:

(1) to reconceptualize the fundamental concepts in the field, particularly globalization, localization, glocalization, childhood, culture, and curriculum;
(2) to analyze some of the most popular ECC models in the world across societies; and
(3) to offer insights and recommendations for the future development and redeployment of ECC studies and practices to embrace ideologies of the post-truth era.

In particular, this book contains two parts. The first part is titled "*The Globalized Childhoods*," assembling five chapters that critically examine the major ideologies or practices involved in the globalization of early childhoods:

Chapter 1, "The Glocalization of Early Childhood Curriculum"
We analyze the cases of curriculum globalization and present three important theoretical frameworks for analyzing its implementability.

Chapter 2, "Child-Centered Pedagogy: Where It Might Be Right and Where It Might Be Wrong"
We systematically critique the "child-centered" approach and propose the "dual-centeredness" hybrid theory that acknowledges teachers' and children's central and complementary roles in the educational process.

Chapter 3, "Constructivism and Instructivism in Early Childhood Curriculum: Critiques and Reflections"
We critique the ideas of constructivism and instructivism and propose a fusion of both to pave a "middle way."

Chapter 4, "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Education: What's Missing?"
We critically and historically analyze the developmentally appropriate practice framework and its influence on ECC globally.

Chapter 5, "Play and Learning in the Early Years: Conflicting or Complementing?"

We address the highly contested and controversial pair of concepts (namely play and learning) and recommend the continued imperative of including both play and learning in the professional discourse of ECE.

The second part of this book is titled "*The Localized Curricula*," which includes four chapters.

Chapter 6, "Glocalization of Early Childhood Curriculum: Two Cases of China"

We analyze two cases in China in terms of the three types of curriculum outcomes (intended, implemented, and attained) and highlight valuable lessons learned.

Chapter 7, "Glocalization of Early Childhood Curriculum: The Two Cases of Hong Kong"

We analyze two cases in Hong Kong (officially known as the Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China since 1997, when it was returned to Chinese sovereignty after 156 years of being under British rule). Specifically, we applied the "*Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He*" framework for this analysis.

Chapter 8, "Reggio Emilia Approach Interpreted or Misinterpreted in Other Societies: The Case of the United States"

We critically examine the globalization of the Reggio Emilia Approach in the United States and summarize some valuable lessons learned.

Chapter 9, "Early Childhood Curriculum: From Globalization and Localization to Glocalization"

In this concluding chapter, we synthesize the "big ideas" and "major lessons" learned from this book.

Historically, this book examines the globalization of ECC in the world that has occurred since the turn of this millennium, as well as the implementation outcome demonstrated by the case studies analyzed. Geographically, it covers particularly the American and Chinese contexts, focusing on analyzing the influences of globalization, localization, and glocalization. The systematic and comprehensive nature of this coverage makes this book the first of this kind that raises further awareness of the most recent trend toward glocalization rather than the globalization of ECC in this post-truth era. We believe that this book can serve as a valuable intellectual source that promotes understanding and stimulates further thinking among all key education stakeholders (e.g., curriculum developers, educational researchers, prospective teachers, teachers, and policymakers) locally and globally.

Last but not least, we extend our gratitude to Ms. Katie Peace, the editor of *Education, Psychology, Mental Health, and Linguistics* at Routledge. Without her kind invitation and persistence, this book would not have been possible. She contacted us for "another book on the curriculum" immediately upon the publication of the first one on ECC (Yang & Li, 2019). Her trust, insistence, and professionalism have encouraged us to

conceptualize and reconceptualize new ideas and thinking to inspire the field of ECE locally and globally, and hence, the birth of this book! Thanks, Katie!

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1 The Glocalization of Early Childhood Curriculum

Philip Hui Li and Jennifer J. Chen

The "3C" Problem: Childhood, Curriculum, and Culture

Early childhood has been globally valorized as a critical period characterized by rapid development and learning in young children. Accordingly, early childhood education (ECE), referring to the education and care provided to these young children, is foundational to facilitating their development. To date, however, references to young children in age designation vary across nations. For instance, young children refer to those aged from birth to 8 years in some countries (e.g., Australia, Cheeseman & Torr, 2009; the United States, NAEYC, 2020, 2022), but from birth up to only age 6 in others (e.g., China, Zhu, 2009; Hong Kong, Chen et al., 2017). Therefore, the definition of early childhood varies across countries or contexts. Nevertheless, a high-quality ECE is critical to building a strong foundation for young children's development and learning. At the very heart of such an education is the early childhood curriculum (ECC). In an increasingly globalizing world, the globalization of ECC has also become a salient trend. Viewing ECC as the manifestation of culture, we propose that considerations of cultural idiosyncrasies are critical to addressing issues associated with the cultural globalization and universalization of ECC.

The Concept of Culture and Its Relationship to Curriculum

Culture is the fundamental glue that binds a society and its people (Chen, 2019). Thus, it is only natural to see culture permeating every sector of society. Perhaps no place can collectively transmit cultural knowledge to the younger generation more directly and potently than the institution of education. The educational setting is where children start formally learning about the immediate culture in which they live and other cultures through the curriculum and their social interactions with their teachers and peers. Thus, as culture is at the heart of an education system, the curriculum serves as a vehicle through which culturally-bound educational goals and ambitions of a society can be concretely delineated and realized (Nijhuis, 2019; Offorma, 2016). In sum, education is the instrument by which culture is maintained, transmitted, and even modified through education for the citizens of a society. Given the

integral relationship between culture and curriculum, it is imperative that the planning and adoption of any curriculum should reflect the specific sociocultural environment for whom it is designed while also considering global knowledge of child development and pedagogy, which informs us how children best learn and, accordingly, how teaching ought to be conducted.

The Definitions and Conceptualizations of Curriculum

The etymology of the word "curriculum" has Latin roots. According to the online *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*,[1] *curriculum* in New Latin means "a course of study" and in classical Latin "running" or "course," all deriving essentially from the Latin word, "*currere*," which means "to run." Taken together, we may define the curriculum simply as running a course of study. However, the curriculum is more complex and specific than this simple definition. The complexities of the curriculum include its nature, rationale, delivery mechanisms, and outcomes. For instance, we might ask: what curriculum does an education system adopt? And why? How might the same curriculum operate across cultural contexts? While an educational curriculum is multifaceted, encompassing its rationale, goals, and practices, it also represents a sociocultural and political artifact (that symbolizes what the nation expects young children to learn and achieve) and a navigational road map (that steers teachers and children in the direction toward realizing societal hopes and aspirations for these children).

Various definitions of curriculum have been proffered and delineated across cultural contexts, scholars, and education authorities. They tend to reflect four areas of interest: (1) description (what it is and why), (2) function (what it does and how it works), (3) components (what it includes and why), and (4) outcome (what it strives to accomplish). From a general perspective, a curriculum has been defined as the document, road map, blueprint, or plan that guides the teaching and learning process in specific areas to bring about favorable educational outcomes for students in a particular sociocultural context (Chen, 2016; Offorma, 2014). Reflecting this definition, for example, the ECC in the context of New Zealand is defined as "the sum total of the experiences, activities, and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development" (MoE of New Zealand, 1996, p. 10). In Hong Kong, the Curriculum Development Council (2017) delineated its kindergarten education curriculum as covering "Values and Attitudes," "Skills," and "Knowledge," which promoted a balanced development in children through globally promoted approaches, such as "Real-life Themes," "Integrated Approach," and "Learning through Play" (p. 18).

Curriculum may also be defined as a structured series of content that aligns with cultural values for a specific group of learners. It involves the methods of instruction and learning experiences, which are the activities designed to accomplish the curriculum. Furthermore, from an outcome perspective, a curriculum may be conceptualized as a catalyst for schools to

translate the demands and expectations of the society into reality. These needs and aspirations include culturally embedded knowledge, skills, and dispositions that learners are expected to acquire to contribute to society and solve real-world problems in the future (Offorma, 2014). For instance, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2020), which is the most influential and largest organization for ECE in the United States (see Chapter 4), defines ECC as "[consisting] of the plans for the learning experiences through which children acquire knowledge, skills, abilities, and understanding" (p. 25). Advocating developmentally appropriate practice (see Chapter 4), NAEYC (2020) further elaborated that

> [i]n developmentally appropriate practice, the curriculum helps young children achieve meaningful goals because they are culturally and linguistically responsive and developmentally and educationally significant. The curriculum does this through learning experiences that reflect what is known about young children in general and about each child in particular.
>
> (p. 25)

Curriculum may also be described as a program of study, including the contents, subject matters, and knowledge to be achieved. It is manifested in three main types: (1) formal curriculum (the intended curriculum as delineated in curriculum document and policy), perceived curriculum (the curriculum as perceived by practitioners), and operational curriculum (the functional curriculum that is implemented) (Goodlad et al., 1979). In an ideal scenario, these three kinds of curricula would align. However, in the situation of adopting an imported Western-derived ECC into a Chinese cultural context (e.g., China, Singapore), they may deviate from one another (Yang & Li, 2022). It is perhaps indisputable that a high-quality ECE is strongly desired for families to position their children for success. It is especially more so in educationally competitive societies, such as China and Hong Kong. For example, many Chinese parents hold the pervasive presumption and mentality that "赢在起跑线" (meaning winning at the starting line), giving rise to their emphasis on selecting a high-quality preschool/kindergarten to enroll their child so that they will have an early advantage for future success (Chen et al., 2017). This mindset also views education as symbolizing a race to the finish line, believing that how well a child begins his ECE will play a determining factor in his or her later success. Thus, it is not surprising that stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, education authorities) are devoted to creating an advantageous "starting line" for young children in Chinese cultural contexts.

Li (2007) summarized the seven common definitions of curriculum: (1) curriculum is a textbook; (2) curriculum is the experience; (3) curriculum is the learning activity; (4) curriculum is the teaching plan; (5) curriculum is the learning outcome; (6) curriculum is student's autobiography; (7) curriculum includes all the things happening in preschool/school. In sum, the

aforementioned definitions and conceptualizations suggest that curriculum is complex, contextualized, and variable across cultural contexts influenced by various factors. Among these factors, globalization plays a key role in ECC reforms, affecting the conception and delivery of the new ECC vis-à-vis the local cultural context.

Globalization and Its Global Impact

Globalization has assumed a prominent role in many sectors, from education to business, transforming our lives in impactful ways. Despite its growing influence, globalization is an abstract term that has been defined variously. Nonetheless, there is some consensus on the definition of globalization that describes it as the global flow of goods, people, information, and other forms of capital (Nagasawa & Swadener, 2013). Some scholars believe that globalization elevates the global consciousness in such a way that services, goods, and ideas flow and exchange across the globe through various channels (Edwards, 1995). Like it or not, we live in an increasingly globalized world that impacts every sector of society (Giddens, 2002). For instance, the globalization of the ECC derived from the West represents a process coterminous with the cultural globalization of educational practices.

Cultural Globalization

Culture is as old as the oldest civilization known to mankind. It is generally referred to as the fabric of common standards, such as beliefs, values, knowledge, norms, habits, and ideologies, shared among community members (Hofstede, 1991; Offorma, 2016; Spiro, 1994). The inherent attributes of culture consciously and unconsciously shape and can be shaped by the attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors of its members (Chen, 2019). While numerous local cultures are shared by a collective of members, there are also global cultures shared by citizens and nations around the world (Chen, 2022). Because culture is shared, it is social in nature that can inform, affirm, and transform how members interact with one another and with ideas in socially and culturally appropriate ways. Li and Chen (2017) adopted LeBaron's (2003) metaphor of "underground rivers" to describe cultures as fluid yet powerful forces in our lives and social relationships with others, influencing how we perceive, think, feel, and behave.

Furthermore, culture is the most visible catalyst of globalization, as manifested in the direct or indirect transformation of a local culture confronted with global influences. For instance, on the one hand, culture is visible in the global expansion of information and knowledge via digital technologies and media sharing, promoting the global acceptance of Western cultural values and educational ideologies (Rana, 2012). On the other hand, cultural globalism is also visible in the imposition of the hegemonism, colonialism, and chauvinism of Western cultural values as the "best" on local cultures (Li & Chen, 2017). Over the past decades, globalization has evolved in qualitatively different

ways. These global changes can be positive or negative, depending on their purposes and outcomes. For instance, in the educational realm, globalization is positive when it properly provokes learning and growth and enriches local cultural values, leading to improved educational practices for a particular cultural context. In this regard, globalization can serve as a valuable source of educational advancement. On the contrary, globalization can also lead to cultural hegemony and colonization if imported ideologies are adopted without any critical examination of their social, cultural, and contextual appropriateness. Unfortunately, the negative impact has been extensively overserved in the past decades, especially in those developing countries that strive to learn from the developed ones.

Cultural Universalism vs. Cultural Relativism

Cultural universalism versus cultural relativism has been one of the oldest yet frequently debated global discourses. The debate becomes even more intense in light of localization-globalization dynamics in ECC (Li & Chen, 2017).

Cultural universalism. This perspective is grounded in the belief that a universal set of standards is identified as the "best" in the world and should be modeled after by all nations (Li & Chen, 2017). Consequently, it promotes cultural hegemonism, colonialism, and chauvinism, as evident in education reforms forsaking their own "inferior" cultures in favor of the "superior" culture of the global superpower of the West, especially the United States. As such, cultural universalism is problematic because it undermines the "best" indigenous cultural characteristics befitting a particular local culture. Instead, cultural relativism should be considered, as it advocates cultural equality, pluralism, and mutual respect (Li & Chen, 2017).

Cultural relativism. This approach is based on the belief that there is no so-called best culture in the world as "best" is relative to a particular cultural value system because cultures are fundamentally different from one another with their unique features (Li & Chen, 2017). Cultural relativism presupposes an epistemological perspective that individual beliefs, practices, and standards are culturally specific and should not be evaluated and interpreted through their own cultural lenses (Tobin, 2005). Following this logic, it is then intellectually and methodologically flawed to evaluate other cultures against the assumptions and criteria of the universal "best" culture. The ungirding assumption of cultural relativism is the existence of diverse cultures and associated qualities, and they should be respected as equally worthy of consideration. For instance, from the cultural relativism perspective, an ECC derived from the culture and quality standards of the West is not treated as universal nor free of embedded cultural assumptions or biases, but instead, reflects the values and needs of a particular community of people at a given place and time (Tobin, 2005). Accordingly, importing a Western ECC directly and uncritically into other Eastern societies, such as China and Hong Kong, is highly problematic and inappropriate because it represents the homogenization and universalization of ECC.

Globalization of ECC

Globalization of ECC is not a new phenomenon, as the past century has witnessed several waves of popularization of some progressive curriculum models from the West to the East, such as the Project Approach (in the 1920s) and the Montessori Method (in the 1940s). However, the latest round of globalization of ECC was initiated in the 1980s and peaked around the turn of this millennium, driving Asian countries in their ECC reforms to a place of Western discourses, values, and ideologies. As a case in point, Asian countries, such as China and Singapore, have launched large-scale national reforms to make their preschool and K–12 curricula more "globalized" or "Westernized" (Li et al., 2012; Yang & Li, 2022). Unfortunately, these large-scale reforms are not based on scientifically sound evidence from local pilot or implementation studies. Thus, the underlying intention, rationality, and rigorousness of these national reforms become questionable without empirical support. In contrast, New Zealand and Australia have implemented their own ECCs reflecting local and global influences while remaining true to their unique cultural identities. Specifically, New Zealand developed *Te Whāriki* (MoE of New Zealand, 1996, 2017) and Australia the Early Years Learning Framework (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2009) that responsively attend to their unique cultural needs while considering global practices. In the following sections, we elucidate four cases (namely, China, Singapore, New Zealand, and Australia) as examples illustrating their development and implementation of an ECC within the global-local interactive dynamics.

The Case of China

China, officially referred to as the People's Republic of China, is an economically prosperous, developing country in East Asia. It has been the world's most populous country. In October 2022, China had a population of more than 1.4 billion.[2] China also constitutes the world's largest market for ECE, serving 48,182,600 young children (ages 3–6) in 2020 (MoE of the PRC, 2021). Since the turn of this millennium, the educational authorities of China have launched a large-scale ECC reform to import and implement American ECC models (Yang & Li, 2022). Accordingly, two national ECC policies were enacted: "the Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial Version)" (MoE of the PRC, 2001) and "the Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3–6 Years" (MoE of the PRC, 2012).

These ECE policy documents have been influenced by the globalization of ECC promoting Western ideologies. At the core of the Western ECC is the manifestation of constructivist, child-centered, play-based, and project-oriented characteristics (Chen et al., 2017). Concomitantly, Western-originated curricula, such as the Project Approach and the High/Scope Curriculum from the United States, and the Reggio Emilia Approach and Montessori Method from Italy, have been adopted or adapted into Chinese

early childhood classrooms (Li et al., 2012). The main difference between the Chinese and the Western ECC lies in the emphasis on freedom and control over the learning experience between the children and the teacher (Tzuo, 2007). While the Western ECC highlights the importance of child-centered learning experiences, the Chinese ECC is predominantly teacher-directed, underscoring the teacher's control over children's exploration and discovery of learning. Thus, when the two conflicting ECC cultures interact, a cultural collision inevitably occurs. A viable solution to mediate this cultural collision is a hybrid or fusion of these two cultural traditions in ECC, such as combining the teacher-directed Chinese curriculum with a child-centered Western curriculum (Li & Chen, 2017).

In practice, when implementing Western educational ideologies, policy-makers and practitioners in China have neglected considerations of the cultural appropriateness of these imported curricula, the criticisms toward the progressive curriculum reform, and the contradictions between policy and practice (Yang & Li, 2022). In such a scenario, early childhood reforms tend to result in two gaps (Li et al., 2011): the "belief-practice" gap and the "policy-practice" gap. For instance, while Chinese teachers reported that they believed in the child-centered approach, they practiced the opposite—namely, teacher-directed whole-class teaching (Li et al., 2012). Additionally, teachers found it challenging to implement top-down policies that were issued by education authorities, leading to a "policy-practice" gap. The "belief-practice" and the "policy-practice" gaps have jointly indicated the challenges in adopting Western ECC in China, calling for empirical studies and critical reflections examining the implementation issues and potential solutions. Li et al. (2012) conducted a cross-cultural comparison of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and Singapore to understand how and why teachers in 18 early childhood classrooms in these societies twisted imported curricula and pedagogies in their implementation. They found that whole-class direct instruction was the dominant teaching method reflecting the powerful influence of Chinese cultural values on teaching practice among these teachers. Furthermore, Li et al. observed societal differences in classroom practice, which reflected the spectrum of openness and Westernization in these three societies. These findings imply that adopting ECC models developed in a Western sociocultural milieu directly in China is inappropriate due to differences in social, cultural, educational, and other contextual factors. Thus, sociocultural and contextual appropriateness should be seriously considered and carefully examined when reforming ECC in a specific society.

Recently, research has further investigated the implementation outcomes of imported ECC. For example, Yang and Li (2022) examined cultural influences on ECC in China and Singapore by adopting a three-level framework: formal curriculum, perceived curriculum, and operational curriculum. First, at the formal curriculum level, de-schoolification (去小学化) in China has become the main feature that discourages early teaching of reading and writing to avoid developmentally inappropriate educational practices and the possible side effects of early rote learning (Li & Rao, 2005). Instead, the focus on

cultivating areas of competence, including curiosity, learning engagement, and risk-taking, has been promoted in China. Accordingly, a competency-oriented curriculum has replaced the traditional subject-based curriculum. Similarly, the new arts curriculum policy advocates joyful art experiences and free emotional and cognitive expressions (Jolley & Zhang, 2012). Second, a change from teacher-led, whole-group instruction to child-directed, individualized experiences has been observed at the perceived curriculum level (Li & Chen, 2017; Li et al., 2011). For instance, most Chinese teachers adopt a balance or hybrid of teacher- and child-directedness (45%) approach to program delivery in response to the parents' expectations of their children's pre-academic preparation for formal schools (Li et al., 2011). Third, at the operational curriculum level, a gap between teachers' reported and actual classroom practices was found: the child-centered, individualized instruction was not consistently implemented in actuality. For example, the operational curriculum was conducted largely in teacher-led, large-group, whole-class, and theme-based teaching planned by the teachers (Yang & Li, 2022). Furthermore, although play is extensively observed in early childhood classrooms in China, it is still rule-based, teacher-driven, and task-oriented. All of these findings collectively suggest that the implementation of top-down policies promoting a globally acceptable ECC in China has not been realistically achieved but instead remained only as an ideal, contrary to the aspirations of education authorities there.

The Case of Singapore

Located at the Straits of Malacca, Singapore is one of the key geographical intersections connecting the two worlds: the East and the West. According to the Worldometer,[3] in October 2022, Singapore had a population of nearly six million. Guarding the safety of these East-West connections and communications, Singapore itself has been inevitably transformed by the two worlds and their associated cultures. As a multiethnic and multicultural society, Singapore shares Chinese culture rooted in Confucianism and comprises mostly Chinese Singaporeans (constituting more than 70% of the Singaporean population) (Yang & Li, 2022). In an attempt to promote child-centered and play-based pedagogy, in 2003, the Ministry of Education (MoE) of Singapore published the kindergarten curriculum titled "Nurturing Early Learners (NEL)" for children ages 4–6, a framework that was updated in 2012 again by the MoE of Singapore. For instance, NEL values early arts, aesthetics, and creative learning experiences and expects young children to participate in early arts activities (Kim & Kim, 2017). However, NEL also underscores five localized considerations: (1) appreciation for the need for teacher-directed, explicit instruction; (2) provision of pre-academic preparation for young children to successfully transition to formal school; (3) definition of "purposeful play" appropriate for local classrooms; (4) achievement of the predetermined goals of different learning areas via integrated curriculum; and (5) understanding of the existing constraints in the local system

to better implement NEL (Yang et al., 2022). Furthermore, in 2013, the Early Years Development Framework for Child Care Centres in Singapore was published, advocating a shift from academic instruction to hands-on learning and development of their learning dispositions (Nyland & Ng, 2016).

In their analysis of Singapore's ECC, Yang and Li (2022) found that its formal curriculum was strongly influenced by Western ideologies. In particular, Singapore's formal curriculum expects young children to develop key learning dispositions, such as perseverance, creativity, and curiosity (Tan, 2017). Additionally, the formal curriculum of Singapore highlights purposeful play and quality interactions as supporting young children's holistic development. Like China, Singapore has also incorporated the global trend of child-centered and competency-based learning into its ECC framework for young children. Furthermore, the perceived curriculum has remained relatively consistent with the formal curriculum in Singaporean teachers' beliefs (Yang & Li, 2022). Particularly, Singapore teachers strongly endorsed developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (for discussion of DAP, see Chapter 4) and the child-centered approach to pedagogy, reflecting a paradigm shift toward becoming less academic-focused and teacher-led but more child-centered (Tang, 2015). Tan and Rao (2017) further found that teachers in Singapore believed in both child-centered and teacher-centered pedagogies, even though they preferred a child-centered approach. However, some teachers there still favored subject-based or pre-academic learning, as parents had high expectations of early academic success (Nyland & Ng, 2016). Furthermore, considering the important role of professional resources in human capital, Singapore teachers appeared to lack adequate training and resources for implementing the child-centered ECC with fidelity. Thus, at times, they even resorted to applying traditional approaches, which were subject-based, teacher-directed, and academic-oriented.

Evidence suggests that the operational curriculum in Singaporean early childhood classrooms appears to function differently from the perceived and formal curriculum in some ways. First, the traditional pedagogy with worksheets is still evident, defined as the "drill-and-practice" approach (Li & Rao, 2005). Second, Singapore teachers tend to adopt intentional and outcome-based instruction instead of promoting creativity and expression in the formal curriculum (Bautista et al., 2021). Likewise, intentional and explicit teaching strategies are employed to teach gross motor skills, and the teacher-child dialogue tends to be knowledge-driven and teacher-initiated/directed (Yin et al., 2020). Third, four contextual constraints have been found to deter Singapore teachers from implementing the formal curriculum: (1) rigid schedule, (2) high teacher-student ratio, (3) unskilled teachers, and (4) small classroom environments (Yang & Li, 2022). In sum, the globalization of ECC has brought about the dominance of Western values and practices in Singapore, such as child-centered and play-based learning. Yet, the traditional teacher-directed pedagogy persists, thwarting the progress of implementing a globalized ECC.

When globalization meets localization sharing different cultural values and ideologies, it can result in a cultural collision. Yang and Li (2022) conducted a scoping review of internationally published studies on the ECC reforms in China and Singapore to understand the collective, individual, and interactive effects of globalization and localization. They found that although both countries shared a constructivist orientation, they were still constrained by local values and contextual realities, and thus, the imported Western ECC was not fully realized. These findings suggest that adopting a globalized ECC in a local context with divergent social and cultural values is not appropriate or viable. As suggested by Yang and Li, a functional and realistic solution would involve curriculum hybridization in the early childhood sector in Singapore.

The Case of New Zealand

New Zealand is a country with hundreds of islands in the Southern Hemisphere. It features picturesque topography and native Māori culture shared by indigenous Polynesian people. According to the Worldometer,[4] in October 2022, New Zealand had a population of about five million. New Zealand's development is entwined with political transformation and cultural integration. Politically, New Zealand became a British colony in 1840, was converted to a self-governing country in 1952, attained Dominion status in 1907, and finally achieved full independence in 1947. Culturally, the main cultures in New Zealand are Zealand European and Māori (influenced by Māori people as the indigenous Polynesian population of New Zealand)[5]. The cultures represent two main ethnic groups, European New Zealanders (Pākehā in Māori) (being the most dominant) and Māori people. Accordingly, the three official languages in New Zealand are English, Māori or Te Reo Māori (the language of Māori), and New Zealand Sign Language, with English being the most dominant.

Te Whāriki, an official national ECC, was depicted by the metaphor of a "woven mat" in Te Reo Māori to suggest the interwoven relationships of four curriculum principles with five curriculum strands, collectively reflecting the country's hopes and aspirations for the education and care of young children (MoE of New Zealand, 2017). *Te Whāriki* is the first in a few ways for New Zealand. It is the first national ECC in New Zealand, initially published in 1996 (MoE of New Zealand, 1996) and updated in 2017 (MoE of New Zealand, 2017). This curriculum is geared toward guiding early childhood care and education for young children from birth to school entry. *Te Whāriki* also marks the first time that ECE becomes part of major education reforms in New Zealand (May, 2001). These education reforms happened alongside major social reforms, making New Zealand a textbook example of neoliberalism in ECE (Larner, 2003). Situated in the neoliberal reforms climate, attention on early childhood education and young children in New Zealand represents a political shift toward educationalizing early childhood, viewing ECE not just as a facilitator of lifelong learning but also as the beginning of

this lifelong process (Duhn, 2012). Furthermore, politically and culturally, *Te Whāriki* is also New Zealand's first bicultural and bilingual ECC written in two languages, English and Te Reo Māori. Accordingly, for the first time, this curriculum sought to "represent and reflect Maori politics and pedagogy" (Te One, 2003, p. 24). For all of these remarkable "firsts," *Te Whāriki* has quickly gained both national and intentional tractions as a progressive and innovative curriculum aimed at empowering children and challenging the political power structure, as demonstrated by New Zealand's commitment to investing in biculturalism as symbolic of the nation's cultural past, present, and future (Nuttall, 2003; Te One, 2003).

At the very heart of *Te Whāriki* is the vision that children would grow up as "competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society" (MoE of New Zealand, 1996, p. 9). Particularly, it emphasizes biculturalism and bilingualism in developing the "ideal child." Duhn (2012) observed that

> one of the startling aspects of how the contemporary New Zealand child is produced through *Te Whāriki* is that there is such strong emphasis on creating a vision of bicultural "national" childhood at a time when New Zealand is deeply entangled in discourses of globalization.
>
> (p. 90)

However, Duhn also analyzed that while globalization discourses emphasizing multiculturalism and its associated complexities were evident in many other Western nations, *Te Whāriki* appeared to rather favor the national discourses on biculturalism. This bicultural orientation reflects New Zealand's wider political context (Māori childhood and Pākehā childhood) on bicultural matters, which may be even more complex and prominent than neoliberal aspirations to achieve the "perfect" globalized childhood and child.

We gather from Duhn's (2012) analysis of *Te Whāriki* as reflecting three perspectives (1) separation, (2) integration or hybridization, and (3) an alternative possibility. First, there was a separate version of *Te Whāriki* written in Māori for the Māori people. The MoE of New Zealand (1996) reasoned that "[t]he Māori curriculum is designed specifically to provide a basis for appropriate practice in nga Kohanga reo" (p. 10). While the Māori version of the curriculum might have encouraged Māori people to maintain their own cultural particulars, it suggests that this curriculum would differ from the mainstream version of *Te Whāriki*. Yet, Duhn noted that "there is no English nor Te Reo [Māori] translation or explanation of possible differences between the two curricula" (p. 98). Duhn further critiqued the bicultural discourses inherent in *Te Whāriki* as representing two separate, binary domains (Māori and Pākehā), thereby reinforcing their differences rather than valuing them as threads to interweave. The updated version of *Te Whāriki* (MoE of New Zealand, 2017), however, did highlight that both versions shared the same framework with respect to educational principles and strands.

The second interpretation of *Te Whāriki* is one of integration or hybridization. The development of biculturalism as emphasized by *Te Whāriki* appears to suggest efforts to integrate and hybridize both cultural strengths and differences in educating young children from both the mainstream culture and Māori culture. The third perspective highlights that "the existence of two separate views of the child and early childhood education in *Te Whāriki* may signify a new acceptance of difference and multiplicity" (Duhn, 2012, p. 98). This interpretation suggests that a new alternative possibility may emerge as "new patterns" of the "woven mat" of ECC are discovered and understood.

Te Whāriki in New Zealand is a classic example of how global contemporary early childhood is transformed locally and affected by global neoliberal discourses. For example, "*Te Whāriki* emphasizes the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions that support lifelong learning" to meet the demands of the global world (MoE of New Zealand, 2017, p. 7). However, it is only on the surface level that *Te Whāriki* appears to cultivate the "global" neoliberal child. On a deep level, the intentional construction of the bicultural child is clearly visible throughout the curriculum as reflecting the expectations and demands of competence in governing New Zealand in the future (Duhn, 2012). Just like other aspects of governance, neoliberalism is politically and situationally specific as manifested in ways befitting local rationalities of New Zealand and is reflected in its ECC. It is worth noting that the manifestation of neoliberalism may be articulated differently in other cultural contexts with distinct local governing issues and solutions (Duhn, 2012). In this connection, Duhn concluded that as a response to the effects of globalization (global conceptions of the child and early childhood) and localization (local/national beliefs of the child and early childhood), "[t]he bicultural child is an articulation of the neoliberal global child in New Zealand" (p. 83).

The curriculum in New Zealand is inherently politically driven and culturally situated. Although different from the global conception of the "ideal child" as multicultural, the bicultural child in *Te Whāriki* in New Zealand is politically appropriate and culturally meaningful. While a curriculum is an instrument that channels a nation's hopes and aspirations, *Te Whāriki* is more than just a curriculum document, it represents an essential "cultural artifact" for New Zealand in such a way that it articulates its vision and produces transformations of childhood for this society (Duhn, 2012). Furthermore, while influenced by the global ideologies of the ideal child, *Te Whāriki* articulates New Zealand's own beliefs of the ideal child rooted in a hybrid of local (national) and global (Western) governance, which in turn, influences the curricular principles and strands related to fostering in children the ability to effectively govern the society in the future. Thus, the ideal child in *Te Whāriki* appears to reflect a fusion of local and global notions of governance (Duhn, 2008).

In sum, *Te Whāriki* and its development in the past nearly three decades reflect the intricate interactions between globalization and localization of early childhood rooted in the interweaving of multiple mediated threads (e.g., social, cultural, political). First, the discourse of *Te Whāriki* has a

bicultural nature and reflects New Zealand's deeply ingrained political and cultural dynamics involving the Pākehā and the Māori. Second, in New Zealand, early childhood is seen as maximizing the child's potential to govern and produce a future workforce complete with requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Duhn, 2010). In sum, *Te Whāriki* represents a classic case of local ECC as reflecting multiple discourses of localization, neoliberalism, and globalization.

The Case of Australia

Australia is an independent, developed country located on the Australian continent comprising mainland Australia, the island of Tasmania, and numerous smaller surrounding islands. Relatively prosperous, Australia is the world's sixth-largest country. The indigenous Australians had inhabited the continent for approximately 65,000 years before becoming a British colony in 1788 and then an independent nation in 1901. Accordingly to the Worldometer,[6] in October 2022, Australia had a little over 26 million inhabitants.

In Australia, ECE services are primarily provided by long-day childcare, preschools, early learning centers, kindergartens (within primary schools), and family childcare. In 2009, the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (GDET) released its first national learning framework titled "Belong, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia" (referred to as the EYL Framework hereafter) under the National Quality Framework to guide practice with children from birth to five years.

Inspired by New Zealand's *Te Whāriki*, the EYL Framework highly values young children's agency and connection with the sociocultural world in which they live (Australian GDET, 2009). Similar to *Te Whāriki* in New Zealand, the EYL Framework is the first in a few ways for Australia. The EYL Framework is the first national ECC as part of the Council of Australian Governments' effort to develop a national curriculum for learners from birth to age 18 (Grieshaber, 2010). It is also the first time that Australia has developed a national ECC specifically for children from birth to 5 years. Additionally, for the first time, the EYL Framework has been mandated for early childhood services in Australia for families eligible to receive benefits from the Australian Government (Grieshaber, 2010).

Just like the ECC for New Zealand, the EYL Framework breaks from tradition by emphasizing intentional teaching built around contemporary, progressive ideologies, such as globally endorsed theories of child development, to apply pedagogical approaches that reflect particularly constructivism, child-centeredness, play-based learning. These approaches are inspired by an eclectic body of globally promoted features, including the U.S.-originated DAP framework[7] (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) and the Italian-derived Reggio Emilia Approach[8] (Edwards et al., 1998). Furthermore, according to Grieshaber (2010), the EYL Framework integrates "learning and intentional teaching" with particulars from five areas of globalized early

childhood ideologies: "1. free play and play-based learning; 2. Child development and learning; 3. Free play and intentional teaching; 4. Outcomes to plan learning; 5. High expectations and equity" (p. 34). This EYL Framework has a specific emphasis on play-based learning and recognizes the importance of early literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional development. Play-based learning is defined as "a context for learning through which children organize and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations" (DET, 2019, p. 6). It also highlights the role of early childhood educators as contributors to the learning process and acknowledges the significance of "intentional teaching" whereby the educator serves as an active participant in children's learning (Raban & Li, 2021). A departure from the free play of the last century to a focus on play-based learning is also observed. This phenomenon indicates that globalization is at play in influencing ECE for children in Australia.

Raban and Li (2021) summarized the three lessons other countries could learn from Australia. The first involves the departure from the "White-male tradition" of the dominant Western narrative. The Australian tradition has evolved from philosophies and ideologies highly valued by theorists, such as Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey, and Piaget, and favored also the middle-class European-American communities. These ideological standards have been regarded as the universal norm in the world. Not surprisingly, during the past decades, this "White-male norm" has been promoted by educational authorities in other countries, resulting in a policy-practice gap and a beliefs-practice gap in reality (Li & Chen, 2017; Li et al., 2012). This is because the White-male values have encountered resistance from local cultures and teachers (Li et al., 2012). The second lesson is that "intentional teaching" is critical to ECC, and thus, should not be abandoned (Raban & Li, 2021). Australia's EYL Framework promotes intentional teaching, a balanced position that integrates play, learning, and teaching. It encourages early childhood educators to develop and implement teaching practices that combine play-based learning with learning outcomes. Therefore, ECC should include responsive teaching and scaffolding, such as effective teaching and learning of skills and concepts. The third lesson concerns the departure from all extreme views to embrace more balanced or eclectic views that incorporate both child-centered and teacher-directed approaches. A hybrid of idealism, pragmatism, and realism could develop and deliver a localized, feasible, and workable curriculum befitting the local context. Early childhood teachers should consider embracing a fusion of constructivism, instructivist, and post-structuralism over the dominance of a solely progressive education. Accordingly, they should depart from adopting exclusively child-centered approaches to espousing a balance of teacher-directed and child-initiated learning.

Similarities and Differences across the Four Cases

The four cases discussed earlier share similarities and differences. For example, guided by sociocultural theories, both New Zealand's and Australia's ECC

frameworks emphasize the importance of early childhood learning in the community. In addition, both frameworks view young children as culturally competent individuals capable of actively interacting and connecting with the broader community and local culture as elucidated in New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* and Australia's EYL Framework (Yang et al., 2022). However, this kind of localized curriculum is not evident in Chinese and Singaporean ECC reforms that are heavily influenced by globalized ideologies. Furthermore, unlike Chinese and Singaporean ECC frameworks that clearly define the distinct learning domains/areas, both Australia's EYL Framework (Australia GDET, 2009) and New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* do not prescribe any specific subject contents but only frame their ECC in terms of principles, strands, goals, and learning outcomes. Nonetheless, the four country-specific case examples share the same process of "curriculum hybridization" as a result of an amalgamation of local and global influences, which calls for "recontextualization" and "reconceptualization" of imported ECC policies and philosophies befitting the local sociocultural context. To better capture global-local dynamics and resolve their tensions due to incompatibility in social, cultural, and other contextual factors, we propose adopting the term "glocalization of ECC," which is thoroughly addressed in the following subsection.

The Glocalization of ECC

The term "glocalization" (a portmanteau of "globalization" and "localization") is believed to have been coined by sociologist and theorist Roland Robertson (1992) to refer to the organic fusion of the processes of globalization and localization. According to Robertson (1992), globalization is "a form of institutionalization of the two-fold process involving the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism" (p. 102). Furthermore, glocalization also represents the intertwining of homogenization and heterogenization (Robertson, 1995). Finally, Glocalization may also be referred to as "global localization," suggesting the customization and adaption of global perspectives to local conditions. Not surprisingly, increasing global markets by adapting to the local context is an effective strategy to cope with the existing variety at the global level (Robertson, 1995).

Similarly, some ECE scholars have also adopted the term "glocalization" to describe the hybridization of global trends and local cultures in the context of ECC reforms. For example, Nagasawa and Swadener (2013) employed the term to explore the complex interactions among early childhood, globalization, and neoliberal policies inherent in Kenya and indigenous communities in the United States. Choy (2017) later adopted this term to examine the cultural forces influencing the globalization of ECE in Chinese contexts. Recently, Bautista et al. (2021) also applied the concept of glocalization to analyze Singapore's NEL and Hong Kong's Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide, suggesting that ECCs are only operable if they are culturally appropriate and socially situated. Similarly, Yang and Li (2022) investigated the interactive and collective effects of globalization and localization

in ECC in both China and Singapore, sharing constructivist orientations, indigenous Chinese cultural values, contextual realities, and imported Western curricula. They found that the phenomenon of curriculum hybridization was evident in both countries and manifested as a common denominator of the glocalization trend in ECC.

New Frameworks for Analyzing ECC Reforms

The critical analyses presented earlier have indicated a need for a framework to understand ECC's globalization phenomenon. In the following section, we present three such critical frameworks constructed by the authors of this book: (1) the "3CAPs" framework; (2) the "foreground-middle ground-background" framework, and (3) the "*Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He* (天时, 地利, 人和)" framework.

The 3CAPs Framework

In his book published in Chinese in 2007, Li proposed that the evaluation of the appropriateness of ECC reform policies should apply three locally contextualized yardsticks: (1) it should be appropriate to the local culture; (2) it should be appropriate to the local context; (3) it should be appropriate to the local children. In 2017, Li and Chen further developed the three principles into the "3CAPs": Culturally Appropriate Practice (1CAP), Contextually Appropriate Practice (2CAP), and Child-Individually Appropriate Practice (3CAP). The 1CAP refers to the success of any ECC reform needs to ensure that the ECC is compatible with the local culture; 2CAP focuses on aligning the ECC with local educational dynamics and unique features; 3CAP proposes that children's individual experiences and developmental differences should be considered. Similarly, NAEYC (2020) constructed the DAP framework centered around three core considerations affecting child development and learning: (1) age-appropriateness (commonality), (2) individual-appropriateness (individuality), and (3) social and cultural appropriateness (context) (see Chapter 5 for an extensive discussion of the DAP framework).

The 3CAPs framework is important to consider because it is anchored in cultural, contextual, and child factors that have substantially affected the ECC innovations and reforms in various countries (e.g., China, Singapore) due to the dynamic yet complex interactions between globalization and localization. The complex development of ECC is also reflected in the interweaving of global and local threads (e.g., Bautista et al., 2021; Chen, 2022; Chen et al., 2017; Nganga et al., 2020; Yang & Li, 2022). For instance, in their study of how and why eight teachers in one typical Hong Kong kindergarten implemented the Project Approach (imported from the United States) based on their analysis of classroom observations, interviews, and artifacts, Chen et al. (2017) found that these teachers struggled with implementation fidelity. In the resolution, the teachers resorted to engaging in a

hybrid pedagogy that combined aspects of the Chinese pedagogy and the contemporary Western, early childhood pedagogy as a "culturally sensible, viable, and potentially sustainable" solution that considers the cultural and contextual dynamics in Hong Kong (p. 339). Similarly, a hybrid model was also evident in other studies. For example, in analyzing the ECC in both Hong Kong and Singapore, Bautista et al. (2021) found that due to incompatibility between their deeply ingrained Chinese cultural values and Western ideologies embedded in the formal curriculum, the curriculum implementation was challenging for key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, principals, teacher educators). Based on their findings, Bautista et al. suggested "glocal" curriculum frameworks representing hybridization between global and local practices as a culturally meaningful and viable solution.

The 3CAPs framework also applies to the ECC analysis in other countries. Particularly, when Nganga et al. (2020) guest-edited a special issue of the *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* titled "Culturally Inclusive and Contextually Appropriate Instructional Practices: Rethinking Pedagogical Perspectives, Practices, Policies, and Experiences in Early Childhood Education Programs," they encouraged contributors to employ the "3CAPs" framework "to interrogate educational practices and policies that factor the effects of heritage cultures on child development in contexts of children's global rights, neo-colonialism, ethnocentrism, Euro-Western assumptions, and globalization" (p. 2). Nganga et al. commented that the nine papers featured in the special issue yielded an understanding of both challenges and opportunities for implementing meaningful ECE programs that consider cultural and contextual dimensions. From this perspective, ECC reforms and practices should embrace cultural and contextual diversity when engaging in curriculum development and assessment alongside teacher education, rather than adopting globally accepted ECCs as universal quality standards. As the 3CAPs consider diversity in cultural and contextual dynamics across the globe, this framework is theoretically and practically inclusive, and can inform the development and refinement of curriculum policies and practices to enhance their implementation fidelity.

The "Foreground-Middle Ground-Background" Framework

Another theoretical framework for assessing the applicability and implementability of an ECC imported from a different cultural context is the "foreground-middle ground-background" framework developed by Chen (2022). Specifically, adopting the visual analogy of landscape painting, Chen (2022) suggested that any attempt to paint the ECC landscape should consider three coherent yet unique elements: the foreground, the background, and the middle ground. Specifically, her foreground-middle ground-background framework consists of three essential elements: (1) the "foreground" (Western-derived global ideologies), (2) the "background" (the local cultural and contextual conditions), and (3) the "middle ground" (the harmonization of the foreground and the background). First, the foreground refers

to the focal point or object closest in view, which refers to the contemporary Western ideologies widely adopted as the dominant foreground in the landscape of ECC reforms (Chen, 2022). For instance, in China and Singapore, the constructivist-oriented models and the child-centered, play-based ideologies have accordingly been visualized as the foreground in the ECC landscape (Yang & Li, 2022). Second, "the background provides the context and supports the foreground" (Chen, 2022, p. 5). For instance, both China and Singapore are still influenced by the content knowledge-oriented and academic skills-focused ECC as their background, which contrasts with the contemporary, constructivist-oriented ECC reforms featured in the foreground. Third, the middle ground serves as a reconciliatory driver of balancing the foreground and the background in ECC reform (Chen, 2022). Finally, the middle ground allows teachers to harmonize the conflicting forces between global and local cultures by engaging in curriculum hybridization and cultural glocalization as a feasible solution in the context of globalized curriculum.

Chen (2022) proposed this new three-component framework for analyzing the global-local dissonance in ECC reforms and innovations when commenting on Yang and Li's (2022) study comparing the glocalization of ECC in China and Singapore. Chen's commentary further provided insights based on hindsight for developing foresight to guide the advancement of a harmonious ECC landscape in not only China and Singapore but also in other societies confronted with the same dilemma of adopting a foreign ECC, while maintaining their own unique cultural identities. Concurring with Yang and Li, Chen also viewed curriculum "hybridization" and "glocalization" as being potentially "a viable yet complex solution to the inherent global-local conflicts in curriculum importation" (p. 2). Furthermore, curriculum hybridization and cultural glocalization may also function as a sustainable strategy for maintaining implementation convergence of foreign imported ECC in a localized sociocultural context (Chen, 2022).

The Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He (天时, 地利, 人和) Framework

The authors of this book have also proposed another new three-pronged theoretical framework (*Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He*) for analyzing the implementability of imported Western-derived curricula and pedagogies in a different cultural context (Chen & Li, 2022). According to Chen and Li, "*Tian Shi*" refers literally to heavenly timing (meaning the right time or favorable timing), *Di Li* earthly auspice (meaning the right place or favorable contextual circumstances), and *Ren He* the right people or favorable human conditions (e.g., human harmony, human capital). In sum, *Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He* are commonly and colloquially interpreted as "the right people at the right time in the right place doing the right thing" (p. 3). Furthermore, *Tian Shi, Di Li, and Ren He* implies that "all three conditions (i.e., propitious timing, favorable context, and adequate human capital) must be present and aligned to bring about success in any endeavor" (p. 3). From this theoretical perspective, the three elements of *Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He* must be properly in place to render success in the implementation of an imported ECC.

Conclusion: Toward Multiple Frameworks

In sum, each of the three afore-described frameworks individually and complementarily can be employed to appropriately analyze and resolve the global-local predicaments inherent in ECCs and other educational phenomena. Collectively, they provide a comprehensive set of frameworks that can be employed to more fully deconstruct the implementability of imported ECCs in a local context with varying social and cultural values.

ECE and care have catapulted to prominence in many government policies and education reform agendas worldwide, especially in light of globalization trends and knowledge of child development. Yet, while childhood and child development are universal processes, a globalized ECC does not seem functional in certain local contexts. It is because an ECC represents the manifestation of specific cultural features (e.g., values, ideologies, aspirations) through which children are socialized and learn to become productive citizens of their society. Thus, it is only to the extent that an ECC incorporates the social, cultural, and contextual dynamics that it can be viable in addressing local needs, concerns, and aspirations. In this chapter, in recognizing the inevitable influences of globalized ideologies on the local development of ECC, we examined four country-specific cases (China, Singapore, New Zealand, and Australia). Based on our critical analyses, we concluded that glocalization and curriculum hybridization are viable and potentially sustainable solutions to address the global-local dissonance in ECC development and implementation. This approach also represents the "middle ground" that seeks to harmonize such dissonance (Chen, 2022). Just like any endeavor, the successful navigation of the ECC terrain requires continuous examination and reflection guided by conceptual frameworks. With this in mind, we have offered our three theoretical frameworks: Chen and Li's (2017) 3CAPs,' Chen's (2022) foreground-middle ground-background, and Chen and Li's (2022) *Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He* (天时, 地利, 人和) to help guide such examination and reflection.

Notes

1 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/curriculum#:~:text=Curriculum%20is%20from%20New%20Latin,words%20such%20as%20corridor%2C%20courier%2C
2 https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/china-population/
3 https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/singapore-population/
4 https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/new-zealand-population/
5 https://www.newzealand.com/us/maori-culture/#:~:text=M%C4%81ori%20culture%20is%20an%20integral,M%C4%81ori%20to%20reach%20these%20lands
6 https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/australia-and-new-zealand-population/
7 The fourth edition of the DAP book was published in 2022 (NAEYC, 2022).
8 The third edition of *The Hundred Languages of Children* book was published in 2012 (Edwards et al., 2012).

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2 "Child-Centered Pedagogy"
Where It Might Be Right and Where It Might Be Wrong

Philip Hui Li and Jennifer J. Chen

In education everywhere, two fundamental yet global areas that concern all stakeholders (e.g., education authorities, teachers, parents) are (1) curriculum (what to teach) and (2) pedagogy (how to teach). In this chapter, we systematically review and critique the "child-centered" approach (CCA) to early childhood curriculum (ECC) and pedagogy and advocate consideration rather than dismissal of the "teacher-directed" approach (TDA) as another critical contributor to children's learning experiences. First, we briefly introduce the origin and evolution of the CCA. Second, we reflect on the major criticisms of CCA. Last, we introduce the "dual-centeredness" hybrid theory (Li, 2005) that acknowledges the central and complementary roles of both the teachers and children in the educational process.

The "CCA": A Historical Review

Child-Centered Pedagogy

Child-centered pedagogy is generally referred to as a method or style of instruction that revolves around supporting children as active learners rather than passive recipients of teaching. Thus, it is viewed as respecting children's interests and needs and bringing them closer to their true nature (e.g., sense of curiosity, need to explore and play) rather than imposing authoritarian methods of domination over them. In this way, child-centeredness is viewed "as a deeply sensitive middle ground, between ignoring children and dominating them completely" (Baker, 1998, p. 155).

Prior to the emergence of child-centered pedagogy, a similar concept, learner-centered education, had already been conceptualized by John Locke (1632–1734), an English philosopher and physician in the 17th century. As part of his idea of experiential education, Locke believed that one would learn prominently through experience and that children should be permitted to explore and experience learning through natural and meaningful activities, such as play. Child-centered pedagogy resembles Locke's beliefs. According to Fallace (2015), "Child-centered pedagogy emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries from the innovative ideas and techniques of European philosophers Jean Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Froebel, Johann

Heinrich Pestolozzi, and Johann Herbart" (p. 74). Notably, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), a Swiss-born philosopher, propounded his unconventional ideas about educating the "natural man" unadulterated by the corruption of modern society in his book *Émile*. Specifically, Rousseau detailed a novel yet innovative form of education centering on a child's interests, needs, and experiences. As an example, he provided the child, *Émile*, the autonomy to explore, interact with, and understand nature as a way to be naturally educated.

By the 20th century, the influence of child-centered pedagogy has spread widely throughout the world as a powerful educational force (Fallace, 2015). Most notably, John Dewey, an American philosopher and progressive education reformer, emerged as the most influential figure of the CCA during the first half of the 20th century. Dewey (1938) posited the philosophy of fundamental unity in that there is an intimate and necessary symbiotic relationship between the process of actual experience and education. This relationship requires a child-centered curriculum connecting the content and the child's world, thereby creating more meaningful and authentic learning experiences for the child. However, critics have argued that the curriculum cannot and should not depend solely on the individual development and interests of the child. For instance, even though Dewey claimed that the CCA focused on child development, critics still saw it as being too open and lacking rigor, failing to systematically deliver the knowledge and skills needed to promote children's academic success (Edmondson, 2006). In the same vein, it is argued that the child-centered curriculum is not reliable for providing the knowledge necessary to educate the child intellectually, and thus, it may be considered "anti-intellectual" (Pieratt, 2010). Nevertheless, despite much criticism, Dewey's idea endures as one of the most influential forces in the education field locally (in the United States) and globally. In fact, integrating Dewey's philosophy on progressive education, education reformers, politicians, scholars, and practitioners in developing countries have aggressively promoted project-based learning and a child-centered curriculum since the turn of this millennium. In particular, while being criticized by some and praised by others, CCA has re-emerged as a powerful global ideology.

Despite the influence of the CCA in contemporary practices, there is no consensus on its definition. In fact, from their extensive review of the literature on the contemporary usage of the CCA in the early childhood (EC) field, Chung and Walsh (2000) revealed 40 different definitions. Nevertheless, most EC educators appear to have a shared ideological understanding of the CCA, placing the child at the center of all teaching and learning activities (Chung & Walsh, 2000). Particularly, Chung and Walsh synthesized the literature revealing that during the late 1930s to the 1980s, three major meanings of the "child-centered pedagogy" emerged: (1) Fröbel's idea of the child being at the front and center of one's world, (2) the developmental view of the child being at the center of education, and (3) the progressive education ideology (e.g., Dewey's) that the child should initiate and direct one's own learning activities. These three central meanings of the

child-centered pedagogy collectively reflect the underlying ideology of the child as simply the most active player in one's own education.

Delineating the CCA further, Ryan (2005) offered a formal, summative definition of a child-centered education as relying on a curriculum that begins with addressing the unique needs and interests of the individual child and the specific developmental profile of childhood. Correspondingly, the teachers' role is to apply their knowledge of child development to orchestrate optimal learning experiences for children through play, discovery, and inquiry. In turn, children are perceived as active and not passive learners who are given the "freedom to choose" by their teachers to freely explore and learn independently, through which they understand the world in which they live (Ryan, 2005).

Since the 1980s and particularly the 1990s, developing countries, especially those in the East, have imported the CCA from the West to supplant their deeply ingrained teacher-centered didactic approach through which teachers impart knowledge to students (Li et al., 2012). In particular, education authorities in Chinese societies, such as Hong Kong, mainland China, and Singapore, have implemented large-scale reforms to legitimize the CCA in early childhood education (ECE). However, this bold move has not thoroughly considered the culturally and contextually appropriateness of the CCA and, thus, has encountered myriad concerns, arguments, and challenges. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that the sociocultural and educational ideologies as well as available resources in Chinese societies are too different from those of North America to allow the CCA approach to ECC and pedagogy to become viable there (Chen et al., 2017; Li, 2005; Li et al., 2011, 2012). For instance, the CCA applied in integrated curricula (e.g., active hands-on learning, individualized teaching) requires certain conditions and resources to be operable (e.g., structural and managerial changes, more open space, smaller classes), which are neither available nor possible in China. For this reason, some scholars (e.g., Li, 2005; O'Donoghue, 1994) do not think that the CCA is functional in countries like China; instead, they advocate a teacher-centered, formalistic approach that is more contextually appropriate for these regions. Despite continuous controversies, the CCA has been globally promoted as a universal archetype in ECE.

The CCA as a Universal Approach

Holding the CCA in high esteem, international aid organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, which is now known officially as the United Nations Children's Fund) have been avidly promoting this model across the globe, especially in Asia, Africa, and other developing regions (Shah, 2019). Moreover, given that the ideology of child-centered education is derived from the West, by endorsing it, these international organizations may be seen as promoting Western liberal democracy and values (Tabulawa, 2003).

The endorsement of the CCA in certain countries may reflect their treatment of it as a solution to their various societal and educational issues. For instance, the CCA is viewed as democracy-promoting because it emphasizes equality in teacher-student relationships (Shah, 2019). Furthermore, according to Schweisfurth (2011), the promotion of child-centered education around the globe is regarded as a traveling policy, transferred from country to country in the developing world to hopefully solve such historically intractable issues as poverty and political authoritarianism, to increase levels of foreign investment or to extend democratization" (p. 427). However, despite the apparent benefits of the CCA to society, scholars (e.g., Nykiel-Herbert, 2004; Tabulawa, 2003) around the globe have also critiqued child-centered education as endorsing a "one-size-fits-all approach" and fulfilling the interests of those international organizations that promote it. Furthermore, the universality and globalization of child-centered education represent the West's political and ideological domination over the rest of the world. Additionally, the widespread hailing of this approach in other parts of the world may also be considered as allowing educational colonialism by the Western world.

One of the most globally influential manifestations of child-centered ideologies is developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) originated from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the largest national organization devoted to ECE in the United States. Viewed as embodying the child-centered ideology to its full extent, DAP has become the dominant pedagogical force in the United States and other developed countries (e.g., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) (Ryan, 2005).

Cannella (1997) asserted that before the emergence of DAP, the ideology of child-centered pedagogy was not criticized easily because it was founded on progressive beliefs, including democracy and personal freedom. However, the harshest criticisms rushed in until child-centered pedagogy was manifested in DAP, as described in NAEYC's 1996 position statement (Brooker, 2005). However, the U.S.-derived DAP framework is not universally applicable to other cultural contexts, such as China and Hong Kong, where teacher-directed instruction still reigns supreme. In particular, the last two decades have witnessed increased criticisms about the appropriateness of the child-centered pedagogy for developing countries in the East, with sociocultural realities, educational traditions, and available resources being different from the West, where the CCA could easily flourish. A thorough discussion and critique of the DAP framework can be found in Chapter 4.

Criticisms of the Child-centered Approach

While child-centered pedagogy may be beneficial in some ways by allowing children the freedom to pursue their own natural learning interests and needs, it is also problematic in other ways. The first problem is that child-centered pedagogy benefits children from middle-class backgrounds more than

their counterparts from working-class backgrounds (Doddington & Hilton, 2007; Power et al., 2018). The second problem is that by presenting children with the authority and liberty to learn on their own, child-centered pedagogy seemingly disempowers teachers to serve as the overt disciplinary authority to maintain order in the classroom (Doddington & Hilton, 2007). Finally, the third problem is that child-centered pedagogy is so open-ended and dependent on children's individual experiences, interests, and inquiries, that the instructional procedures of the teaching-learning process are not well defined, and thus, the CCA imposes challenges for teachers to learn to identify and then build on children's interests to develop lessons and learning activities accordingly (Mili, 2018). Thus, the emphasis solely on child-centered education would miss teacher-directed knowledge and skills not acquired by children on their own.

Despite its support for the CCA to curriculum and pedagogy, the most recent iteration of the DAP framework has also recognized the instrumental role of teacher-directedness in certain learning situations:

> While all learning is child-centered, some strategies involve more direction on the part of the child and others on the part of the teacher. When needed, the teacher can be more proactive or directive. Strategies may be used as most appropriate for the situation.
>
> (Masterson, 2022, p. 184)

This recognition attests to a greater understanding of the contextual importance of teacher-directed instruction as a way to address children's particular needs.

For more than three decades, criticisms of the CCA also abound, despite the continuous endorsement of this approach as critical to promoting optimal child development and learning by leading educators in many parts of the world. Just as the CCA has been adopted by many countries, the notion of child-centeredness has been vigorously examined, researched, and critiqued from various angles by scholars across the globe, including in Australia (e.g., Clark, 1989; Davies, 1989a, b; MacNaughton, 1997), Britain (e.g., Steedman, 1985, 1987; Walkerdine, 1985, 1990), Canada (e.g., Langford, 2010; Norquay, 1999), Hong Kong (Chen et al., 2017), the Netherlands (e.g., Singer, 1996, 2005), and the United States (Brooker, 2005; Cannella, 1997; Graue, 2005). In the following section, we review some critical critiques of child-centered pedagogy by Langford (2010) as an example of criticisms of the CCA.

Lanford's Three Critiques of Child-centered Pedagogy

Lanford (2010) reviewed the literature and elucidated three major critiques of child-centered pedagogy to reposition the important place of the female professional, who has been treated as a technician and facing social inequities, in ECE.

Landford's Critique #1: "The Powerless Female Teacher and Child"

This critique can be traced back to the 1960s and the 1970s when "some feminist educators endorsed child-centered pedagogy as a liberal democratic initiative to implement equality into curriculum projects in classrooms" (Langford, 2010, p. 114). Additionally, "feminists regarded the teaching profession as an opportunity for women to work, to move beyond 'their class', to gain independence and thus as a liberatory course of action" (Langford, 2010, p. 115). Unfortunately, implementing child-centered pedagogy proved to be a tall order, as female teachers struggled internally with the unattainability of child-centeredness. Feeling responsible for meeting the needs of all individual children at all times, the child-centered teacher may face situations where child-centered pedagogy is unimplementable and teacher-directed strategies are called upon. In such circumstances, the teachers' failures to engage in child-centered pedagogy would be interpreted as guilty of being incapable of realizing modernist ideologies (Walkerdine, 1990). Furthermore, Walkerdine (1990) found it particularly problematic that in child-centeredness, females and children are positioned socially in terms of power relations that create "the free male child and constrain and regulate the activities of female teachers and girls" (p. 24). Walkerdine characterized the teacher, who is typically female, as the one who passively fulfills the developmental and learning needs of the child who is an active knowledge constructor. Walkerdine further believed that

> [t]his opposition of the passive teacher to the active child is necessary to support the possibility of the illusion of autonomy and control upon which child-centered pedagogy is founded. The capacity for nurturance becomes the basis for women's fitness for the facilitation of knowing and the reproduction of the knower, which is the support for, and yet opposite of, the production of knowledge.
>
> (p. 61)

Furthermore, the sphere of child-centeredness is interpreted as male privileged, centering on males and constraining females (Cannella, 1997; Clark, 1989; MacNaughton, 1997; Walkerdine, 1985) in such a way that the gendered dichotomies between males and females encourage boys to be stereotypically independent explorers and active knowledge constructors while reinforcing feminine qualities (e.g., conformity, propriety) for girls. This disposition was also found in Clark's (1989) study of more than 40 primary and EC teachers who enacted child-centered pedagogy in such a way that they espoused the individuality aspect of child-centeredness while simultaneously endorsing gender lines that thwarted girls from success in their own. Essentially, child-centered pedagogy does not provide equitable education for boys and girls because it is only central to and appropriate to the needs of boys. MacNaughton (1997) suggested that a potentially feasible solution would be to empower teachers to intervene in the gendered

educational experiences of boys and girls. Ironically, the ECE settings are often viewed as "feminized" due to the preponderance of teachers being female, yet by enacting the liberal, progressive CCA, early schooling is confronted with another problem: being essentially "masculinized" and leaving female teachers and girls in passive and disempowered positions (Cannella, 1997).

Landford's Critique #2: "The Free and Individual Child: An Illusionary and Decontextualized Construct"

According to Langford (2010), child-centered pedagogy is meant for each child (typically male) to freely pursue his own needs and interests, but feminist critics believe that both female and male children are constrained by the choices of activities by others, such as teachers and peers. Thus, in reality, the "free and individual child" can only be constructed as an illusion. For example, in child-centered pedagogy, the teacher purportedly learns the needs and interests of individual children by conducting continuous observations of their learning and development (Langford, 2010). However, Walkerdine (1990) viewed that, in reality, these observations would actually serve as a means for covertly oppressing or molding nontypical children, especially those from impoverished and racial minority backgrounds, into what they considered "rational" individuals. In this case, the child-centered teacher appears to have some power over these children. Thus, CCAs do not actually equate to total freedom, as they are still immersed in social control and regulation by adult authority (Cannella, 1997).

   Nonetheless, child-centered pedagogy is hailed as an integral DAP and thus presents an ideal approach for all to follow. In analyzing the original DAP[1] framework published in the 1980s, scholars (e.g., Delpit, 1995; Henry, 1996) raised concerns about the mainstream child-centered pedagogy being rather not developmentally appropriate for promoting academic achievement in racial minorities, such as African American and African Canadian children. The reason is that child-centered pedagogy "is very much a White-Centred discourse in that it shares many attributes and effects of White privilege" (Norquay, 1999, p. 194). Consequently, when implemented with racial minorities, child-centered pedagogy tends to "deracialize" the child from one's social context and imposes Whiteness and a "White-centered" educational approach on these children (Norquay, 1999).

Landford's Critique #3: "The Absence of Authentic Social Relationships"

Langford's (2010) third critique of child-centered pedagogy lies in the lack of authentic teacher-child relationships. According to Landford, child-centered pedagogy breaks rather than builds strong teacher-child relationships in EC settings. Researchers also share this concern in other countries, such as the Netherlands (e.g., Singer, 1996, 2005) and the United

States (e.g., Brooker, 2005; Graue, 2005). For example, in child-centered pedagogy, while the teachers' roles may be observer and facilitator, their participation in children's educational experiences is limited. Instead, child-centered pedagogy requires teachers to promote children's independence in playing and learning freely according to their own interests and needs with minimal teacher intervention, limiting the opportunities for teachers to develop meaningful relationships with children. Adult interventions and support are particularly necessary for children who need them, which become minimal in child-centered pedagogy (Graue, 2005). Brooker (2005) further presented the picture of child-centered pedagogy as mostly encouraging the child to engage in the solitary endeavor of learning, exploration, and knowledge construction. This approach aligns with Piaget's individual context of learning but discounts Vygotsky's view of learning as socially constructed among individuals, such as in knowledge co-construction between the teacher and children (Brooker, 2005). In sum, child-centered pedagogy appears to distance teachers from fully developing authentic social relationships with children in the classroom and providing needed support to scaffold the learning and development of these children, especially those who need it. In this case, as an alternative, teacher-directed pedagogy may complement child-centered pedagogy to provide a context for fostering meaningful teacher-child relationships.

From the TDA to the CCA: A Historical Perspective

The emergence of the TDA in education can be traced to the 19th century in Europe. In the 19th century, a "new education" reform promoted the TDA named Herbartianism after German educator Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) and affected compulsory education in Germany, Hungary, and other European countries. Herbart proposed that teachers should be the center of teaching, whereas students should learn from teachers responsible for planning and delivering instruction. This campaign promoted the ideology of "teacher-directedness" and became a global trend in the late 19th century. Subsequently, Ivan Andreyevich Kairov (1893–1978), a Soviet educator, further developed the teacher-centered approach to explicitly suggest that the teacher should be the designer and master of teaching in such a way that it precedes students' learning. In turn, students' learning is guided and led by teachers' instruction. Deeply influenced by Herbart and Kairov, most countries in the world then began promoting the TDA. China was no exception, as it followed the suit of the Soviet educational system and practices. Consequently, Chinese teachers have dominated EC classrooms with well-planned teaching activities, upholding the belief that the teachers were at the center of all instruction, actively transmitting knowledge to students who were treated as passive receivers of such knowledge. While this teacher-centered ideology matches the collectivist orientation of Chinese culture that reveres authority, it inevitably disregards students' individual learning interests and needs.

The TDA did not last long. The tide turned in the early 20th century when John Dewey introduced the "CCA" as a notable feature of his progressive education ideology, which swept through China. Chinese scholars and practitioners immediately took to this innovative concept because it was a contrasting perspective to the "teacher-centered" Herbartianism. The two polar approaches (teacher-centered and child-centered) may be understood from the geocentric and heliocentric theories in astronomy. The geocentric theory positions the Earth at the center of the universe, with the Sun, Moon, stars, and planets all orbiting it. Dewey's introduction of the CCA as more fitting than the TDA in promoting student learning was like the "Copernican Revolution," representing a paradigm shift in astronomy from the geocentric theory to the heliocentric theory (ascribing the Sun rather than the Earth as the center of the universe around which the Earth and other planets orbit). The two polar astronomic theories may be used as a metaphor for identifying the central object of the universe. In the 19th century, the TDA could be likened to the Earth, perceived as located at the center of the universe as described in the "geocentric" theory. Since the 20th century, the CCA has been equated to the Sun as the center of the universe in the heliocentric theory.

In contemporary ECE, child-centered pedagogy originated from the West and reigns supreme in the global sphere, as it has been promoted in many developing countries, especially those in the East. For those Eastern societies, such as China, Hong Kong, and Singapore, this promotion represents a paradigm shift from the TDA to the CCA and a philosophical belief that young children's instinctive interests and needs should be at the center of all teaching. However pedagogically innovative and philosophically sound, this paradigm shift seems problematic because it steers directly from one extreme (the TDA) to another extreme (the CCA). Moreover, the extremist perspective of the CCA reveals no room for negotiation, requiring teachers to turn over the authority of instruction to children to merely serve as observers and facilitators of student learning.

"Child-Centered" Pedagogy vs. "Teacher-Directed" Pedagogy

Inherent Differences

The discourses on child-centered and teacher-directed pedagogies have treated these two types of pedagogy as binary and implied that one is better than the other. In contemporary ECE, child-centered pedagogy has been hailed as the better one. In this section, we delineate the inherent differences between the two types of pedagogy and the empirical evidence on the lack of implementation success of child-centered pedagogy in Chinese societies as an example to illustrate the problematic aspects of this progressive educational model.

Li et al. (2012) defined pedagogy as the strategies or style of instruction. Of particular relevance are two prominent types: (1) the traditional

teacher-directed Chinese pedagogy and (2) the contemporary child-centered EC pedagogy (Chen et al., 2017). The main inherent difference between these two types of pedagogy lies in the degree of freedom and control over the teaching-learning process, with the teacher being the dominant force in dictating learning in teacher-directed pedagogy and the children having the control and freedom over their own learning in child-centered pedagogy (Chen et al., 2017; Li et al., 2012). As pedagogy does not occur in a vacuum, it can be understood as being crafted, situated, and established in accordance with cultural norms and societal expectations.

Notably, as defined by Chen et al. (2017), Chinese pedagogy is cast as "a specific instructional model to teaching and learning that is profoundly influenced by traditional Chinese cultural values and extensively practiced in classrooms in Chinese societies," and contemporary EC pedagogy originated from the West is accordingly influenced by Western cultural values (p. 325). Furthermore, Chen et al. characterized the inherent differences between the two pedagogical methods in this way:

> Due to their unique cultural roots, traditional Chinese pedagogy and contemporary early childhood pedagogy can be conceptualized as distinct in terms of philosophy (didacticism vs. constructivism), epistemological beliefs (knowledge transmission vs. knowledge construction), theory (behaviorist vs. constructivist), and practice (teacher-directedness vs. child centeredness).
>
> (p. 326)

Chen et al. (2017) described traditional Chinese pedagogy according to these four areas in this way: (1) philosophically, it is cast as didactic/instructive; (2) epistemologically, it is one in which the teachers play the role of knowledge transmitter imparting "correct" academic and moral information meant for learners to acquire, memorize, and then practice; (3) theoretically, it reflects the behavioral treatment of the child as a passive recipient of knowledge; and (4) finally, all of these philosophical, epistemological, and theoretical perspectives are collectively mirrored in practices involving mostly teacher-directedness. Teacher-directed practices, in turn, contrast diametrically with child-centered practices so dominant in ECE in Western societies and reflective of Western cultural values, such as the development of individuality and the promotion of child-initiated explorations and project- and play-based learning (Chen et al., 2017; Li et al., 2012). The Project Approach and the High/Scope Curriculum derived from the United States, as well as the Reggio Emilia Approach and the Montessori Method from Italy, are just a few globally renowned forms of child-centered pedagogy promoted fervently in Chinese societies. For example, in Chinese societies, especially mainland China and Hong Kong, policymakers and reform leaders have chosen to follow the global trend by importing child-centered curricula and pedagogy in their ECE reforms.

Child-Centered Reform Policy in Hong Kong as a Case Example

Since the 1990s, the major direction of EC reform in Hong Kong has focused on introducing and implementing a child-centered curriculum and pedagogy. The education authorities and local scholars have avidly advocated progressive educational ideologies of child-centered curriculum guidelines. Accordingly, "child-centeredness" has become the most significant keyword in the various versions of Guidelines to Pre-primary Curriculum in Hong Kong (The Curriculum Development Council, 2006, 2017; The Curriculum Development Institute, 1996). The notion of child-centeredness has been promoted as empowering children with the freedom to initiate, control, and regulate their own learning.

Like the magical phrase "Open Sesame!" from the classic story of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" that opens the magic door, revealing a cave containing a treasure hidden by the 40 thieves, "child-centeredness" has been treated as the magic of "advanced ideology and practice" that unlocks the hidden treasure of children's developmental and learning potential. Unfortunately, however, lacking successful implementation fidelity (e.g., Chen & Li, 2022; Chen et al., 2017; Li et al., 2012), the notion of child-centeredness has become only a "sound bite" and slogan in Hong Kong, where the traditional TDA continues to serve as the dominant method of instruction there. Thus, in this context, the large-scale reform and implementation of CCA are bound to be counterproductive and self-defeating. There are at least two main reasons for this defeat.

First, CCA is inconsistent with traditional Chinese culture, which highly values social rather than individual interests and upholds collectivism rather than individualism. Furthermore, the East and the West differ significantly in their value orientations: Society vs. Person. The CCA originated from the framework of individualism and thus overtly emphasized individual interests and needs. Unfortunately, implementing imported CCA into Chinese EC classrooms undermines collectivism and social interests deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Consequently, attempts at superseding TDA with the CCA may be viewed as an act of "shooting ourselves in the foot."

Second, child-centeredness does not mean child sensitivity. In an individual interview with Lillian Katz, a professor emerita of ECE at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, when she visited Hong Kong in 2003, she commented, "[C]hild-centered approach is nonsense; instead, we should promote the child-sensitive approach. Early childhood curriculum and pedagogy should be sensitive to young children's interests, developmental levels, and learning needs." The message was that Chinese societies should promote a child-sensitive approach rather than a CCA.

Empirical Evidence

In light of the paradigm shift from traditional TDA to innovative CCA in Chinese societies, Li and his research team (e.g., Chen et al., 2017; Li et al.,

2012) have analyzed the implementation of the CCA vs. the TDA there. For example, Li et al. (2012) examined pedagogical practices of early literacy in several carefully selected classrooms in Shenzhen (China), Hong Kong, and Singapore. This first comparison of Chinese classrooms has generated empirical evidence to help settle the debate between the CCA and the TDA by uncovering that the CCA has not been implemented with fidelity in these Chinese classrooms. Furthermore, in exploring the actual pedagogies in EC classrooms in these three Chinese societies, which formed a spectrum of cultural openness and Westernization, Li et al. found a hybrid of the CCA and the TDA at play: teacher-directed whole-class theme-based teaching mixed with child-centered individual and group learning activities. Li et al. further uncovered that while the theme-based instruction was prioritized, the nature and conduct of the other activities reflected the teachers' application of the CCA, including engaging children in question-and-answer interactions and encouraging them to share their viewpoints and vote for their favorite characters in the story. Moreover, while the Project Approach was implemented in Hong Kong and Singapore kindergartens, it was conducted in a teacher-directed manner (Li et al., 2012). Similarly, Chen et al. (2017) also found that the Project Approach implemented in a typical Hong Kong kindergarten was conducted in a hybrid method (teacher-directed and child-centered). The major reason for the lack of implementability in these Chinese classrooms is that the imported CCA and its underlying ideologies conflict with traditional Chinese culture and contextual circumstances, such as the examination-oriented and competitive education system, parental expectations of academic achievement, and contextual limitations (e.g., time limitation, teachers' own emotional insecurity), all which are nearly impossible to eradicate or supersede in Chinese societies (Chen et al., 2017; Li et al., 2012).

In a more recent study, Li et al. (2020) found that Hong Kong kindergarten teachers created reciprocal and constructive relationships with children during knowledge construction and delivery, inviting them to express their own ideas or opinions. However, they also found that the teachers conducted direct instruction quite frequently because they had to complete the knowledge transmission process and gain control over the classroom in the process. In addition, they found a significant "belief-practice gap": the teachers claimed during the interview that they supported the CCA, but in actual classroom observations, they were found quite teacher-directed in practice. Taken together, Li et al. (2020) concluded that a hybrid of teacher-directed instruction and child-centered constructive interaction was the mainstream in the Hong Kong EC classrooms in their study.

The aforementioned findings give rise to a case of balancing two binary ends: TDA versus CCA. They also suggest that direct transplantation of Western curriculum pedagogy into Chinese classrooms is not considered appropriate due to social, cultural, and contextual incompatibilities. Instead, one should recognize that cultural tradition and social values serve as both assets and liabilities for developing EC pedagogy in the age of globalization.

In this connection, child-centered curriculum and pedagogy should be continuously re-examined, re-conceptualized, and re-considered as to whether and how it may suit the local culture, tradition, and educational context and capitalize them as assets rather than liabilities.

The Dual-Centeredness Theory: A Dynamic View of the Classroom Dynamics

Like the "geocentric" and "heliocentric" theories debated by astronomers, scholars, and philosophers, the TDA and the CCA have also been contested from different perspectives. However, unlike the geocentric and heliocentric models, the TDA and the CCA can be right or wrong depending on the context within which they operate. Therefore, viewing instruction as neither exclusively based on the TDA nor the CCA, we believe that the duality of centeredness or the co-existence of both the TDA and the CCA may be the most proper characterization of the reality in many EC settings globally.

To date, the most debatable issue regarding ECC reform in Chinese societies, especially in Hong Kong and China, is how to seek a balance between the TDA and the CCA. In the past three decades, most Chinese scholars and policymakers have been optimistically promoting the CCA imported from the United States, and all the teachers have been urged to implement it. Unfortunately, the actual results of this implementation are not so optimistic. Over the years, although EC teachers generally accepted the concept of child-centeredness, they have had difficulties putting it into practice (Chen et al., 2017; Li et al., 2012). Some are even reluctant, resistant, and unwilling to implement it in their classrooms.

Li (2005) critically analyzed the problem underlying the implementation of the CCA in China and proposed a new theoretical framework—namely, the dual-centeredness (child-centered and teacher-centered) theory as the central representation of the reality in ECE in China and other similar cultural contexts. This section presents an English version of this dual-centeredness conceptualization that helped to settle the debate of the TDA vs. the CCA.

The Dual-Centeredness Theory

According to Li (2005), the dual-centeredness theory advocates that there are two parallel processes of teaching and learning, like "a coin with two sides": teaching and student learning are the two simultaneous processes led by teachers and students, respectively. On the one side, teachers are the masters and the center of teaching, and on the other side, students are the owners and the center of their own learning. Furthermore, the roles played by teachers and students are reciprocal and complementary. In particular, teachers are the subject during the teaching process, while students are the object. In contrast, during the student learning process, teachers are the object,

whereas students are the subject. This theory captures the complex yet dynamic dual nature involving teaching and student learning.

As an example of the dual-centeredness theory, we describe the daily teaching and learning activities in one typical Hong Kong EC classroom. These activities demonstrate three types of teacher-child relationships. First, during the circle time or theme-based whole-class teaching period, the teacher plans, prepares, and delivers instruction, thus becoming central to the teaching-learning process. Under this circumstance, the teacher plays a leading role, reflecting the teacher-centered approach. Second, during small-group learning activities, children are assigned to work in small groups to accomplish the tasks planned and prepared by the teacher. Under this circumstance, the teacher initially plays a leading role in assigning children to small groups and orchestrating learning activities. However, the decisions concerning how group members work collaboratively to complete the tasks are left up to the children. Thus, small-group activities attest to the teacher-centered and child-centered duality. Third, during free play and individual learning time, the teacher serves as an observer and facilitator while children decide on and initiate their own learning activities. In this situation, children become the masters and authors of their own learning, reflecting the CCA. The daily routine of a typical kindergarten in Hong Kong usually includes the aforementioned three situations, with each accounting for one-third of the daily time. Moreover, as most Hong Kong kindergartens operate a half-day mode (three hours per day), they tend to divide the time equally across the three classroom activities: one-hour teacher-centered, one-hour child-centered, and the remaining hour a dual-centeredness approach, combining teacher-centeredness and child-centeredness into one activity.

This dual-centeredness theory suggests that neither Herbart's teacher-centered approach nor Dewey's CCA is adequate in capturing the complexities involved in the teaching and learning process of the aforementioned Hong Kong case for three main reasons. First, with respect to teacher-centeredness and child-centeredness, each represents only a one-sided view of the same coin, which does not appear to acknowledge the existence of the other view. Second, both approaches interpret pedagogy as a one-way epistemological relationship between teaching and student learning. The TDA views students as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge from the teacher as the expert. Whereas, the CCA relegates the role of the teacher to the sidelines in favor of supporting children's autonomy, freedom, and control of initiating their own learning and constructing their own knowledge. Third, it is too simplistic to ascribe the dynamic pedagogical interactions as either teacher-centered ("geocentric") or child-centered ("heliocentric") with the teacher or the child orbiting around the other. Just like the rotational relationship between the Sun and the Earth, the teacher-child relationship in pedagogy is also dynamic and complex. This complexity reflects the teaching and student learning as situational, involving both child-centeredness and teacher-centeredness to accomplish their respective purposes and intentions.

The Middle Way as Potentially the Best Way

The "Doctrine of the Mean" or the Middle Way reflects the teachings of Confucian's *Zhongyong* (中庸) and Buddhism as the best way to obtain harmony and prosperity. For instance, Chinese people strive to seek a middle ground when resolving conflicts to maintain harmony (Chen et al., 2017). As a Chinese cultural virtue rooted in Confucianism, the Middle Way has been applied in human interactions in all fields, including philosophy, politics, economy, culture, education, ecology, and even daily life. Furthermore, the Middle Way has become the basic law used to resolve contradictions between society and nature. This basic law becomes the emblematic force necessary for balancing the participation of two separate yet interwoven actors in the teaching-learning process—namely, the teachers and children. Thus, the Middle Way may be cast as reflecting the dual-centeredness theory. It has also been found in what Weikart (2000) identified as the "open frame" type of ECC model: both the teacher and children are at the center of teaching and learning with high levels of engagement.

Conclusion

Child-centered pedagogy has had more than a three-century history marked by acclamation and progress, as well as controversies and critiques. While child-centered pedagogy is endorsed globally, especially in Chinese societies, empirical evidence has demonstrated that due to cultural, social, and contextual incompatibilities, it has not rendered success in these societies. The fundamental problem lies in the pedagogical discourse that apparently demarcates child-centeredness and teacher-centeredness into a binary. In reviewing conceptual and empirical evidence, we conclude that in treating the notion of centeredness, both the teacher and children are at the center of the educational process to fulfill their respective roles and functions. The Middle Way (combining both child-centeredness and teacher-directedness) is perhaps the most optimal in providing children a well-rounded educational experience drawing on both the knowledge imparted from the teacher and that constructed by the child through one's own self-directed exploration and discovery.

Note

1 See Chapter 4 for an extensive, historical review and discussion of DAP.

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3 Constructivism and Instructivism in Early Childhood Curriculum

Critiques and Reflections

Philip Hui Li and Jennifer J. Chen

Constructivism: A Historical Review

What Is Constructivism?

Constructivism is a theoretical framework for explaining how knowledge is generated and how students learn. This framework has dominated the field of learning science over the past few decades (Li et al., 2020; Solomon, 1994). Individuals who endorse constructivism are known as constructivists (e.g., Piaget, Vygotsky). Constructivists believe that knowledge is constructed through individual and social interactions with the world. They also believe that knowledge construction reflects one's perspective and values (Kincheloe, 2000). In understanding how children learn, constructivists assume that they are constructors of their knowledge through their own experiences (Piaget, 1963) and social interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, learning is regarded as an active, contextualized, constructive, and cognitive process. For instance, children may create their own subjective or objective reality and experiment with it through individual and/or social experiences. However, many factors can affect how children construct their knowledge, including cultural influences (Solomon, 1994).

According to the idea of constructivism, children's learning environments are social in nature and, thus, should promote group cooperation with peer support and employ various measures and resources to achieve targeted learning and solve daily problems (Wilson, 1996). In addition, the constructivist-oriented classroom reflects considerations of the physical environment, classroom management, child and teacher roles, language and communication channels, child choices, children's interaction with content, and evaluation of children's learning. DeVries and Zan (1994) summarized the characteristics of the constructivist classroom as including three main components: (1) organization: focusing on meeting children's needs, encouraging peer interaction, and promoting children's responsibility; (2) activities: catering to children's learning interests, encouraging active experimentation, and promoting cooperation; and (3) the role of the teacher and the relationship with children: promoting the construction of knowledge, interpersonal understanding and cooperation, and moral values.

During the past century, constructivism has been further elaborated by the three theoretical giants: Piaget, Vygotsky, and Freire. However, their unique views about how knowledge is understood, assessed, and delivered differ. For example, Piaget's (1963) theory of cognitive development highlights the qualitative differences in children's knowledge construction processes according to the stages of their development. Vygotsky (1978) believed that child development, learning, and knowledge acquisition are embedded in the social and cultural contexts within which young children live and learn. Freire (1994) further elucidated that knowledge is obtained when young children gather to exchange ideas, share problems, and make meaning of their experiences. A common theme among Piaget, Vygotsky, and Freire lies in their understanding of the process of inquiry and knowledge creation, through which children explore and learn. Accordingly, "constructive" experiences should include individual learning experiences, problem-based activities, project-oriented inquiry, peer dialogues, and teacher-student interactions that help children make sense of the subject matter, introduce them to diverse sources of knowledge, and provide them with opportunities to convey their understanding through multiple means (Ampadu & Danso, 2018).

Development vs. Learning: Which One Comes First?

Many, if not all, scholars and educators agree that development and learning are intertwined. However, they may disagree on which one influences which. Perhaps a clear example of this discordance is between Piaget and Vygotsky. Specifically, Piaget believed that children's development precedes their learning, whereas Vygotsky espoused that learning precedes development. Highlighting the decisive role of genetics in development, Piaget (1963) endorsed that development is an unfolding process preprogrammed by a child's genetic makeup. In contrast, Vygotsky (1978) explained that learning is affected by social, cultural, and historical factors.

Constructivism: Piaget vs. Vygotsky

In education, perhaps the most cited classical theorists of constructivism are Piaget and Vygotsky. While both their theories converged on constructivism, Piaget and Vygotsky also upheld divergent perspectives.

On the matter of development and learning, there are nine major distinctions in view between Piaget and Vygotsky:

1. **The defining characteristics**: Piaget theorized distinct developmental stages, asserting that development drives learning, whereas Vygotsky believed in social processes, viewing learning as the driver of development.
2. **The mechanism of development**: Piaget believed that cognitive development is influenced by one's ability to engage in processes, especially assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration, which are considered universal across all children. He also asserted that a child is not comparable to a

"miniature adult" because a child is qualitatively different from an adult in development. In contrast, Vygotsky believed that child development is variable across cultures and the social interactions are key to cognitive development.

3. **The nature of learning**: Piaget believed that learning is solitary and individualized (e.g., learning through active construction of one's experience), whereas Vygotsky viewed learning as social and contextualized (e.g., learning through social interaction with others).

4. **The driving source for early development**: Piaget believed in the importance of maturation and conflicts, whereas Vygotsky endorsed social interactions with others (e.g., peers, parents, teachers, and other adults) as key to one's development.

5. **The roles of language**: Piaget supposed that thought precedes language, whereas Vygotsky suggested that language drives thought.

6. **The role of the child**: Piaget believed that a child is an active independent constructor of knowledge through individual interaction with the world, whereas Vygotsky asserted that a child learns through social interaction with others.

7. **The role of the teacher**: Piaget believed that teachers should provide an environment conducive for children to individually explore, investigate, and experiment with ideas. Particularly, Piaget's (1963) cognitive development theory suggests that children develop differently at different stages. As such, teachers should try their best to understand the children's unique experiences and ways of thinking at their individual developmental stage and engage them in learning activities that can address their developmental needs at that stage. In contrast, Vygotsky suggested that teachers should involve learners in socially organized activities and provide developmentally appropriate scaffoldings to them. Particularly, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory focuses on the critical role of culture and social interactions in shaping knowledge construction. This theory views child development as a socially mediated process through which a child acquires cultural values, social beliefs, and problem-solving and learning strategies from others. Accordingly, this view gives importance to children's interactions with caregivers, peers, teachers, and the material world as optimal for their cognitive development. Vygotsky defined each child's potential for cognitive development as occurring within their zone of proximal development (ZPD), referring to as a process in which young children achieve new learning through the help of a more competent individual (e.g., the teacher, more advanced peers) that they would not have otherwise learned independently. From this perspective, cooperative learning, mixed-ability groups of children, and mixed-age tutoring could effectively promote cognitive growth in children within their individual ZPD through scaffolding.

8. **The nature of readiness**: Piaget believed that the genetics and biological stages of development decide when children are ready to learn

independently, whereas Vygotsky suggested that children could perform within their ZPD through proper scaffoldings.

9. **The role of biology**: Piaget suggested that maturation dictates developmental progression, whereas Vygotsky believed that children are born already with some innate mental capacities for learning (e.g., perception, memory).

As the preceding nine points highlighted, both Piaget and Vygotsky contributed uniquely to understanding development and learning. However, neither theorist's view could serve as the singularly correct one, and neither alone could tell the whole story. Nevertheless, the contrasting viewpoints held by Piaget and Vygotsky can be potentially resolved by arriving at a middle ground in a process that combines both ideas to provide a greater understanding of child development and learning.

The Myths about Constructivism

Although constructivism is a well-recognized and adopted framework in education, there are widespread myths about this concept. We highlight three here. The first myth is that constructivism is equivalent to child-centeredness. For example, according to Baines and Stanley (2000), constructivism has been regarded as child-centered rather than subject-centered or teacher-centered. Constructivism, however, is not the same as the various child-centered teaching approaches that have emerged and been practiced over the centuries. For instance, Rousseau and Dewey advocated that teachers should minimize their interference with children's "natural" development. However, constructivist approaches to teaching also include having teachers engage directly with children to co-construct knowledge, reflecting a balance between teacher-directed and student-centered learning.

The second myth concerning constructivism is that teachers need not be experts in specific content areas (Baines & Stanley, 2000). Quite the contrary, constructivist teaching puts high demands on teachers' understanding of the subject. Constructivist classrooms demonstrate the importance of deep subject knowledge required of the teacher.

The third myth is that there are no wrong answers to a problem and that students personalize their own knowledge. Holt-Reynolds (2000) portrayed a situation where a prospective English teacher endorsing constructivism encouraged her students to develop their own interpretations of the story, regardless of the accuracy or fidelity of their interpretations. Quite the contrary, effective constructivist teaching actually does involve applying certain standards to evaluate the accuracy of ideas.

Constructivism vs. Instructivism

This section compares and contrasts the two big theoretical frameworks: constructivism and instructivism. Each framework explains how children learn and how teachers should teach accordingly.

Constructivism vs. Instructivism

Traditional teaching in Chinese societies is dominated by teacher-directed instruction, known as instructivism (Cai et al., 2021). The instructivism perspective holds that children must learn a fixed amount of knowledge directly from their teachers, textbooks, and other sources (Kaymakamoglu, 2018). Accordingly, teachers are expected to serve as transmitters of ideas and knowledge directly to their students through a well-planned, teacher-directed curriculum and pedagogy. However, because of its focus on teachers and their teaching, instructivism leaves little room for children to learn creatively and independently. Perhaps the key problem is that instructivism is based on the view that knowledge is transmitted and knowledge construction is directed by the teacher.

In contrast, constructivist approaches to teaching and student learning promote processes, such as problem-based learning and project-based inquiry. For example, the constructivist teacher encourages children to explore answers to a problem independently and collaboratively with peers. Constructivists highly value problem-solving and inquiry-based learning activities. In the process, children can explore and experiment with their ideas, make conclusions and inferences, and communicate their knowledge via multiple means. Bruner (1966) stated that a constructivist pedagogical approach should address four main points: (1) learning tendencies, (2) the structure of knowledge so that children can easily grasp it, (3) the most effective order of material presentation, and (4) the types and paces of rewards and punishments to motivate student learning.

Because of the presumed and confirmed benefits of constructivism for children's development and learning, scholars and international governmental constituents have been actively promoting constructivist ideas with great enthusiasm. The widespread constructivism is particularly salient in early childhood education (ECE), leading some societies, such as China and Hong Kong, to adjust their curriculum and pedagogical landscape. Unfortunately, this constructivist movement has not been successful in certain countries that embrace instructivism, as explained by the case studies of China and Singapore later in this chapter.

Toward a Fusion of Constructivism and Instructivism

Constructivism emphasizes that children actively construct knowledge through their own experiences and interactions with others and the environment, whereas instructivism views learning as a process of direct knowledge transfer or dissemination (Yin et al., 2020). Accordingly, the constructivist classroom is child-centered, inquiry-oriented, and process-driven (Li et al., 2012). In contrast, the instructivist classroom is teacher-led, academic-centered, whole-class, and product-oriented (Lee & Yelland, 2017). As constructivist approaches to education are promoted globally, they have also inspired early childhood curriculum (ECC) reforms, especially

in Asian societies, such as mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore (Huang et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020; Yin et al., 2020).

The Case of China

Constructivism has been promoted in ECE reforms by education authorities in China and is widely accepted by Chinese teachers (Huang et al., 2019; Li et al., 2012; Rao et al., 2010; Yin et al., 2020), whereas instructivism has been heavily critiqued by education authorities (Huang et al., 2019). However, the endorsement of constructivism in the traditional Chinese context can result in two gaps: (1) the policy-practice gap and (2) the belief-practice gap. A solution to these gaps involves a fusion of constructivism and instructivism (Huang et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020; Yin et al., 2020). Cai et al. (2021) conducted a mixed-methods study to evaluate whether the fusion of these two frameworks in pedagogy could be observed in the block-building activities in Chinese classrooms. They found that the six-phase of the *Engineer Design Process* (EDP) could be observed in the teacher-child dialogues in Chinese block-building activities. However, these researchers also uncovered that Chinese kindergarten teachers focused more on knowledge transmission and paid less attention to the *test* phase in EDP, such as collecting and analyzing data and defining or modifying specifications. This finding corroborated Huang et al.'s (2019) finding, revealing that Chinese teachers emphasized knowledge transmission while promoting knowledge construction.

The fusion of constructivism and instructivism found in Chinese kindergartens might have reflected Chinese early childhood teachers' training in the instructivist approach in their teacher education programs (Huang et al., 2019). Accordingly, Chinese teachers engaged in knowledge transmission in a domain-based approach, leaving little time for and attention to children's learning through the trial and error process. However, some evidence of constructivism was also reported by Cai et al. (2021), who identified that the top three types of strategies were "*invite opinions or ideas*," "*propose action or inquiry activity*," and "*state agreement or position*." These strategies were employed to invite young children to contribute their ideas to the EDP and engage them in the action proposal and scientific inquiry. In this way, young children could express their ideas during debate. Consequently, young children learned to "*build on or clarify others' contributions*" and "*make other relevant contributions.*" This finding provides evidence of constructivism during block-building activities. Despite so, Cai et al. also found that direct instruction was still effective in Chinese block-building activities as it was in literacy classes found in other studies (Huang et al., 2019; Yin et al., 2020).

The Case of Singapore

Singapore is a multiracial and multicultural society with a mixed composition of ethnic Chinese, Malays, and ethnic Indians forming most of its

population. This society highly values meritocracy and education, understands the importance of ECE, and strives for quality ECE to give every child a good start (Goy, 2017). Accordingly, the education authorities have launched a wave of reform to improve the overall quality of ECE, as evident in the new curriculum framework, "Nurturing Early Learners: A Curriculum Framework for Kindergartens in Singapore" (NEL), released in 2012. Six fundamental principles were proposed: "integrated approach to learning, teachers as facilitators of learning, engaging children in learning through purposeful play, authentic learning through quality interactions, children as constructors of knowledge, and holistic development" (MOE, 2012, p. 25). However, inspired by progressive constructivism, applying these constructivist methods has posed challenges to Singapore's early childhood teachers who have been engaged in traditional pedagogical practices. In particular, the education authorities have revised the Chinese curriculum syllabus to promote child-centered pedagogy in early childhood classrooms (Tan, 2006). This revised syllabus highly values young children's active role and needs in learning, following developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) guidelines from the United States. Additionally, "NEL Framework for Mother Tongue Languages: Chinese" issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2014 followed the same trend. Accordingly, young children are regarded as curious and active learners who are encouraged to learn Chinese by participating in various relevant activities (MOE, 2014). This Chinese language framework (MOE, 2014) has further confirmed the six constructivism principles proposed in the original NEL framework (MOE, 2012).

Yin et al. (2020) conducted a mixed-methods study on Chinese literacy pedagogy in Singapore, revealing that the main patterns included knowledge delivery, factual content-dominated dialogue, and monotonous, teacher-dominated discussion. These researchers believed that these methods aligned with instructivism. However, they also identified some constructivism elements in teacher dialogues, including engaging children in talking and discussion and crafting the dialogue content according to a chosen theme and the children's learning interests. They concluded that a fusion of constructivist and instructivist classroom dialogic approaches emerged. The dominating pattern of "discussion as the form, instruction as the function" demonstrated the substantial influence of constructivism and instructivism among kindergarten teachers' practices in Singapore (Yin et al., 2020, p. 595).

Yin et al.'s (2020) finding suggests that Singapore's early childhood classrooms are still in the process of transitioning from instructivism to constructivism. This means that there may be an incongruence between constructivism advocated by the state system and instructivism evident in the context of elite politics. In this situation, policymakers in Singapore might consider refining the ECC to suit local conditions, especially in early Chinese education, because simply transplanting constructivism to the Singapore context can create a gap between policymakers' positioning and teachers' understanding. A doable solution may be to hybridize constructivist and instructivist pedagogies into a localized and balanced fusion.

The Fusion of Constructivism and Instructivism

Both the case of block-building activities in China (Cai et al., 2021) and the case of Chinese literacy pedagogy in Singapore suggest that constructivism and instructivism actually coexist in early childhood classrooms. This phenomenon has also been previously identified. For instance, Rao et al. (2010) found a unique pedagogy reflecting a fusion of traditional Chinese beliefs and contemporary notions of DAP in Hong Kong kindergartens. Moreover, they associated this fusion with the influences of various cultural-contextual factors. Li et al. (2012) also found that Beijing, Hong Kong, and Singapore all implemented progressive, innovative pedagogies (e.g., child-centered) from European-American contexts with traditional Chinese pedagogy (e.g., teacher-directed) into a unique fusion of the two types of pedagogy.

Similarly, Chen et al. (2017) found that the Project Approach in a Hong Kong kindergarten was transformed into a hybrid of traditional Chinese and progressive contemporary pedagogies. These researchers further uncovered that this fusion appeared to have been engendered by the teachers' practical considerations of their contextual realities, such as time limitations, curriculum demands, and parental expectations. In light of these findings, Chen et al. concluded that hybrid pedagogy appeared to be an optimal solution to balance local contextual needs with globally promoted innovative approaches. In another study, Cheung (2017) also found a hybrid of teacher-directed and child-centered approaches in Hong Kong kindergartens. This fusion approach of constructivism and instructivism to balance local and global educational needs has also been found in other studies of Chinese societies: mainland China (Huang et al., 2019), Hong Kong (Li et al., 2020), and Singapore (Yin et al., 2020). All of the convergent evidence revealed by these studies suggest that neither constructivism nor instructivism is superior to the other, and thus, there is no one best way to approach teaching and student learning, but there is always a *Middle* Way (avoiding all extremist views). The discussion in this chapter attests that the Middle Way is a hybrid of constructivism and instructivism in early childhood pedagogical practices. To illustrate the concept of the Middle Way, we apply the metaphor of the pendulum swing, as shown in Figure 3.1.

The Pendulum Never Stops

History may repeat itself; everything can find its origin or clues to its past. A historical review of the educational reforms in the past century indicates a consistent pattern best represented by a pendulum that swings back and forth and from side to side (Li, 2005). The United States, for instance, has gone through many educational reforms in the past 100 years in the effects of ebb and flow like a pendulum swing, keep moving and never stopping. For example, Dewey's progressive education of experimental learning and constructivist approaches to education emerged in the early 1900s in the United States and was later replaced by the behaviorism school (i.e., programmed
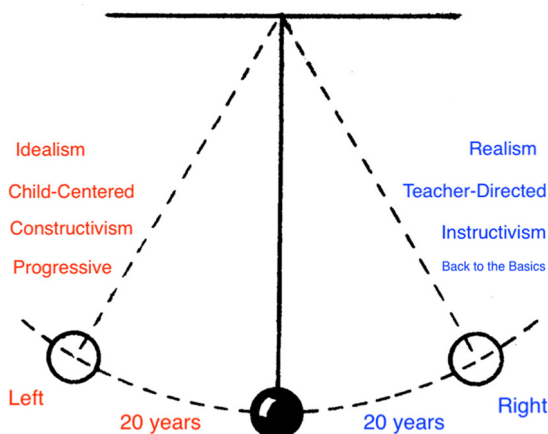
Figure 3.1 The pendulum of educational reforms in the United States and China.
Source: (Li, 2005, p. 6).

teaching, instructional-based theory) around the 1950s. Later, the "back to basics" education movement in the 1970s focused on teaching and strengthening students' skill acquisition of the three Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic) to improve their educational outcomes. This movement can be considered employing an instructivist approach to teaching and student learning. In ECE in the United States, however, the instructivist and academically driven approach was quickly counteracted by the call for the constructivist-based DAP first advocated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children in the late 1980s (Bredekamp, 1987; NAEYC, 1986) (A more detailed discussion of this advocacy, history, and evaluation of DAP can be found in Chapter 4). Since the 1980s, guided by the DAP framework, the approach to ECE in the United States has swung back to Dewey's progressive education ideologies. This pendulum swinging back may be interpreted as an intentional effort to revitalize constructivism and relinquish instructivism in ECE in the United States.

Similarly, China has also gone through swinging processes in its own education reforms. When John Dewey visited China in the early 1900s, he left behind progressive education ideologies, which subsequently inspired a 40-year process of Americanization of education in China until the early 1950s. When the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, the new regime decided to learn from the former Soviet Union and started another 40-year process of Sovietization of education in China. Then when China opened the door to the world, another 40-year process of Americanization of education commenced and was in full swing. However, neither Americanization nor Sovietization of education in China has been socially, culturally, and contextually appropriate, as China has its own unique history, which requires a unique education reform plan and implementation

that reflects the country's social, cultural, and contextual merits and circumstances. In fact, the *middle* position of the pendulum is the most stable and efficient and, thus, represents the best way. However, choosing the Middle Way does not mean that we do not change and transform our ideas and practices. Instead, we must learn from history and its associated lessons to achieve the most constructive education system for children. For now, a balance between globalization and localization (giving rise to glocalization) and between constructivism and instructivism appears to be the most optimal *middle* ground.

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4 Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Education

What's Missing?

Jennifer J. Chen and Philip Hui Li

The Origin and Definition of DAP

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is a theoretical and practical framework conceived, delivered, and nurtured developmentally by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the United States. According to its website (https://www.naeyc.org/about-us), NAEYC is the largest professional association in the field of early childhood education (ECE), comprising about 60,000 members (as of 2022) dedicated to the education and care of young children from birth to age 8.[1] Considering that all of NAEYC's position statements on DAP and related book publications proclaim developmental theory as the foundation on which DAP is built, it is imperative that we define the concept of development at the outset. *Development* may be defined generally as changes in a human being in different areas (e.g., physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, language) over one's life span. *Child development* in terms of DAP may then be referred to as changes occurring in children during the early years from birth to age 8 (as designated by NAEYC). In its latest position statement reinforcing the definition of DAP, NAEYC (2020) operationalized it "as methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning" (p. 5). Accordingly, concepts such as intentional teaching, play-based learning, child-centered learning experiences, and joyful learning are quintessential characteristics of DAP.

DAP is not a new concept, especially in the developmental science field. This point was acknowledged in NAEYC's (2022) latest edition of the DAP book: "The concept of *developmentally appropriate* was not new, having been used by developmental psychologists for years about age-related and individual human variation" (p. xvii). Nonetheless, the DAP framework has been made especially popular during the last nearly four decades by the four iterations of its position statement and book. Since the very first publication of its position statement (NAEYC, 1986) and its subsequent DAP book (Bredekamp, 1987), NAEYC has revisited and updated its position statement (1996, 2009, 2020) and DAP book (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2022) once about every decade. In

the United States, the DAP framework appears to have quickly become an archetype of effective, intentional methods to promote optimal development and learning in young children. Accordingly, it has been serving as the gold standard for early childhood (EC) teacher education programs to implement, especially in the United States.

A Review of the History of DAP: Conceptualization, Evolution, and Advancement

With its intentionally well-crafted position statements and related book publications, the DAP framework has exerted tremendous influence on ECE in the United States and beyond. The DAP framework is so influential that many EC educators have regarded its book as the "bible" of the field. However, just as it focuses on child development, the DAP framework has also experienced its own development and growth over time. Figure 4.1 summarizes the significant evolution of the DAP framework as becoming more refined both conceptually and practically over time, reflecting a more advanced knowledge base and contextual changes. Likewise, each iteration of the position statement on DAP and its accompanying book reflects the knowledge and context at a particular point in time. For example, NAEYC (2020) underscored that "[e]ach edition [of the position statement on DAP] has reflected the context and research of its time, striving to correct common misinterpretations and to disseminate current understandings based on emerging science and professional knowledge" (p. 33).

The 1980s was a pivotal era marked by some key education reforms in the United States. It started with the policy document, *A Nation at Risk*, authored by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983, detailing the failure of American schools to educate students for success and, thus, providing recommendations for educational improvement. In the wake of this watershed moment in the history of American education, the
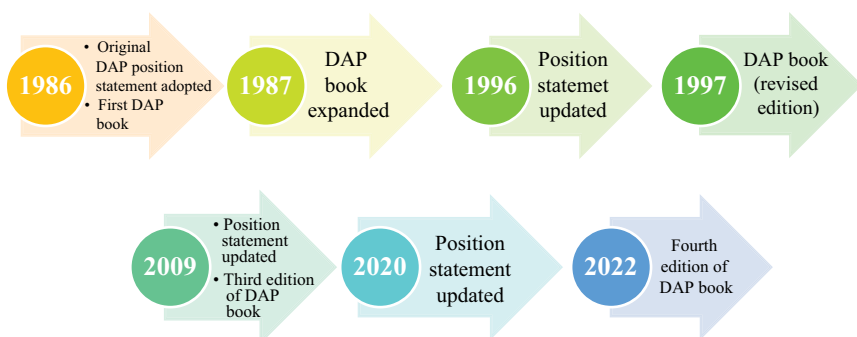
Figure 4.1 The timeline of the evolution of DAP.

Source: (see NAEYC, 2022, p. xvii, for its own delineation and representation of the timeline).

education system responded by increasing its emphasis on academic instruction. Notably, it created an education movement encouraging a "pushdown" curriculum focusing on formal, explicit academic content skills (e.g., numeracy, literacy) from elementary grades to kindergarten and even preschool programs. This pushdown curriculum had implications for the nature of operation in ECE (Miller & Almon, 2009) and was considered not developmentally appropriate for young children (e.g., Elkind, 1986, 1987; NAEYC, 1986). While the curriculum pushdown movement engendered concerns for educators, it also provided an impetus for action from the EC community.

Leading the effort, NAEYC offered a fitting solution to counteract the pushdown curriculum force, guiding the EC field. The solution was the formulation of the DAP framework described in a position statement in 1986 (NAEYC, 1986) and in its first expanded version of the DAP book in 1987 (Bredekamp, 1987). These documents represented concerted efforts to address the increased inappropriate pedagogical practices and curriculum expectations for the growing number of preschoolers in EC settings. Advocating against the artificial approach of instituting the pushdown curriculum to accelerate young children's learning progress, the DAP documents conveyed the message that teachers and parents should not force children to achieve what they were not developmentally ready for. Instead, a suggestion was to implement DAP by designing preschool environments and learning experiences around exploratory play-based activities (Bredekamp, 1987; NAEYC, 1986).

In addition to counteracting the pushdown curriculum with the DAP framework, NAEYC addressed another necessity simultaneously, involving offering specific directions for seekers of program accreditation by delineating DAP criteria for a national voluntary program accreditation system launched in the 1980s (NAEYC, 1984a, 1984b). In its latest revision of the position statement on DAP, NAEYC (2020) described that although the term "developmentally appropriate" was permeated throughout the accreditation criteria, initial program visits demonstrated a wide range of interpretations of this term. Consequently, it strived to provide a common "language" for the EC field.

For example, the DAP guidelines (NAEYC, 1986) asserted that academically driven expectations and the didactic method of teaching generally associated with the educational process in elementary grades were not developmentally appropriate for young children. Thus, they provided an affirming voice to educators struggling with the academically-oriented climate in their work with young children and served as a bulwark against the strong pushdown curriculum force.

NAEYC's opposing position on the pushdown curriculum and its resultant solution by innovating the DAP framework subsequently garnered fervent support from the EC community. For example, David Elkind (1986, 1987) cautioned the "miseducation" of preschool children across the United States, noting that whether in schools or homes, preschoolers were being

inappropriately provided with formalized academic instruction and inculcation meant for elementary school-age children. In his classic books, *The Hurried Child* (1981) and *Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk* (1987), Elkind delivered a powerful censure on the pushdown curriculum and the like that forced children to "grow up" academically faster than they were ready. Furthermore, Elkind (1987) also underscored other deleterious consequences. For instance, due to being "miseducated," young children could experience stress from academic pressure and little learning benefits.

The original position statement on DAP (NAEYC, 1986) focused on countering the inappropriateness of the pushdown curriculum by delineating the DAP framework as a viable and vital solution for guiding EC educators in delivering high-quality EC experiences, which would be appropriate for young children's development and learning. However, as an initial effort, the original statement on DAP targeted only educators of 4- and 5-year-olds (NAEYC, 1986). It was quickly expanded to include the entire spectrum of early years (birth through age 8) (NAEYC, 1986). In addition to guiding practice, both the original and expanded versions of the DAP framework were also meant to provide a common language within the EC field (NAEYC, 2020).

Central to the original DAP framework were two core considerations: age-appropriateness (typical patterns of development in various areas for different age groups) and (2) individual-appropriateness (individual-specific patterns of development) (see Table 4.1). Accordingly, the initial DAP guidelines encouraged teachers to ensure that classroom expectations and curricula would flexibly match the children's individual needs at their developmental levels rather than conform to rigid academic demands (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989). In the context of the DAP framework, Teacher-directed experiences were viewed as counterproductive to young children's learning. In contrast, child-initiated/child-directed activities were considered optimal because they corresponded to children's intrinsic motivation to learn and make sense of their environment and the world in which they live (Bredekamp, 1987; Elkind, 1987). Reflecting this viewpoint, not surprisingly, the original DAP book (Bredekamp, 1987) provided examples that favored child-directed learning as the "correct" way of educating young children. Thus, the child-centeredness approach became a hallmark of the DAP framework. As cited by Dickinson (2002), one suggestion for practice in the 1987 version of the DAP book was that "[t]he correct way to teach young children is not to lecture or verbally instruct them. Teachers of young children are more like guides or facilitators" (p. 52). This example and the like appeared to convey a singular universal standard of what would be considered DAP. Sally Lubeck (1998), one of the avid critics of the DAP framework, questioned in her article, "Is developmentally appropriate practice for everyone?" Lubeck noted that DAP guidelines assumed homogeneity in everyone, suggesting that they were applicable more or less to everyone and, thus, were used as the standards for judging the quality of educators' practices.

In this case, heterogeneity or diversity is neglected in this discourse; for instance, cultural and individual differences of children were not considered when judging the appropriateness of a teaching practice.

It was not until a decade later, with the release of the revised edition (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), that this "correctness" mentality began to shift to reflect an increased awareness of diversity and the need to provide high-quality early learning experiences to children from different backgrounds. Considering the complexity and variability in how young children develop and learn, a salient hallmark of the revised edition was the paradigm shift "from either/or to both/and thinking in early childhood practice" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 23). While this shift represented an effort to strike a balance between teacher-directedness and child-centeredness in practice, it retained many of the same features as the original version. For instance, both the original (Bredekamp, 1987) and the revised version (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) of the DAP book continued to list the normative developmental milestones for children and dichotomized practices into either "appropriate" or "inappropriate," thereby obfuscating the dynamic complexity of teachers' decision-making and teaching practices as well as the heterogeneity of children's development and learning.

Another decade later since the revised DAP publication, came the third edition of the DAP book (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) with a comparatively stronger emphasis on the complex mosaic of diversity among young children and their families, including children from all culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, English language learners, and learners with special needs. It appeared that the conceptualization of DAP with each revised edition became increasingly more sensitive and appropriate at addressing heterogeneity in child development and learning as well as diversity in children's background characteristics. The fourth and latest revision of the DAP book represents the most open-minded conceptualization of the DAP framework by focusing more extensively on some key features, such as the importance of context and *both/and* thinking in implementing DAP.

Although well-meaning in translating developmental theory and research into practice for educators to follow, the first three editions of the DAP book grouped examples of practices into two contrasting categories, as summarized in Table 4.1. Notably, the original DAP book (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) provided examples of classroom practices considered appropriate or inappropriate for typically developing young children. The revised version of DAP (Bredekamp, 1987) continued to offer contrasting examples of DAP and developmentally inappropriate practice (DIP) with young children, seemingly demarcating between what EC educators should do (DAP) and what they should not do (DIP). This approach appeared to render a prescription of pedagogical practice for EC educators. Specifically, in the first two editions of the DAP book, examples of "Appropriate Practices" and "Inappropriate Practices" for each age group were juxtaposed in two table columns. The third edition of the DAP book (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) similarly

Table 4.1 Comparisons across the four editions of the DAP books

DAP	First Edition (1986) Edited by Bredekamp	Expanded Edition (1987) Edited by Bredekamp	Revised Edition (1997) Edited by Bredekamp and Copple	Third Edition (2009) Edited by Copple and Bredekamp	Fourth Edition (2022) by NAEYC Contributed by various authors
Title	Developmentally Appropriate Practice	Developmentally Appropriate Practice	Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs	Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs: Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8	Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs: Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8
Content Coverage	Part 1: "NAEYC Position statement on DAP" (adopted in 1986) Part 2 including development during the first 3 years of life, examples of appropriate practice for infants and toddlers, a chart of developmental milestones of children from birth to age 3 Part 3 describes appropriate and inappropriate practices for infants and toddlers Part 4 provides NAEYC's position statement on DAP in programs for 4- and 5-year-olds	Expanded version of the first edition: Added sections on DAPs for 3-year-olds and children in the primary grades	Part I: "NAEYC Position Statement: *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*" (Adopted in 1996) Part 2: "Developmentally Appropriate Practice: The Early Childhood Teacher as Decisionmaker" Part 3: "Developmentally Appropriate Practice for Infants and Toddlers" Subsections including: • "*Developmental Milestones of Children from Birth to age 3*" • "*Examples of Appropriate and Inappropriate Practices for Infants*" • "*Examples of Appropriate and Inappropriate Practices for Toddlers*" Part 4: "Developmentally Appropriate Practice for 3-through 5-Year-Olds" Subsections including: • "*Development and Learning in Children Age 3 through 5*" • "*Examples of Appropriate and Inappropriate Practices for 3-through 5-year-Olds*" Part 5: "Developmentally Appropriate Practice for 5-through 8-Year-Olds in the Primary Grades" Subsections including: • "*Development and Learning in Primary-Age Children*" • "*Examples of Appropriate and Inappropriate Practices for 6- through 8-year-Olds*"	"NAEYC Position Statement" (adopted in 2009) Part 1: "NAEYC Position Statement" Part 2: "The Infant and Toddler Years" including "Development in the First Three Years of Life" and "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in the Infant and Toddler Years-Ages 0–3: Examples to Consider" Part 3: "The Preschool Years" including "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in the Preschool Years – Ages 3-5: An Overview" and "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in the Preschool Years – Ages 3–5: Examples to Consider" Part 4: "The Kindergarten Year" including "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in the Kindergarten Year – Ages 5–6: An Overview" and "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in the Kindergarten Year – Ages 5–6: Examples to Consider" Part 5: "The Primary Grades" including "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in the Primary Grades – Ages 6–8: An Overview" and "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in the Primary Grades – Ages 6–8: Examples to Consider" "Frequently Asked Questions about Developmentally Appropriate Practice"	"NAEYC Position" Statement (adopted in 2020) Part 1: "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Context" including five chapters: 1. "Intentional Teaching: Complex Decision-Making and the Core Considerations" 2. "The Principles in Practice: Understanding Child Development and Learning in Context" 3. "Context Matters: Reframing Teaching in Early Childhood Education" 4. "Teaching Content in Early Childhood Education" 5. The Power of Playful Learning in the Early Childhood Setting" Part 2: "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Action" 6. "Creating a Caring, Equitable Community of Learners" 7. "Engaging in Reciprocal Partnerships with Families and Fostering Community Connections" 8. "Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children's Development and Learning" 9. "Teaching to enhance Each Child's Development and Learning" 10. "Planning and Implementing an Engaging Curriculum to Achieve Meaningful Goals" 11. "Demonstrating Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator"

Framing and reframing of the term "best practices"	The term "best practice" was used	The term "best practice" was used	"Moving from either/or to both/and thinking in early childhood practice" The term "best practice" was used	"Moving from either/or to both/and thinking in early childhood practice" The term "best practice" was used	"Moving from either/or to both/and thinking in early childhood practice" The term "best Practice" was NOT used and was reframed
Core considerations	• Commonality: Age-appropriateness • Individuality: Individual-appropriateness	• Commonality: Age-appropriateness • Individuality: Individual-appropriateness	• Commonality: Age-appropriateness • Individuality: Individual-appropriateness • Context: Contextual (socially and culturally)-appropriateness	• Commonality: Age-appropriateness • Individuality: Individual-appropriateness • Context: Contextual (socially and culturally)-appropriateness	• Commonality: Age-appropriateness • Individuality: Individual-appropriateness • Context: Contextual (socially and culturally)-appropriateness
Framing of practices into two contrasting categories	• "Appropriate Practices" • "Inappropriate Practices"	• "Appropriate Practices" • "Inappropriate Practices"	• "Appropriate Practices" • "Inappropriate Practices"	• "Developmentally appropriate" • "In contrast"	• "Examples of Developmentally Appropriate Practices" • "Examples of Practices to Avoid"

contained two columns of practical examples for each age group, with the headings of "Developmentally Appropriate" and "In Contrast," denoting contrastive practices. Similarly, in the fourth edition of the DAP book (NAEYC, 2022), a table was divided into two columns juxtaposing "Examples of Developmentally Appropriate Practices" and "Examples of Practices to Avoid" for each age group. However, unlike the previous three editions that explicitly dichotomized practices into two types as a means of contrast, this most recent one encourages educators to understand what practices are considered developmentally appropriate and what practices to avoid in context. Building on the emphasis on context as an important factor in understanding developmental appropriateness in practice as highlighted in the latest edition of the DAP book, we further underscore cross-cultural differences as such a critical context. For instance, there are ECE practices judged appropriate in one culture but inappropriate in another culture. Therefore, we caution that the appropriateness of ECE practices must be culturally and contextually defined and measured.

The Developmental Theory Undergirding DAP

The DAP framework is recognized as being grounded in developmental theory, especially reflecting the work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Although Piaget and Vygotsky converged on the fact that they were both regarded as constructivists and their theories were grounded in the tradition of constructivism, they diverged in their views on the relationship between development and learning (see Chapter 3, for a detailed comparison). Notably, Piaget asserted development as a necessary condition that precedes learning, whereas Vygotsky affirmed the contrary: social learning precedes development.

Piaget's and Vygotsky's different perspectives are also reflected in their varying interpretations of knowledge construction. Piaget (1971a) believed that knowledge is constructed through individual experiences and that children actively construct knowledge and the reality of the world by interacting with their environment. Accordingly, the role of the teachers is to support the children's active engagement in learning by structuring the classroom environment and designing active learning experiences (e.g., child-centered, hands-on, inquiry-based) that meet each child's stage of development and facilitate his or her independent learning process without overt instruction. In contrast, Vygotsky (1934/1986) asserted that knowledge is constructed through social interactions with others, a process through which development and learning are facilitated. Accordingly, Vygotsky (1978) recognized the vital role of teachers and advocated teacher scaffolded instruction within the zone of proximal development (ZPD), defined as the optimal level of performance between what a child can achieve independently and what he or she can potentially achieve with assistance. Teacher scaffolding is critical because it provides an impetus for optimizing children's development at a higher level that may be impossible by simply

waiting for such development to unfold at its own pace, as believed by Piaget. The latest iteration of DAP (NAEYC, 2020, 2022) shows vestiges of the developmental theories of both Piaget and Vygotsky. For instance, it promotes the regularity of learning as involving child-initiated activities and teacher scaffolding.

Criticisms of the Earlier Editions of the DAP Framework

When the concept of DAP was debuted in NAECYC's initial position statement in 1986 and its subsequent expanded book publication in 1987 (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), the DAP framework made quite a splash in the EC community as a welcome alternative to the pushdown curriculum and, relatedly the academic-driven, direct instructional climate. Reflecting this paradigm shift, the DAP framework emphasizes the congruence between the curriculum and the children because curricular instruction that exceeds the child's current developmental level is understood as leading to minimal gains, if any; and worse, decreasing learning engagement and motivation while increasing stress and creating undue emotional burdens on the child (Bredekamp, 1987; Elkind, 1987). Despite its timely and significant contributions to the EC field, the original DAP framework also made waves in the research/academic community by prompting scholars' intense scrutiny and critical analysis. For example, scholars (e.g., Jipson, 1991; Lubeck, 1998; Mallory & New, 1994a; Walsh, 1991) began to critique the different aspects of the DAP framework.

The major criticisms of the original position statement may be grouped into four areas: (1) concerns about favoring Piaget's developmental theory and lacking other theoretical perspectives, (2) the imposition of a universality model of child development, (3) the incongruence between DAP and expectations of minority groups, and (4) the lack of attention on context. These criticisms concern mostly the original position statement and DAP book, some of which may still be relevant to the revised and the third iteration. Understandably, the first attempt of anything represents a trial and error learning curve, with each subsequent attempt getting better and better. Thus, the first edition of the DAP book receiving the most criticism is perhaps not surprising. In fact, subsequent editions did "listen to" and appropriately addressed some criticisms. Currently, to our knowledge, there have not been published criticisms of the fourth edition of the DAP book. It may be because it has only debuted for less than a year as of October 2022. More importantly, it may also be because it has addressed previously raised criticisms to represent the most advanced and refined version, as we shall discuss later in this chapter.

We must revisit criticisms of earlier iterations of the DAP position statement for two reasons. First, much of the national research (e.g., Charlesworth et al., 1991; 1993; Jones & Gullo, 1999; McMullen, 1999; Mitchell & Hegde, 2007; Vartuli, 1999) has built on the original conceptualization of DAP, so has much of the international research (e.g., Haroun & Weshah, 2009;

Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Hoot et al., 1996). Second, these earlier criticisms provide a ground on which we analyze the current edition of the DAP book (NAEYC, 2022) to assess what refinements it might have made and how.

The Emphasis on Piaget's Theory as the Theoretical Foundation

NAEYC (1986, Bredekamp, 1987) originally proclaimed that the DAP framework was informed by developmental theory. However, it was premised largely and narrowly on Piaget's constructivist understanding of child development and learning normed on Western, White, and middle-class children (Lubeck, 1996; O'Brien, 1993). Accordingly, the original version of DAP vehemently advocated child-directed learning and informal practices as the most developmentally appropriate while paying little attention to structured learning and formal instruction as they were considered developmentally inappropriate (e.g., Fowell & Lawton, 1992; Jipson, 1991; Lubeck, 1998; Walsh, 1991). By not considering alternatives or contradictory theoretical perspectives, the developmental theory derived from Piaget's ideas cannot be proven the most appropriate for understanding child development to guide practice.

To reconcile favoritism toward Piaget's developmental theory and, relatedly, the child-centered pedagogical approach highlighted in the original position statement on DAP, the revised position statement (NAEYC, 1986) reflected ideas from both Piaget's and Vygotsky's constructivist perspectives. Importantly, it made an intentional attempt to shift away from the "*either/or*" paradigm as characterized in the original position statement (NAEYC, 1986) to embrace the "*both/and*" conceptualization in practice. An example is that "[c]hildren construct their understanding of concepts, **and** they benefit from instruction by more competent peers and adults" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 23). This example acknowledges the benefits of child-centered and teacher-directed/scaffolded learning experiences. The DAP's *both/and* approach is also supported by other scholars. For example, Epstein (2014) asserted that instructional decisions should be made according to specific learning goals so that teachers intentionally engage children in child-centered experiences to teach certain skills and adult-guided/directed activities to potentially benefit children's learning of a particular content more effectively. Furthermore, this balanced approach to instructional decisions and practices afford greater flexibility and freedom to choose from an expansive toolbox of what they may consider most effective in meeting their children's learning needs to achieve particular goals in a lesson.

The *both/and* approach to teachers' decision-making has been advocated in the last three editions of the DAP book (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2022). This idea is reflected even more strongly in the latest edition of the DAP book (NAEYC, 2022), highlighting that teacher-directed learning activities can also be

developmentally appropriate in certain contexts, such as learning specific content concepts that cannot be accomplished by children on their own (NAEYC, 2022). Examples of the *both/and* approach in the latest DAP framework (NAEYC, 2022) include, "Children benefit *both* from engaging in self-initiated, spontaneous play *and* from teacher-planned and structured activities, projects, and experiences" and "Children benefit *both* from engaging in self-initiated, spontaneous play *and* from teacher-planned and structured activities, projects, and experiences" (p. 8). This *both/and* perspective legitimates teacher-directed instruction as holding a particular place in certain learning situations as developmentally appropriate for young children.

The Imposition of a Universal Model of Child Development

Scholars (e.g., Charlesworth, 1998; Fowell & Lawton, 1992; Jipson, 1991, Kessler, 1991; Lubeck, 1996) were concerned about the original DAP framework as imposing a universal model of child development while neglecting cultural perspectives and developmental variations. Lubeck (1996) debated that because DAP guidelines impressed on others as the only "correct" way of interpreting and doing things, they revealed the problematic nature of "a universal practice premised on a universal theory of development" (p. 147). Because teaching is not as simple as seeking the correct answers from the students but rather is highly contextualized and individualized, the inherent complexity associated with teaching attests to the idea that a theory or a set of general principles is just not likely to be universally applicable (Goffin, 1996; Katz, 1996; Lubeck, 1996). Furthermore, Carta et al. (1991) found that the DAP guidelines restricted alternatives and options for teaching children with disabilities and, thus, they were important but insufficient to inform efforts in planning, delivering, and evaluating EC special education services for these children. These findings highlight the complexity embedded within each teaching situation and the diversity of children's characteristics as countering the universalization of child development implied by the original conceptualization of the DAP framework.

The universal model is viewed as suggesting that all possibilities of child learning and teaching are to be measured against some normative, developmental categories (i.e., appropriate vs. inappropriate) and that there is a seemingly objectivist, "codified body of knowledge" by which EC professionals should abide and from which any deviation would be considered inappropriate (Lubeck, 1998, p. 288). Scholars (e.g., Delpit, 1988; Lubeck, 1998) contended that this very insistent institutionalization of one *correct* way of doing things is dangerous because it seeks to "silence" those with different points of view and, thus, creates a hierarchical hegemony structure where the presumably more knowledgeable individuals have the power to convey knowledge to the rest (Lubeck, 1998). Arguing against passing on

uniform developmental standards to teacher candidates in teacher education, Lubeck (1996) advocated instead for "a dialogic model of teaching and teacher education – calls attention to the "inherently polysemous" nature of human existence. There are many ways of understanding how children develop and learn, many ways to teach, and a range of curricular options" (p. 147). This pluralistic orientation also aligns with the Reggio Emilia approach that encourages children's various representations of their understanding (see Chapter 8).

The universal model is consistent with modernist assumptions about scientific knowledge being objective, absolute, and applicable across all cultures. By implication, the application of Piaget's developmental theory aligns with a universal worldview. Specifically, Piaget's theory suggests that children go through some homogeneous, predictable sequences or stages of developmental change during different periods of their lives. Premised on this universal model, it is assumed that there is a clear developmental trajectory, facilitated by "universally" appropriate standards of practice. Hence, the original DAP guidelines (Bredekamp, 1987) dichotomized practices into two opposites: DAP (e.g., child-centered learning activities) as reflecting Piaget's developmental theory and DIP (e.g., teacher-directed learning activities) as reflecting a behavioral theory. However, this dualism of practices leaves no room for alternatives (Fowell & Lawton, 1993; Lubeck, 1996). In theory, it seems easy to dichotomize practices as either developmentally appropriate or developmentally inappropriate. However, in practice, teaching practices do not always reflect just one type but rather demonstrate a continuum of teaching practices or multiple types of practices, an awareness that is reflected in the revised DAP framework (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Furthermore, the imposed universality of child development does not provide an understanding of the wide variation of complexities and possibilities involved. For example, judging the development of certain children who do not meet the theoretically established universal norms of child development can lead educators to view these children's development as being "abnormal" or underperformed, suggesting a deficit perspective. However, it is more productive and constructive to view the sole focus on Piaget's developmental theory as insufficient in explaining children's development. We believe that instead of fitting the children into a pre-established mold, we ought to find different appropriate molds to fit the children's strengths and needs, especially by attending to the contexts within which they unfold and evolve developmentally. Thus, an alternative to the modernist perspective is the postmodernist one that rejects the universality of knowledge and supports the socioculturally and contextually situated knowledge construction (Lubeck, 1996). We also believe that the postmodernist perspective is the most vital solution to understanding that there are not just one type but multiple types of DAPs, thereby calling for a pluralistic approach to truth-seeking and construction.

The Incongruence between DAP and Expectations of Minority Groups

In the United States, the original DAP framework was criticized for representing only "White, middle-class" ideologies of care and education, which were found incompatible with the sociocultural and historical contexts as well as socialization goals and academic expectations of children and their families from racial/ethnic minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., Delpit, 1988; Jipson, 1991; Lubeck, 1996; 1998; Sanders et al., 2007). Relatedly, this criticism also reflected the concern about the inequity of power and privilege. Notably, the original DAP framework appeared to benefit only those familiar with the cultural knowledge coded with the mainstream (power and privilege) practices but not those outside the mainstream (e.g., Delpit, 1988; Mallory & New, 1994a; O'Brien, 1993, 2000). In addition, O'Brien (1993, 2000) argued that the DAP framework would benefit typically developing children from socioeconomically advantaged, Anglo family backgrounds the most because their experiences tended to align well with child-centered, play-based, and inquiry-oriented learning.

While children from mainstream backgrounds are privileged with child-centered, autonomous skills, those who are outside the dominant culture (e.g., children from racial/ethnic, minority, and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds) may not have the requisite learning and developmental competence to fully reap the benefits from DAP in action (O'Brien, 1993, 2000). Nonetheless, empirical evidence on the impact of DAP guidelines on the learning of racial/ethnic minority and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged children in the United States is mixed, with some showing beneficial effects (e.g., Bryant et al., 1994; Huffman & Speer, 2000), while others demonstrating no such an advantage (e.g., Van Horn & Ramey, 2003; Van Horn et al., 2012). The latter finding seems to add support to the belief that racial/ethnic minority children may benefit from a qualitatively different kind of learning experience, such as the opportunity to acquire academic skills (Delpit, 1988) to slowly gain access to mainstream education (e.g., Mallory & New, 1994a; O'Brien, 1993, 2000). Similar findings were also reported in developing countries (Rao et al., 2012).

Parents and educators of children from diverse backgrounds also tend to believe that an academic-oriented education is what these children need to be better positioned for success in the mainstream school system and later in society (Delpit, 1988; Mallory & New, 1994a; 1994b). Thus, it is not surprising that empirical evidence attests that parents of racial/ethnic minority children are likely to choose EC programs designed to be academically driven with a more didactic, teacher-directed model of instruction in which literacy and numeracy skills needed for success in formal schooling are taught (e.g., Fuller et al., 1996a; 1996b). Unfortunately, this reality does not match the DAP discourse in which the learning environment promotes primarily child-centered and play-based experiences. However, a balanced approach combining child-centered and teacher-directed instruction may be an entry point toward bridging DAP in action with academic instruction for some

racial/ethnic minority children. For example, in their study of six African American directors of subsidized child care centers serving racial/ethnic minority children from low-income backgrounds in California, the United States, Sanders et al. (2007) found that these directors infused child-centered activities with didactic instruction as culturally and developmentally responsive practices to accommodate these children's needs. Similar findings were also reported in the studies conducted in Chinese societies (Chen et al., 2017; Li et al., 2012).

Taken together, two important implications may be of particular relevance. First, understanding and incorporating knowledge of contextual factors affecting children's development and learning would be considered DAP, as strongly emphasized in the fourth edition of the DAP book. Second, as not all children are the same, the one-size-fits-all approach to nurturing their development and learning is inappropriate. In this connection, an appropriate solution to working with children from diverse backgrounds would be to listen to their "voices" and attend to their needs instead of levying on them a set of unrealistic and unrelatable dominant "White, middle-class-normed" standards to follow. It is conceivable that children will continue to struggle developmentally if their needs are not addressed in contextually appropriate ways.

The Lack of Attention to Context

Another criticism of the original DAP framework concerns the lack of attention to the context in which child development and learning occur. For example, Lubeck (1996) was concerned that by promoting individual development based on Piaget's theory, DAP appeared to foster development in isolation as if the child was an "isolated being" (p. 152). However, it was not until the revised version (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) that Vygotsky's sociocultural theory appeared salient in addition to Piaget's developmental theory. In particular, Vygotsky's theory was leveraged to help explain how children's development and learning unfold in the context of social interactions with adults and peers. It was also only in the revised iteration that contextual appropriateness was included as a third core consideration of the DAP framework. Thus, the revised and subsequent versions of the position statement on DAP and the DAP book reflect the developmental theory of both Piaget and Vygotsky.

It has been recognized that different contextual characteristics (e.g., the specific characteristics of the students, the kind of school setting) require different kinds of DAP in action (e.g., Goldstein, 2008). The professional context is complex with many contours, and thus DAP, in terms of curricular and instructional decisions, should be made in the context of these complexities. For instance, a salient complexity in the teaching situation is the sociopolitical climate. Goldstein (2008) advocated that sociopolitical factors, which were not part of the DAP framework, should be reviewed as an aspect of culturally appropriate practices. Goldstein cited Bronfenbrenner's

socioecological model as suggesting that "children's learning and development are influenced not only by their specific sociocultural milieus but also by the larger sociopolitical macrosystem in which those sociocultural milieus are embedded" (p. 255). Goldstein also viewed Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning and development as acknowledging the powerful influences of the cultural and historical milieus and the sociopolitical context in which children live and are socialized.

In addition, Goldstein (2008) believed that the sociopolitical appropriateness of academic content and skills (e.g., the former No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in the United States) may be assimilated into the existing child-centered learning experiences as a response to the new educational mandates by ways, such as supplementing lessons and activities presented in mandated curriculum content with child-centered lessons and learning activities (e.g., hands-on, play-based) without a complete overhaul of well-grounded classroom practices. Accordingly, Goldstein (2008) proposed a "broadening" conceptualization of culturally appropriate practices by considering the influences of both sociopolitical and sociocultural factors. For instance, teachers should no longer feel conflicted between their tendency to apply DAP guidelines and their obligation to meet new curricular, instructional, and accountability expectations when meeting the academic demands imposed by an education policy. It may be that certain academic skills are considered culturally appropriate but may not be considered developmentally appropriate without understanding the context in which they occur. This scenario calls for teachers to be adaptive. As the ability to resolve contradictions emerging from teaching situations is a key feature of the DAP framework (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), it would be productive for those teachers in the United States working in the DAP space to resolve teaching demands by leveraging their professional knowledge to inform their decision-making in the context of ever-evolving education reform policies, such as the Common Core standards, and the current Every Student Succeeds Act.

What's New and Different about the Latest Iteration of DAP

Now that we have examined the criticisms concerning the previous editions (especially the original one) of the DAP book, in this section, we discuss whether and how the latest edition might have addressed some, if not all, of these criticisms. We also examine what is new and different about this fourth and latest iteration of the DAP book. While the publication of this, perhaps highly anticipated, version of the DAP book might have generated excitement in the field of ECE in the United States and even beyond, it also naturally prompts questions. For example, what is new and different about this iteration? How does it expand upon our current knowledge of child development and learning and relatedly pedagogical practices? Whether and how does it address the cultural and contextual considerations raised by criticisms of previous editions? These questions and the like are addressed in the newest publication of DAP.

At the outset, NAEYC (2022) made clear that unlike the previous editions of DAP written and edited principally by NAEYC staff, this newest edition represents a concerted effort to muster intellectual strengths from both the NAEYC staff and many EC educators with various domains of expertise and experiences to serve in a variety of capacities, such as writers and reviewers. In terms of content, as described by NAEYC (2022), the current DAP book represents both "continuity and change" in the conceptualization of the DAP framework in the context of long-standing core values and advanced professional knowledge. Concerning continuity, just like its previous versions on DAP, the latest position statement (2020) also emphasizes DAP as reflecting three essentials: (1) core considerations that guide the educators' decision-making, (2) principles of child development and learning that inform practice, and (3) specific guidelines for professional practice. However, different from its predecessorial editions, the latest iteration has further refined these three aspects to reflect its current professional knowledge and contextual changes and to apply a more "fluid" approach to its theoretical conceptualization and practical guidance, as discussed later.

Another point of continuity is related specifically to the core considerations of DAP. As illustrated in a figure by NAEYC (2022), the framework for DAP focuses on the educators' intentional decision-making in supporting children's optimal development and learning by incorporating the three core considerations: (1) **age-appropriateness** based on knowledge of child development in terms of typical patterns of behaviors and growth that characterize specific age groups (**commonality**), (2) **individual-appropriateness** premised on knowledge about the unique developmental profile (e.g., specific learning strengths, interests, needs) of each child (**individuality**), and (3) **context-appropriateness** founded on knowledge about the **social**, **cultural**, **linguistic**, and **historical contexts** in which children, families, and teachers live and are socialized (**context**).

However, it is worth noting that, as summarized in Table 4.1, at the same time, age-appropriateness and individual-appropriateness have served as two core considerations of the DAP framework since the original position statement (NAEYC, 1986), and context-appropriateness was only added to the revised position statement a decade later (NAEYC, 1996). Moreover, the emphasis on the context at the time is believed to have encouraged EC educators to rethink and retool their practices by considering diversity (e.g., race, ethnicity, culture, language) that is characteristic of a multicultural society (Mallory & New, 1994a; Powell, 1994).

Nearly four decades later, the current NAEYC's (2020) position statement on DAP and, relatedly, the fourth iteration of the DAP book (NAEYC, 2022) demonstrate an even greater effort to underscore the importance of understanding the social and cultural contexts affecting children's development and learning. NAEYC (2022) urged educators to attend to the context (e.g., social, cultural, community, family) in which young children learn and thrive to carter support to these children's needs accordingly, including

incorporating knowledge of the diverse cultural and linguistic assets that children bring from the home to the classroom.

Another pivotal change in the fourth edition of the DAP book is that, for the first time, NAEYC (2020) also stressed the need to consider the social and cultural contexts of educators and EC settings in addition to those of children, an approach that "reflects an equity lens":

(1) "The principles of child development and learning acknowledge the critical role of social and cultural contexts and the fact that there is greater variation among the 'universals' of development than previously recognized" (p. 34).
(2) "Understanding of the social and cultural contexts applies not only to children but also to educators and the program setting" (p. 34).

Furthermore, in explaining why context is more critical to consider than ever in practice, Friedman et al. (2022) situated this importance within the changing nature of the sociodemographic dynamics in EC settings in the United States in this way:

> The United States has become more diverse racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically, and so too have the children from birth through age 8 attending early learning programs. Children in these programs come from diverse backgrounds, speak multiple languages, have a variety of abilities and identified disabilities, and have varying experiences impacted by their social identities (race, ethnicity, language, gender, class, ability, family composition, and economic status, among others)… educators need to seek to understand the implications of these contexts by continuously learning from families and communities and becoming aware of and countering their own and larger societal biases that may undermine children's positive development and well-being.
>
> (p. 49)

Consistent with its adoption of an "equity" lens, in addition to increasing emphasis on the core consideration of context, NAEYC (2020, 2022) made other conceptual changes, including the following:

- A paradigm shift in viewing context from a deficit to a strengths model. Acknowledging that "*[i]n the past, however, differences in social and cultural contexts were identified as deficits and gaps rather than assets or strengths to be built upon*" (p. 34), NAEYC (2020) advocates treating social and cultural differences as assets or strengths to build on rather than as liabilities or deficits to address.
- A focus on identifying and raising awareness of the existence of potentially implicit biases and their related implications for thought and behavior on which educators may reflect, understand, and address.

- A revision of child development and learning principles by incorporating new research understanding and contextual features affecting development. A paradigm shift from focusing on "best practice" to embracing practices as the most effective if they reflect the core considerations, principles, and guidelines of DAP.

Specifically, NAEYC (2022) highlighted that "*[o]ne of the key decisions made during the revision of the position statement was to purposefully not use the term best practice*" (xix). NAEYC (2022) further qualified that

> [t]his reframing does not mean there is no clarity around appropriate practices; clear guidelines for determining the most appropriate practice is reflected in the principles, the guidelines, and the core considerations outlined in the position statement on developmentally appropriate practice.
>
> (p. xx)

Furthermore, this reframing also addresses scholars' skepticism concerning the idea of best practice. For instance, Goldstein (2008) asserted that there was no singular "best" curriculum approach or instructional practice that would be considered developmentally appropriate for all children.

NAEYC (2020) further explained that its intention for eliminating the term "best practice" from its DAP lexicon was to avert potentially equating the mainstream culture's perspectives as "best" practice and espousing biased assumptions:

> This reframing reflects the concern that, especially when applied to specific practices, "best" has often been used in the United States to reflect the dominant culture's assumptions. The dominant culture within the U.S. has historically and generally speaking been that of white, middle-class, heterosexual, Protestant people of northern European descent. Practices based on specific cultural assumptions without sufficient consideration of the wide variation in individual, social, and cultural contexts can create an inherent bias.
>
> (p. 34)

Another point of change in the fourth edition of the DAP book (NAEYC, 2022) involves re-conceptualizing child development to reflect new research and consideration of the social and cultural milieus in which development occurs. For example, NAEYC (2020, 2022) revised its long-standing premise of child development on Piaget's stage theory. Piaget (1971b) believed that children develop cognitively in an orderly and linear progression from one stage to the next. Instead of following Piaget's theory of stage-based development, the newest DAP guidelines adopt the metaphor of "waves" to describe development in terms of fluidity rather than rigidity and of a dynamic rather than a straightforward process. Specifically, NAEYC (2020) elucidated,

Development and learning also occur at varying rates from child to child and uneven rates across different areas for each child. Children's demonstrated abilities and skills are often fluid and vary from day to day based on individual or contextual factors. For example, because children are still developing the ability to direct their attention, a distraction in the environment may result in a child completing a puzzle one day but not the next.

(p. 10)

NAEYC's more expansive notion of child development in terms of waves represents a departure from the rigidity of the stage theory proposed by Piaget. It may also be viewed as demonstrating NAEYC's open-mindedness toward possibilities. The possibilities of child development include (1) commonality (developmental waves overlapping with each other), (2) individuality (development and learning moving at their various rates across children and domains within the same child), and (3) context (development being changeable from day to day depending on the context, progressing or regressing beyond the previously assumed rigid boundaries) (NAEYC, 2022).

In this newest edition of the DAP book (NAEYC, 2022), another welcome addition to the developmental theory on which DAP is built is the particular mentioning of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model (also referred to as the ecological systems theory) and Vygotsky's ZPD.[2] This change highlights the complex and dynamic influences on child development and learning. However, just like in the previous editions of DAP, an extensive discussion of these relevant theories was not evident in this latest DAP publication. Instead, the theoretical foundation appears to be permeated, but in a cursory manner, throughout the latest DAP position statement (NAEYC, 2020) and book (NAEYC, 2022). Thus, it makes the link between developmental theory and DAP less palpable and the ways in which they weave together open to interpretation.

Conclusion

Although the NAEYC's newest version of the position statement (2020) and DAP book (2022) have already articulated a wealth of knowledge drawn from developmental theory and research to inform professional practice, a lot has yet to be learned and incorporated. As no framework is perfect and to everyone's liking, criticisms seem inevitable, especially given that it is impossible to meet all expectations of individuals with diverse philosophical and pedagogical worldviews. However, what is needed now is continuity in building a more expansive knowledge base by welcoming new perspectives from an advanced body of child development knowledge and empirical studies on the revised DAP framework.

Just as the field continues to generate new insights, DAP may be considered a "living breathing document" that will continue to evolve and grow over

time. Thus, if history is of any indication, it is reasonable to expect that the current DAP position statement and book will continue to be refined, updated, and revised in the future, just like its predecessor iterations. Moreover, given NAEYC's increasingly open-minded approach to engage the ECE field as expressed in its latest edition of the DAP position statement (2020) and book (2022), it is also reasonable to expect that NAEYC will continue to seek out and value diverse perspectives to bring about new insights and possibilities to create a legacy of "equitable" teaching and learning experiences all within the context of the DAP framework and a "caring community" of EC educators working directly or indirectly to positively impact young children's development and learning, and most of all, their lives.

Notes

1 Like the United States, some countries (e.g., Australia, as discussed in Cheeseman & Torr, 2009) also designate the early childhood years as covering birth to age 8. However, this age range designation is not universal. In other societies, such as China (Zhu, 2009) and Hong Kong (Chen et al., 2017), early childhood years are interpreted as reaching only age 6.
2 Since no citation was provided in the 2022 DAP book, it is unclear where the information was derived from.

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5 Play and Learning in the Early Years

Conflicting or Complementing?

Philip Hui Li and Jennifer J. Chen

Play: A Difficult-to-Define Social Phenomenon

Classical and Modern Theories of Play

Play has been theorized in a plethora of ways (Li, 2007). However, according to Mellou (1994), the various play theories may be categorized into two main camps: (1) classical (e.g., the recreation or relaxation theory, the recapitulation theory) based on ideas about energy, human instincts and needs, and evolution, and (2) modern (e.g., the psychoanalytic theory, the metacommunicative theory, the cognitive theories) that builds on classical theories. Whether classical or modern, all play theories tend to encapsulate a process duality of personal articulation and social adaptation involving self, adult intervention, and/or peer interaction (Mellou, 1994).

During the past two centuries, many classical, physiological-based theories have become popularized. Notably, the surplus energy theory propounded by Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller (a German playwright, poet, and philosopher) (1875) and Herbert Spencer (an English sociologist and philosopher) (1873) identifies play as the key to which animals and humans liberate their excessive ebullient energy through physical activity. German philosopher and psychologist Moritz Lazarus (1883) proposed the recreation and relaxation theory of play to describe how humans restore the energy expended during daily activities by engaging in recreation and relaxation through play. American psychologist and educator G. Stanley Hall's (1906) recapitulation theory of play refers to children vivifying and reenacting the various cultural stages of the evolution of the human race during development through play.

In addition to the classical theories of play, there are also several modern theories of play. Notably, Freud (an Austrian neurologist and psychoanalysis founder) (1920) developed the psychoanalytic theory of play as yielding a catharsis effect in such a way that through play, children express their feelings and release negative emotions, thereby developing and increasing positive emotions. British and Canadian psychologist Daniel Berlyne's (1960) arousal modulation theory of play contributes to understanding that children regulate their arousal due to various aspects of their external environment.

English anthropologist, linguist, and social scientist Gregory Bateson's (1956) metacommunicative theory of play is premised on the idea that play is a type of communication involving noticing and interpreting metacommunicative (verbal and nonverbal) signals by both the player and the observer, such as establishing the metamessage that "this is play" (p. 180).

Modern theories of play include those from the cognitive school of thought that play signifies and promotes cognitive development and learning in young children. The most notable cognitive theorists include Piaget and Vygotsky. Specifically, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1952, 1962) believed that corresponding to their stages of cognitive development, there are four developmental stages of play: (1) "functional play," (2) "constructive play," (3) dramatic or symbolic play," and (4) "games with rules." Similarly, Soviet psychologist Vygotsky (1967) theorized that play promotes cognitive development and encourages abstract thought, highlighting particularly that

> [p]lay is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development. Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives – all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development.
>
> (p. 16)

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is cast as the difference between what a child can achieve unassisted and what they can achieve with assistance or "scaffolding." To Vygotsky, play promotes cognitive development at a higher level within the ZPD.

American sociologist Mildred Parten (1932, 1933) developed six categories of social participation in play among preschool children: (1) "unoccupied behavior," (2) "solitary play," (3) "onlooker behavior," (4) "parallel play," (5) "associative play," and (6) "cooperative or organized supplementary play." Focusing specifically on dramatic and sociodramatic forms of play, Israeli psychologist Sara Smilansky (1968) theorized that there are six elements of play: (1) "Imitative Role-Play"; (2) "Make-Believe objects, movements or verbal declarations"; (3) "Make-believe in regard to actions and situations"; (4) "Persistence in the play episode"; (5) Interaction; and (6) "Verbal Communication." Among the various forms of play, free play, where children are free to engage in any type of play (e.g., sociodramatic play, constructive play with blocks), and specifically dramatic/sociodramatic play are considered the most common among preschool children (Chen, 2021, Chen & Kacerek, 2022).

Dramatic/sociodramatic play is also known by other names, such as "pretend play"; "social pretend play" (e.g., Howes et al., 1992; Kavanaugh, 2011; Nicolopoulou, 2018); "free-flow play," "imaginative play," "fantasy play," and "ludic play" (e.g., Beardsley & Harnett, 1998); and "symbolic play," "imaginative play," and "make-believe play" (Piaget, 1932; Vygotsky, 1978). All of these terms refer to a natural type of activity that allows

children to explore their imagination and creativity, such as by pretending to be in the role of someone or something else. This type of play is beneficial for children's learning and development of a myriad of skills, such as problem-solving, language, and communication (Vygotsky, 1978) and leadership and followership (Chen, 2021; Chen & Kacerek, 2022).

Taken together, the literature suggests that play is a complex and diverse activity that can be theorized in many different ways. In the same vein, there is no one standard specification of play. It may be because most behaviors and activities that young children engage in can be called play. It may also be because play is

> infinitely varied and complex. It represents cognitive, cultural, historical, social, and physical interconnections between the known and the unknowing, the actual and the possible, the probable and the improbable. It is a dialogue between fantasy and reality, between past, present, and future, between the logical and the absurd, and between safety and risk. Given these complexities, it is hardly surprising that play has defied neat, tidy definitions.
>
> (Wood & Attfield, 1996, p. 4)

Given the dynamic multiplicity of play, forming a unifying definition becomes a mission impossible.

Nonetheless, in contemporary early childhood education (ECE), the cognitive theories of play developed by Piaget, Vygotsky, and Smilansky, as well as the social theory of play pioneered by Parten, appear to be well received by early childhood (EC) professionals. Likewise, contemporary researchers (e.g., Ailwood, 2003; Chen, 2021; Chen & Kacerek, 2022; Löfdahl, 2006) have also framed their own studies of play based on these theories.

The Cultural-Historical Perspective on Play

Vygotsky's cognitive theory of theory has become particularly influential in ECE. We may glean from Vygotsky's theorization four main points. First, play creates a space for concept formation and realization by linking everyday concepts with scientific concepts (Vygotsky, 1967). For example, when children play house, they may learn about or enact what it means to be a mom or dad. According to Vygotsky, children can learn about the rules of behavior in everyday life by playing pretend. In the process, they may develop skills that are conducive to learning, such as developing creative and imaginative thinking.

Second, according to Vygotsky (1967), "Play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development" (p. 16). To Vygotsky, play is what drives child development and through which children learn about the world in which they live. For example, to explore their surroundings, children under 3 years of age use actions such as sucking on fingers or maneuvering objects. As they get older, children begin substituting objects

to represent something else, such as using a stick to represent a pencil and making eating movements with their hands. Thus, this concept representation does not constrain children but liberates them from real actions and encourages their experimentation with different possibilities.

Third, according to Vygotsky (1967), play is defined as rules governed because "whenever there is an imaginary situation in play, there are rules, not rules which are formulated in advance and which change during the course of the game, but rules stemming from the imaginary situation" (p. 10). As a result, when rules dictate play enactment, freedom becomes illusory.

Fourth, according to Vygotsky (1967), play is not uniform but varies by age and developmental capacities. For example, for infants and toddlers (under age 3), playing with an imaginary object in an imaginary situation is something beyond their abilities because they have not yet developed their symbolic thoughts. However, older children (ages 3 to 6) are cognitively capable of engaging in an imaginary situation. Accordingly, pretend play is the most popular and developmentally appropriate activity for preschool children to form and engage in higher mental functioning.

Last but not least, Vygotsky (1967) also believed that the nature of play and play engagement is variable across social and cultural contexts. Considering that play is the most prominent activity in child development (Vygotsky, 1967), it is critical then that we examine play across cultures where the imaginative contexts in which children engage in play may vary. Thus, Vygotsky's sociocultural-historical framework paves the way for a greater understanding of play across cultures.

Play in ECE: A Historical Review

Play is a complex phenomenon that has been studied across multiple disciplines, such as anthropology, art, biology, and psychology (Ailwood, 2003). Concerning ECE, Pramling et al. (2019) indicated that play has been the primary focus of preschool pedagogy since the creation of the first kindergarten (founded by Friedrich Fröbel in Germany in 1837). Eminent scholars such as Friedrich Fröbel, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Dewey believed that play is a critical part of a child's development and thus should be integrated into learning activities in the EC classroom. In particular, Rousseau believed that through play, children could learn about the world around them and grow and learn in a naturalistic and authentic way (Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2014). Thus, the image of children actively learning has become a fixture of child-centeredness pedagogy and curriculum in the contemporary discourse of ECE.

Similarly, from a developmental perspective, Piaget also believed that children could learn about the world by exploring it themselves. However, post-developmental perspectives emphasize the social and cultural aspects of learning and development, promoting scholars to explore the role of play in ECE across sociocultural contexts (Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2014). Consequently, a robust body of research has documented different ways

scholars use play to promote children's learning and development in EC classrooms worldwide (Pramling et al., 2019). What does this all mean for preschool teachers? It means that they should carefully consider the role of play in their instructional practices by being aware of the various ways in which play can be leveraged to optimize its associated benefits for young children within a particular sociocultural context.

In addition to the child-initiated play, play in children can also benefit from adult guidance, and hence the term teacher-supported play is established. The notion of teacher-supported play is akin to Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, referring to the idea that children need help from adults in order to learn and develop properly.

Cross-Cultural Views on Play

While the importance of play in children's learning and development is generally unquestionable, there are many different views concerning what play is and how it should be conducted. Thus, there is no consensus on the definition, nature, and function of play, leading to fundamental disagreements among researchers and educators within and across cultures (Pramling et al., 2019). For instance, some cultures, such as Scandinavians, emphasize children's "free play" with minimal adult intervention (Hakkarainen et al., 2013). In contrast, other cultures, such as the former Soviet Union, believe in "didactic play" to teach young children how to play in symbolic ways to help facilitate the acquisition of academic skills (Pramling et al., 2019). However, some scholars are concerned about the direct involvement of adults as interfering and overtaking children's play and even conflictual in relation to children's developmental needs and interests to play freely (Pramling et al., 2019).

At the end of the 20th century, many Western societies believed that the provision of dedicated spaces for children to engage in free play ensures that children's play is well-supported and protected from outside influences and their development nurtured (Pramling et al., 2019). However, the downside is that children are deprived of social and cultural resources in the absence of adult intervention. Instead, play pedagogy, when adults co-play with children and provide various social, emotional, cognitive, and communicative resources, is a better way to encourage children's learning and development (Pramling et al., 2019).

The aforementioned historical rationale suggests that even though the adults' effort to organize children's play with dedicated spaces is well-meaning, it can be counterproductive because the absence of adult participation might diminish the developmental value of play. Specifically, Stephen (2010) argued that affording children all the freedom to explore without adult guidance reflects a laissez-faire approach, through which adults are detached from children's learning process. However, adults may be seen as "intervening" with children's play when they set up the play environment and expect children to learn by themselves while playing. with this arrangement.

Research (e.g., Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004) has demonstrated that children who are allowed to initiate their own learning balanced with educator-initiated activities in the EC environment tend to perform better cognitively, socially, and personality-wise. This finding resonates with Pramling et al.'s (2019) reasoning that it is not productive to separate ECE into play free from adults or teacher-directed instruction in specific subjects. Thus, there is a pressing need for developing approaches beyond this dichotomy.

Learning: Another Difficult-to-Define Social Phenomenon

Conventional Approaches to Defining Learning

It is perhaps undisputable that learning is why the education system exists across the globe. In other words, the primary purpose of education is to promote student learning. However, despite the common belief about the importance of learning in bettering individuals' livelihood and society's functioning, there is no global consensus on what learning is and how it is fostered. Based on his systematic review of the literature on learning, Li (2007) summarized three major approaches to learning across cultures:

1. **Learning as the outcome**: This approach defines learning as the outcome/change in individual behavior, cognition, or both. This approach has three sub-schools of thought:

   (1) Behaviorism: learning should result in observable yet extrinsic changes in individual behaviors; (2) Constructivism: learning should bring about unobservable yet intrinsic changes in individual cognition;

   (2) Eclecticism: learning should lead to both behavioral and cognitive changes.

2. **Learning as the process**: This approach focuses on the process of learning, which may be more important than the outcome of learning. The process of learning has been emphasized by theorists, such as Dewey and Vygotsky, in embedded concepts, such as "learning by doing," "play-based learning," and "child-centered learning."

3. **Learning as the Activity**: When learning is viewed as an activity, it encompasses both the process and outcome. Vygotsky (1978) defined learning as a social process in which social, cultural, and historical experiences are intertwined and in which learning is situated within the ZPD space.

Li (2007) critiqued the three approaches as simply focusing on one or two of the aforementioned three aspects of learning and thus ignoring the whole picture. If learning is the "elephant in the room," the three blind individuals, as depicted in Picture 5.1, have just touched the elephant's head, body, and
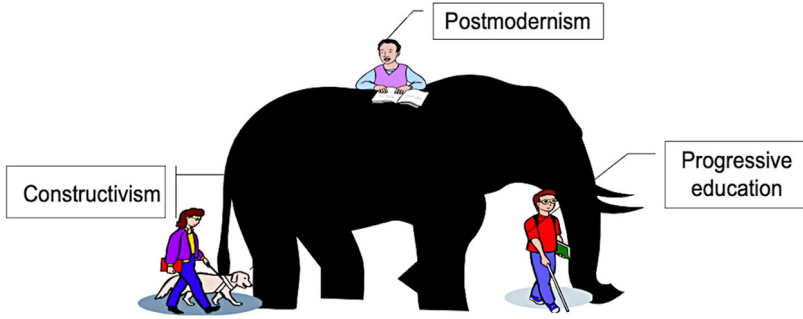
Picture 5.1 The three separate aspects of learning as symbolized by the three blind individuals.

tail. As shown in the aforementioned picture, the three approaches alone or a dyad are neither comprehensive nor inclusive because they are just individual pieces of the puzzle. When all three pieces are put together, they complete the puzzle and reveal the whole picture of learning as a dynamic and complex phenomenon.

Multilevel, Multidimensional, and Multistage Theory of Learning

Li (2007) defined learning as a multilevel, multidimensional, and multistage phenomenon, suggesting that the act of learning could be classified into five levels, five dimensions, and five stages. This idea suggests that learning looks like a cube of 125 cells (Figure 5.1).
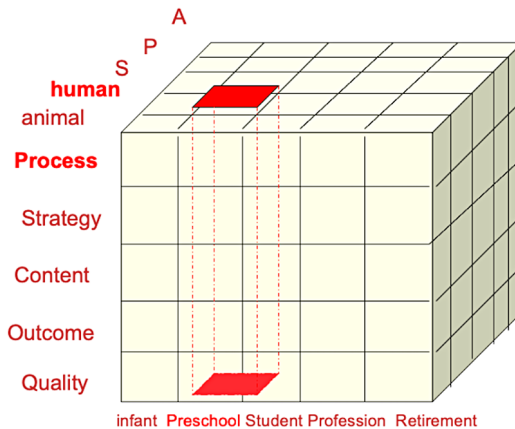

Figure 5.1 The multilevel, multidimensional, and multistage theory of learning.

First, learning has at least five levels: (1) Animal-human shared learning is the most fundamental level. This learning level follows behaviorism's rules (e.g., "stimulus-response") operated within the principles of conditioning as in classical conditioning (e.g., Pavlov, 1927; Watson & Rayner, 1920) and operant conditioning (Skinner, 1938, 1948; Thorndike, 1898). (2) Human's general learning: Human beings have the capacity to exhibit complex social behaviors (e.g., acquiring high-level syntactic languages, thinking abstractly). (3) Student's learning: This is a specific kind of learning that prepares students for university or academic learning, which, in turn, can prepare them for later professional work and development in society. (4) Professional learning: This is a specific and focused kind of learning reflecting systematic training on a certain subject or profession that prepares individuals for future professional work. (5) Artificial intelligence (A.I.) learning: This is also known as "machine learning," which allows A.I. to become more precise at predicting outcomes without being explicitly programmed to do so. This may be because today's A.I. (i.e., Google AI) can learn new things just like a human being but at a faster speed and more massive scale.

Second, learning has at least five dimensions (Li, 2007). The first dimension is **content**, referring to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students should learn and teachers should teach. However, content is a broad term that can mean anything from specific topics and facts to more general concepts and beliefs. More specifically, there are four types of content for young children to learn: (1) the firsthand experience ("learning by doing"); (2) the secondhand experience (learning by listening/reading); (3) the social, cultural, and historical experience (learning through social interaction); and (4) introspection experience (learning through self-reflection). The second dimension is **process**, suggesting that learning is a continual cycle that occurs in a sociocultural context, is carried out individually, and influences and is influenced by various factors (e.g., attention, memory, language, critical thinking skills). The third dimension is **strategy**, referring to an individual's approach to learning the content, completing a learning task, or completing a task more effectively and efficiently. The strategic approach can range from techniques for improving attention and memory to applying better test-taking skills. The fourth dimension is **outcome**, indicating the knowledge, skills, and attitudes individuals should acquire and demonstrate upon completion of a learning activity. Thus, any good learning outcome in EC should encompass the integration and application of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Li, 2007). The fifth dimension concerns **quality**, referring to how well the learning process, outcome, or both are against a set of quality indicators. The quality of learning can vary from person to person because there are bound to be different types of learners (e.g., quick vs. slow learners, students with good memory vs. those with bad memory, deep learners vs. surface learners).

Third, Li (2007) described the five stages of learning in a human's life span. The first one involves infants (ages 0–3) who are born ready to learn and thus are actively exploring and learning about their surroundings

through their senses. Their sensorimotor experience, language learning, and social interactions lay a solid foundation for later learning and development. The second stage involves preschool children (ages 3–6) who begin acquiring new skills, such as literacy and numeracy, communication, as well as individual and cooperative group activities, all of which can help prepare them for formal schooling. The third stage focuses on children and adolescents (ages 7–18) who are acquiring knowledge, subject matter, information, understanding, and skills needed to succeed in primary and secondary schools. Academic learning is typically subject-based, including language arts, math, physics, chemistry, history, geography, biology, science, music, visual arts, and physical education. The fourth stage in the human life cycle involves adults (ages 21–60), who are engaging in activities that will prepare them for their future professions or are suitable for current professional endeavors. Finally, the fifth stage is suited for adults (ages 60 and older) who continue learning into their retirement years and beyond by engaging in activities that will also help improve their mental, physical, and cognitive well-being.

According to Li's (2007) multilevel, multidimensional, and multistage theory of learning, young children's learning encompasses the content, process, strategy, outcome, and quality. Thus, their learning should not be viewed as a single-cell development, but rather it is a 3D cuboid consisting of at least five cells, as shown in Figure 5.1.

The Nature and Mechanism of Learning

What is the nature of learning? What is the neurological mechanism of learning? Li (2007) defined learning as a series of electronic and biological responses in human brains. This series represents a meaningfully connected specialization of the relevant neurons in human brains that strikes a meaningful balance between inhibitory and excitatory reactions. From this perspective, young children's learning involves a purposeful and specified neural "connection," and the pattern of neural connectors is individualized, specialized, and contextualized, which may be explained by theories, such as that of information-processing. Furthermore, the driving powers for early years of learning could vary in forms (e.g., personal needs, curiosity, interest, emotion, motivation) and functions/purposes (e.g., initiating, maintaining, facilitating, transferring). The origins of these learning powers could be founded on such motivating mechanisms as stories, curiosity, and adventures.

Moreover, the contexts of learning in the early years are multifold, including (1) formal learning that is planned and delivered in a school setting; (2) experience/problem-based learning that provides adaptive, flexible, and real-life experiences; (3) mentoring/apprentice learning that is guided and facilitated by an expert and mentor, with a focus on personal performance; (4) self-learning that is personally driven and guided to explore areas of personal interest; and (5) informal learning that is not planned or organized but can take place anywhere at any time. Given these

various contexts where learning can occur, ECE should provide an optimal ecology that supports and fosters adaptive, dynamic, and responsive informal and formal learning.

Teacher-led vs. Play-based Approach to Teaching

Franziska et al. (2018) observed a paradigm shift in educational practices from a training program–based, teacher-led approach to a play-based approach. These researchers conducted an intervention study to compare the effects on the early mathematical competency between these two pedagogical approaches among kindergarten children in Switzerland and interviewed teachers individually about their views on the intervention. The results indicated that the play-based approach led to more learning gains overall. However, children with low competencies gained more from the teacher-led training programs than those without the intervention. In contrast, children with high abilities benefited more from the play-based approach than from the teacher-led training program. These findings suggest that different approaches might be suited for different types of learners. Even the play-based approach requires teachers to diagnose, plan, and help guide children through their learning, such as solving mathematical problems and engaging in mathematical discussions among themselves (Franziska et al., 2018).

Play-Based Learning vs. Teacher-Directed Learning

There is a highly contested debate between the values of play-based versus teacher-directed learning in ECE, positioning them, especially as an oppositional binary in pedagogy (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Thomas et al., 2011). In contemporary ECE, play has been advocated globally as the most optimal context for children's learning and development. In contrast, the view of the teacher-directed context as supporting child learning is contested (McArdle & McWilliams, 2005). However, in the last decade, there has been much discussion about how to balance teacher-directed learning with play-based learning in ECE. For instance, Australian early childhood curriculum (ECC) documents and research (e.g., Thomas et al., 2011) reflect efforts to strike a balance between play-based and teacher-directed learning.

Play and Learning: Dichotomization or Synchronization

While some may treat play and learning as a dichotomy sitting opposite each other, others may view the two as going hand-in-hand in synchrony. These perspectives are evident in two positions. Position 1, representing an instructional stance, focuses on promoting children's academic learning at the expense of play in the EC classroom. In contrast, Position 2, upholding a play stance, favors play and ignores academic learning needed for success in formal schooling. Unfortunately, each position represents a one-sided,

incomplete, and extreme view that does not consider the full range of children's development as an outcome of not just learning or play but both. This perspective aligns with cognitive theorists, such as Piaget and Vygotsky, who saw the conjoined value of play and learning. The interconnectedness of play and learning in ECE is evident in popularized expressions, such as "learning through play," "play for learning," "playful learning," and "play-based learning" (Rao & Li, 2009).

Play and Learning: The Pair of Tai Chi Yin-Yang Fishes

"Tai Chi" is the ancient Taoist philosophy that invokes the concept of "*yin-yang*." The written Chinese characters for *yin* (阴) and *yang* (阳) are portrayed as a mountainside, with the one in darkness representing *yin* and the other in sunlight *yang*. However, the existence of a holistic mountain requires both *yin* and *yang* to ensure its balance. Thus, pairing any two opposites is not seen as distinctively conflictual but complementarily interdependent to become a balancing force in the natural universe. It stands witness to everything around us. For example, *yin-yang* is often interpreted as pairing two polar opposites (e.g., positive and negative, male and female).

As shown in Picture 5.2, the Tai Chi symbol is depicted as a circle equally and spatially divided by an S-curving line, creating two parts often described as the *yin-yang* fishes. One fish is dark in color, representing *yin*, and the other *light* in color, representing *yang*; this symbol has three chief meanings. First, each fish has fat and skinny ends, representing a certain phenomenon's maximum and minimum states. This depiction symbolizes that anything that reaches the maximum endpoint of *yang* may eventually turn into the minimum *yin* or vice versa. Second, there is a small light or dark spot situated at the center of the maximum end, suggesting that even in the darkest *yin*,

Picture 5.2 Yin-yang: A metaphor for understanding the interrelationship between learning and play.

there is a glint of *yang*, and even the brightest yang is tinged slightly with *yin*. Third, the "Tai Chi" symbol is not positioned as an inactive circle but as an active wheel constantly in motion. It further signifies that in the natural universe, *yin* and *yang* are always gravitational toward each other, creating a dynamic equilibrium balanced by constant synergetic motion in Taoism.

The Taoist *yin-yang* perspective may be applied as a metaphor for framing and understanding the interrelationship between learning and play in the early years. Just like the natural harmony created by the interaction between *yin* and *yang*, the balanced approach to promoting learning and play should serve as a place that creates the balance in ECE that children need. However, if young children moved to any one of the extreme states, they would tip toward imbalance. The Anji Play Approach (安吉游戏) is such an example by favoring exclusively *yang* (play). According to its official website (http://www.anjiplay.com), the Anji Play Approach is an educational philosophy and approach founded by Cheng Xueqin in Anji County, China. It is "grounded in love, risk, joy, engagement, and reflection, and returns the right of True Play to every child." However, once the excitement during the "true play" (without *yin* the learning) wears off and without meaningful learning ensued, such play is unsustainable because children are inherently born to learn and desire to learn to meet their natural sense of curiosity for all the unknowns in their world. Conversely, if young children lived in an extreme *yin* state, such as learning all the time (without any play), they would eventually become less motivated and engaged because, just like learning, play is a natural activity for children. Based on the *yin-yang* philosophy, learning and play are both necessary and natural aspects of children's development and, thus, should be integrated in concert with each other to actively balance the restraints of each other.

Cultural Differences in Play

Research evidence suggests that there are cultural differences in the conceptualization and significance of learning and play. For instance, Wu et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study to understand the perspectives of Chinese and German teachers and parents concerning learning and play. These participants, totaling 28 teachers and 12 parents, were selected from two Hong Kong and two German kindergartens. From this pool of participants, six German and six Chinese teachers were interviewed and helped select exemplary play episodes from their own classrooms to later show to the rest of the participants in each cultural context to gauge their views on learning and play. Perhaps it is not surprising that the findings did indeed reveal cultural differences. Specifically, all Hong Kong videos contained collectivist-oriented learning in whole-group activities, whereas the German videos revealed individualist-oriented or small-group activities. Furthermore, with respect to learning, Hong Kong participants endorsed the learning approach (e.g., emphasizing learning objectives, play/game rules) requiring teacher intervention and guidance in play. In contrast, the German participants espoused child-centered play activities to promote individual curiosity

and autonomy (e.g., self-initiation, self-learning experience). All of these findings offer clear evidence of culturally specific values guiding the conceptualizations of play and learning and enacting them in practice.

The "Relational Play-based Pedagogy" in New Zealand

Hedges and Cooper (2018) conducted a qualitative case study of New Zealand by analyzing video and audio recordings of how EC teachers blended their professional knowledge, strategies, and skills in everyday play interactions. These researchers found that the teachers engaged in a "relational play-based pedagogy" where they blended play, teaching, and child learning in open-ended activities that are true to teachers' and children's experiences and knowledge. This approach to play served as a "middle ground" between child-centeredness and teacher-directedness in pedagogy and was considered optimal in promoting children's natural development and learning. Furthermore, this relational play-based pedagogy also aligns with the ECC document (*Te Whāriki*) in New Zealand that provides children with learning experiences that resonate with their interests and ideas (Hedges & Cooper, 2018). The *Te Whāriki* curriculum is discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

The Play-Responsive Teaching in Sweden

In Sweden, the solution to alleviate the pressure of schoolification while promoting play leads to the practice of play-responsive teaching among educators (Fleer, 2009). This approach not only recognizes the dynamic and dialectical relationship between play and learning but also represents a concerted effort to balance child-centeredness and teacher-directedness. For instance, in the process, teachers feel empowered to responsively introduce new concepts into children's play to promote learning. Similar approaches to play and learning have also been found in countries such as Russia, the Netherlands, and Australia (Fleer, 2009).

The Eduplay Approach in China

Rao and Li (2009) conducted multiple case studies in Shenzhen, China, to understand the real context of learning and play in that city. Based on their research findings, Rao and Li proposed the term eduplay as one that aptly reflected the hybridization of play and learning in the Chinese EC settings studied. For instance, they found that Chinese parents endorsed a close nexus between play and learning in the early years, especially fusing learning promoted in the traditional Chinese education context and play advocated globally. This fusion, as manifested in the concept of eduplay, may be viewed as the best way to honor both tradition and innovation. However, while this idea is also instantiated in other Chinese parents' beliefs and practices (e.g., Lin et al., 2019), it is not in others (Lin & Li, 2019).

Despite sharing similar cultural characteristics and values, Chinese parents are not all uniform in their beliefs. For example, Lin and Li (2019) surveyed 163 mothers with preschool-aged children in China, revealing that these mothers' views on play and learning were not homogenous. In fact, the Chinese mothers' perspectives fit into three profiles: (1) traditional mothers endorsing a higher value on academic learning and a lower value on early play, (2) contemporary mothers espousing a higher value on early play and a lower value on academic learning, and (3) eclectic mothers placing the highest values on both early play and academic learning. Variations in these profiles reflect the mothers' educational levels, the children's frequency of engagement in academic learning and play, and the children's cognitive development. First, it was revealed that more highly educated mothers tended to espouse play or both play and academic learning, whereas less educated mothers tended to endorse academic learning over play. Second, as reported, children of eclectic and traditional mothers engaged in more academic learning at home than those of contemporary mothers. Third, children of eclectic mothers exhibited higher cognitive development than those of contemporary mothers and higher socio-emotional development than those of traditional mothers, even after controlling for sociodemographic variables. All of these findings suggest intracultural differences in parental beliefs on play and academic learning are at work, serving as a reminder of not treating individuals from the same culture homogeneously. Otherwise, important insights related to within-group variations can be missed and amiss.

Play and Learning during COVID-19

Play and learning do not occur exclusively in traditional classrooms. Contextual circumstances (e.g., COVID-19, digital era) do and should make us ponder and rethink the ways we view and approach play and learning as educational endeavors. The COVID-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity to examine the role of play and learning in unconventional educational contexts. O'Keeffe and McNally (2021a) conducted a survey study on play practices among 310 EC teachers at the primary level during school closures due to COVID-19 in Ireland. These researchers found that 82% of the teachers suggested play strategies for parents to implement during remote instruction and homeschooling, and nearly all teachers (99%) expressed an intention to integrate play into their teaching practice upon school reopening. These findings reflected the teachers' belief that play is critical pedagogy in promoting young children's social and emotional development, learning, and adjustment to school upon return.

Building on their previous study (O'Keeffe & McNally, 2021a), O'Keeffe & McNally (2021b) conducted online focus group interviews with 12 EC teachers at the primary school level during COVID-19 in Ireland. These researchers discovered similar features and qualities of play in the classroom during COVID-19 resembled those of pre-pandemic times, demonstrating their consistent priority on play in EC classrooms.

Play and Learning during the Digital Era

In this digital age, children may leverage technological tools to advance their learning in ways not afforded by traditional means. For instance, Yang et al. (2022) conducted an experimental study comparing the effects of a robot programming intervention versus block play on the computational thinking and sequencing ability of kindergarten children in China. These researchers discovered that relative to those in the block play condition over time, children in the robot programming intervention overall achieved greater gains over time in sequencing ability, children in the robot programming condition with lower self-regulation at baseline demonstrated larger benefits in sequencing ability, and that older children in the robot programming condition exhibited bigger gains in computational thinking. All of these findings suggest that robot programming benefits children's learning more than the traditional block play activity. However, just like any other learning tools, digital technologies are only beneficial to children's education (e.g., enhanced acquisition of content knowledge) when they are developmentally appropriate and are utilized effectively (e.g., McManis et al., 2010; Nir-Gal & Klein, 2004).

Conclusion

Many scholars and educators agree that both play and learning occupy important positions in EC. Yet, many also debate on which one is more important to prioritize in ECE, why, and how. Thus, although seemingly two simple concepts, play and learning are actually imbued with complexities amplified by these debates. This chapter revisited some key theories and conceptualizations of play and learning. We also offered examples from different countries (e.g., China, Sweden, and New Zealand) to illustrate similarities and differences in emphasis on play and learning across and within cultures. Through these country examples, the conceptualizations and importance of play and learning can be tangibly assessed by examining stakeholders' beliefs and practical systems (e.g., parents, teachers). These synthesized insights may help pave the way for future cross-cultural and intracultural investigations on play and learning.

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6 Glocalization of Early Childhood Curriculum

Two Cases of China

Philip Hui Li and Jennifer J. Chen

Early Childhood Curriculum Reforms in China

Early childhood curriculum (ECC) reforms have been the core development of early childhood education (ECE) in China. Since 1949, China has promulgated three kindergarten curriculum standards. First, the *Interim Kindergarten Teaching Outline (Draft)* (MOE, 1951) was based on the Former Soviet Union's concept and practice of ECE. It clearly defined the main points of kindergarten education and the teaching outline of six subjects (mathematics, music, art, sports, common sense, and language) (MOE, 2001). Since 1978, China has launched the "Reform and Open-Up" policy, which has also affected the development of ECE. Specifically, since the early 1980s, Chinese kindergartens have started importing new curricula and pedagogies from the West, especially the United States. In particular, the education authorities in China issued the "Kindergarten Work Regulations and Procedures" in 1989, with a strong emphasis on child-centeredness, active learning, individual differences, play-based learning and teaching, and integrated curriculum, all of which reflect and promote Western educational ideologies (Liu & Feng, 2005; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). This phenomenon marks the kick-off of the globalization of ECC in China.

As evident in ECE reforms in China, progressive educational ideologies and associated child-centered pedagogies and curricula have become popularized in China, promoting a paradigm shift from a traditional subject-based method to Western approaches (Li et al., 2011). As a result, globally promoted curricular and pedagogical approaches (e.g., developmentally appropriate practice, the Project Approach, and the High/Scope Curriculum from the United States; the Montessori Method and the Reggio Emilia Approach from Italy) were imported and implemented in China. During the past three decades, supported by its government and citizens, China has become the largest experimental site for these imported curricula and pedagogies.

Promoting Western early childhood (EC) practices is one thing; providing a support infrastructure is quite another. For example, the play-oriented curriculum guideline in China did not offer teachers practical guidance on implementing imported curricula and pedagogies. Recognizing this fundamental need, education authorities issued an updated version of the guidelines titled "Guidelines for Kindergarten Education" in 2001 to guide educators how to balance the Western progressive ideologies with integrated curricula (Li et al., 2011). Unfortunately, after a decade-long implementation of these guidelines, the "belief-practice gap" and the "policy-practice gap" continued to be observed in EC classrooms (Li et al., 2011). This finding implies that Chinese teachers might not be ready to implement imported curricula as they were intended. Conversely, some kindergartens have made great strides in localizing the implemented curriculum imported from the West. This chapter reports on two "successful" cases in Shenzhen, China, using the intended-implemented-attained curriculum typology proposed by Van Den Akker (2003) as an analytic framework.

Analytic Frameworks

There have been various theoretical frameworks proposed for analyzing ECC. In this chapter, we adopt the typology proposed by Van Den Akker (2003), who categorized curriculum into three forms: intended, implemented, and attained. This typology provides a productive approach to understanding the problematic efforts to change the curriculum. According to Van Den Akker (2003), there are three forms of curriculum: (1) Intended curriculum: It is the ideal version of a (pre)school curriculum, as articulated typically in curriculum documents and materials. (2) Implemented curriculum: It is the perceived curriculum as interpreted by its implementers (i.e., teachers) and reflected in the operational teaching-learning process. (3) Attained curriculum: It is the actual curriculum as reflected in the students' perceived learning experiences, as well as their tangible learning outcomes. Correspondingly, the intended curriculum is hailed by curriculum policymakers and curriculum developers, the implemented curriculum is determined by the teachers and school leaders, and the attained curriculum is contingent upon the educational experiences of students.

Two Cases of Kindergartens in Shenzhen, China

This chapter discussed two kindergartens in Shenzhen, China, as case studies to illustrate the three types of curriculum: the intended, the implemented, and the attained. Shenzhen is a modern, prosperous metropolis in southeastern China, neighboring Hong Kong and, thus, serves as a convenient and critical link between Hong Kong and mainland China. Influenced by global trends in its social and economic development, Shenzhen has, thus, been progressively exposed to and incorporated Western ideologies in various sectors, including its education system.

Case A: Shenzhen Lotus Kindergarten

School Information

Shenzhen Lotus Kindergarten's (SLK) school and curriculum information was gathered from multiple sources: (1) school documents, (2) interviews with school leaders and teachers, and (3) classroom observations. SLK was a public kindergarten established in 1992, with an area of 4,000 square meters and a floor area of 2,865 square meters. It had one nursery class (serving 1- to 2-year-olds), four K–1 classes (serving 3- to 4-year-olds), four K–2 classes (serving 4 to 5-year-olds), and three K–3 classes (serving 5- to 6-year-olds). The nursery class catered to only about 20 children half-day for two hours every morning. All the other upper classes were full-day, each comprising 35–40 children and 33 teachers (11 English language teachers) headed by one school principal and two vice principals. Among the teachers, 56% possessed primary school teachers' qualifications to teach. The teacher-student ratio was about 1:12, with three teachers (two Mandarin language teachers and one English language) in each class.

Following the ECC trend promoting Western educational practices in China, SLK has enthusiastically implemented imported curricula and pedagogies. Moreover, SLK has also continuously reviewed, reflected on, and refined its curriculum. As a result, after 20 years of school-based curriculum (SBC) development (1998–2018), SLK has established and implemented its well-known SBC known as the "Lotus Curriculum."

According to school documents, SLK's school vision focused on the idea that "happy early childhood lays a solid foundation for individual life-long development and the future of the nation." Accordingly, SLK's school mission was to "[m]ake each school day a happy and valuable day." To achieve its vision and mission, SLK's strategic action was to "[c]reate a happy learning space to nurture young minds; Conduct action research to scientifically develop children's potential; Improve the quality of education to serve parents sincerely."

The Intended Curriculum

The curriculum aims: The curriculum aimed "to educate healthy children who are civilized, confident, individualized, able to learn, and daring to innovate." In particular, "civilization" means good behaviors and habits; "self-confident and individualized" means cheerful and healthy children who strive to be the best of themselves. "The ability to learn and dare to innovate" means being capable, thoughtful, and sustainable. The curriculum's ultimate goal was to produce "Chinese citizens with global perspectives and who are global citizens with Chinese genes."

Curriculum beliefs: "Young children's learning is living, playing, and doing things. The '3Es' beliefs include (1) Exposure: Let young children go through a diversified and multimode learning; (2) Experience: Let young

children accumulate rich experience in experiential learning; (3) Essentials: Let young children harvest the personalized classics from daily lives."

School-based fusion of the chosen curricula: During the past two decades, SLK has adopted the school-based fusion of imported curricula. This fusion started in 1998 when a few experienced teachers received hands-on training on the Montessori Method, and accordingly, a pilot Montessori class was launched. Next, Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, the Reggio Emilia Approach, the Project Approach, and the High/Scope Curriculum were gradually imported, implemented, and implanted into its SBC. This SBC included a localized daily cycle of the High/Scope Curriculum's "plan-do-review" individual activities along with integrated theme-based group activities. SLK cautiously developed its SBC, following a "pilot scale-up" policy that took 20 years to achieve its target goals. The pioneering classes have tried to import different foreign curricula and pedagogies and curricula intentionally yet gradually. Only when the "pilot study" of implementation in certain classes succeeded did SLK scale it up to all kindergarten classes. Furthermore, culturally appropriate learning materials and children's individual learning needs were also gradually incorporated into SLK's SBC. Table 6.1 summarizes the imported educational approaches and elements by SLK.

In sum, SLK has incorporated seven different curriculum theories, models, or ideologies into its SBC. These curriculum practices were either imported from the West (e.g., Montessori Method, theory of multiple intelligences, the Reggio Emilia Approach, the High/Scope Curriculum, and the Bilingual Immersion) or originated from local theorists (e.g., Tao Xingzhi

Table 6.1 School-based fusion of seven curricular models by SLK during 2000–2019

No.	Theoretical model and approach	Element	Period
1	The Montessori Method	A prepared learning environment	2000–2002
2	Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences	Individualized and holistic development	2002–2004
3	The Reggio Emilia Approach	Emergent themes	2004–2013
4	The High/Scope Curriculum	Child-centered learning and "plan-do-review" cycle	2004–2013
5	Bilingual Immersion Model	School-based bilingual curriculum	2002–2019
6	Chinese traditional theorists	Tao Xingzi's Life Education Theory; Chen Heqin's Living Education Theory	2002–2019
7	National regulations and guidelines	Regulation on Early Childhood Education; Outline of Early Childhood Curriculum	2002–2019

and Chen Heqin). Additionally, SLK also followed the national curriculum documents, such as the Regulation on Early Childhood Education and the Outline of Early Childhood Curriculum. SLK's educational approach, based on a fusion model, represents the typical hybridization of the East and the West. Thus, it could be considered an example of the glocalization of the ECC.

The Implemented Curriculum

According to Van Den Akker (2003), the implemented curriculum is visible in the actual operation process of teaching and student learning. SLK's curriculum materials included three main textbook series for different functions: one used for Chinese thematic activities, another one for science and technology-related activities, and the final one for English immersion activities (Yang & Li, 2018). While the teachers at SLK were actively involved in conceptualizing and creating these curriculum materials, both the curriculum leaders and the teachers reported the outdated nature of some of these textbook materials because they were published in 2001 (Yang & Li, 2018). To address this problem, the teachers often resorted to adding materials to supplement these thoughtfully designed textbooks. Furthermore, they created a daily routine of activities that involved either child-centeredness or teacher-directedness, or both, to achieve different goals. Table 6.2 presents the typical daily routine of an SLK class.

As shown in Table 6.2, the learning corner activities of a typical SLK class featured the Montessori Method, with materials being localized and contextualized to incorporate traditional Chinese and Shenzhen culture. Additionally, individual differences were respected, with materials designed by each class teacher to accommodate children's different developmental levels in all corners: Chinese, math, science, culture, social, and art. Teachers provided one-on-one scaffolding based on children's manipulation of the materials. Paired learning was encouraged if one child needed help from a more experienced peer, a kind of interaction that often appeared as noted during classroom observations. Group learning, however, constituted an important part of the theme-based activities, with the teacher introducing concepts and ideas related to a theme prior to children forming groups to engage in free discussion and investigation. The combination of individual, paired, small-group, and whole-class activities and interactions in the classroom reflected a mixture of traditional teacher-directed Chinese pedagogy and child-centered Western pedagogy. This approach is also typical of other kindergartens in Shenzhen, such as the five Shenzhen kindergartens observed in Li et al.'s (2011) study of teachers' beliefs and practices in Chinese literacy teaching.

In addition, the learning corner activities were prepared by teachers based on their observations and understanding of child development and were chosen at will by children. The theme-based activities in the morning normally included both planned and emergent themes to ensure that most of

Table 6.2 Daily routine

	Activities	Content of activities	Types of interaction
8:00–8:10	Welcome Time	– Free play	Child-centered
8:10–8:25	Morning Exercise	– Group physical exercise	Child-centered and teacher-directed
8:25–8:50	Breakfast	– Children who finished breakfast first will read books or play with toys	
8:50–9:30	Learning Corner Activities	– Circle time and children's planning for activities at learning corners – Individual work or dyad cooperation on one piece of material	Child-centered and teacher-directed
9:45–10:15	Theme Activities	– Both planned and emergent themes will be discussed	Teacher-directed and child-centered
10:20–11:00	Outdoor Activities	– Places of outdoor activities will be arranged by the school to coordinate facility use among the whole kindergarten	Child-centered
11:00–2:40	Lunch and Nap		
2:40–3:20	Outdoor Activities	– English teacher is the teacher in charge. Children are immersed in English for the whole PM session	Child-centered
3:20–3:40	Snack Time		
3:40–4:30	Theme Activities	– Both planned and emergent themes will be discussed in English	Teacher-directed
4:30–5:00	Preparation for Dismiss		

the topics in their *Handbook of Integrated Theme Activities* were covered and that children's interests were respected and incorporated into these activities. A closer examination of these learning and teaching activities revealed that the child-sensitive approach appeared to reflect a balance between child-centeredness and teacher-directedness, where both the classroom teacher and children were engaged in these activities.

Regarding its position on the spectrum of curriculum models, SLK featured an approach that reflected teacher-directed inquiry and integrated concepts by incorporating both child-initiated and teacher-initiated decision-making (Helm & Katz, 2016). This approach aligns with Weikart's (2000) idea that schools should choose a contextually appropriate teaching approach and curriculum structure based on the balance between

child-directedness and teacher-directedness. At SLK, learning corner activities reflected integrated concepts. In contrast, theme-based activities feature teacher-directed inquiry to account for the contextual constraints of large class sizes and limited classroom space.

In addition, at SLK, assessments of student learning were formative, contextualized, and triangulated to form a holistic picture of children's overall developmental outcomes, as shown in Figure 6.1.

The Attained Curriculum

The authors of this book (Li, 2007; Li et al., 2011; Li & Chen, 2017) proposed the "3CAPs" framework to evaluate ECC reform: 1CAP (Culturally Appropriate Practice), 2CAP (Contextually Appropriate Practice), and 3CAP (Child-Individually Appropriate Practice). According to this framework, the attained curriculum of SLK reflected the "3CAPs." Culturally, Western pedagogies were not taken at their face value but were integrated into the traditional Chinese culture of teaching and learning. For example, while the Montessori Method advocated that each piece of work should be completed individually, SLK encouraged peer learning and cooperation during learning corner activities, a developmental trait that was valued in Chinese culture. Contextually, the large class size and limited classroom space were considered when planning theme-based activities so that children were divided into two groups to better elicit meaningful participation and teacher-child discussion. In terms of the 3CAP, children's differences in learning and development were also respected in the teacher's preparation of learning materials to account for different levels of difficulties among the children. However, as noted in Li et al.'s (2012) study, the belief-practice gap existed in Shenzhen kindergartens, where teachers were less open to adopting Western pedagogies (e.g., child-centered approaches) than teachers in Singapore and Hong Kong. This finding was also evident in SLK, where some veteran teachers
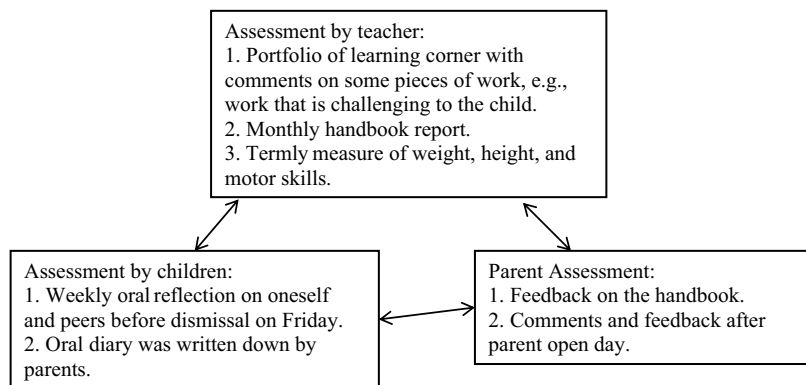
Figure 6.1 Triangulation of assessing children's learning outcomes.

preferred direct teaching, especially during theme-based activities, and were reluctant to engage children in child-centered approaches to active thinking and learning.

Measures to Increase Curriculum Alignments

To increase the alignment between the intended and the implemented curriculum, SLK put a few measures in place, as Yang and Li (2018) discussed in their study. First, SLK invested in teacher professional development. For example, the in-service training activities were both theoretically and practically oriented, including seminars, hands-on teaching demonstrations, field teaching diagnosis, and videotaped teaching analysis by university professors, as well as training on the latest theories, seminars, roundtable discussions, and teaching observation among teachers themselves. Connelly et al. (1997) suggested that a teacher's personal practical knowledge, shaped by the professional development training and practices of this teacher's first few years of teaching, would be fixed and difficult to change thereafter (Li, 2005). To engage teachers in professional change, SLK provided three different packages of training schemes targeting three types of teachers: (1) new teachers who would receive training on the overall curriculum design observe veteran teachers in class before starting their teaching and be assigned a mentor after joining the school; (2) veteran teachers would become mentors to new teachers and receive instructions and suggestions from school leaders; and (3) key teachers would be experimenting, promoting and presenting lectures on new teaching approaches. Furthermore, at the beginning of each school year, paired teachers would plan the same theme-based activity individually, observe each other's delivery of the activity, and then discuss its strengths and weaknesses to learn from each other (同课异构). Through this practice, teachers would then refine their planning before the delivery of activities and improve the handling of emergent themes during these activities.

Second, SLK emphasized building strong teacher-parent partnerships. Coming from primarily middle to upper-middle socioeconomic backgrounds, SLK parents were particularly concerned about the impact of the challenges posed by the globalizing world on their children's growth and development, including language acquisition (Yang & Li, 2018). As explained by Principal Weili Wang, parents tended to feel satisfied with this particular kindergarten when their children attained high levels of natural fluency in English needed to succeed in the global world (Yang & Li, 2018). Recognizing that supply would depend on demand, SLK made a concerted effort to keep up with parental expectations and demands in its curriculum planning and implementation.

Third, SLK proactively sought guidance from scholars and researchers by collaborating with them on research projects that supported SBCD (Yang & Li, 2018). For example, after participating in the "E-Kindergarten" project, an experimental research study on EC science and technology education led by the National Institute of Education Sciences of China, SLK began

emphasizing the science and technology component of SBCD (Yang & Li, 2018). Such collaborative research efforts between schools and experts in the field were critical to helping kindergartens assess and improve their curriculum development.

Last but not least, SLK conducted extensive research on teaching. As noted by the two school principals, teachers participating in research projects led by researchers and experts in the field experienced substantial "磨课," meaning "lesson polishing," during their research participation (Yang & Li, 2018). Specifically, the "moke" process involved three recursive stages: (1) observations of teaching lessons and feedback were provided by peers and experts to teachers; (2) teachers modified and improved their lessons accordingly and then taught these revised lessons to receive further feedback; (3) the same process was repeated until the teachers' teaching of these lessons was deemed satisfactory or high-quality (Yang & Li, 2018). This approach to instructional improvement was called "一课三研" translated as "three rounds of lesson polishing" aimed at aligning the implemented curriculum closely with the intended curriculum (Yang & Li, 2018). This research project also proved that the teachers exhibited individual strengths and merits. For instance, some teachers were competent in delivering science and technology education, others were effective in conducting music education, and others were skilled at providing physical education (Yang & Li, 2018). Based on the teachers' different areas of strength, they would then become lead teachers in their areas of specialty to promote the sustainable improvement and development of their SBC.

Misalignments between the Intended and the Implemented Curriculum

While SLK took action to increase the alignment between the intended and the implemented curriculum, there were still a few misalignments observed among the intended, implemented, and attained curricula. The first misalignment was between the intended and the implemented curriculum in theme-based activities, where some teachers were not sensitive to children's interests and thus failed to handle the emergent themes during discussions. To address this issue, SLK might consider holding weekly seminars that use demonstration videos to illustrate high-quality, teacher-child interactions by key teachers and then pose reflective questions on professional practice for discussion. The video-based method of observations and reflections would encourage authentic experiential learning for teachers. Moreover, these videos could serve as a valuable knowledge base for new teachers in the future. Brief teaching tips on effective pedagogical practices could also be developed and provided to teachers. Teaching practice is malleable, but change does not occur overnight. Instead, any positive change in teaching practice requires providing teachers with continuous and consistent professional development activities.

The second misalignment between the intended and the implemented curriculum was that the afternoon session in English was more teacher-directed, as English was the medium of instruction. In each class, the English-subject

teacher acted as the major input of the English language. The English teacher planned and directed activities to help children revisit words and sentences learned during that session. Perhaps, relocating the Chinese theme-based activities from the morning to the afternoon session would be a helpful solution. In this way, the Chinese (30 minutes) and English (40 minutes) theme-based activities could be merged into a bilingual program (lasting 70 minutes). Furthermore, the class teachers wouldn't feel hurried to complete a full round of activities (i.e., introducing the theme, engaging children in a small-group discussion) all within 30 minutes. In this approach, children could also have more time to explore and exchange ideas on the topic. However, merging the two language-specific activities into one might hamper the immersion of English learning for the afternoon session. Alternatively, both the English and Chinese teachers could participate more actively in the activities to facilitate more effective teacher-children interactions in both languages.

In sum, despite the aforementioned two misalignments, there were substantial alignments among the intended, implemented, and attained curricula at SLK. Thus, it could be regarded as a somewhat successful case of glocalization of ECC by incorporating Western ideologies into this local Chinese kindergarten. In SLK classes, individual and group learning coexisted naturally across learning corners and theme-based activities, with an appropriate balance between child-directedness and teacher-directedness. Children at SLK were highly engaged in learning activities and enjoyed the quality free indoor and outdoor play. From the perspective of balanced traditional (teacher-directedness) and innovative (child-centeredness) pedagogies, SLK's SBC development and implementation may be regarded as successful, especially by considering the 3CAPs with a Chinese child-sensitive approach.

Case B: Shenzhen Education Kindergarten

School Information

The school and curriculum information concerning Shenzhen Education Kindergarten (SEK) was gathered from multiple sources: (1) school documents, (2) interviews with the school principal and teachers, and (3) classroom observations. SEK was a public kindergarten run by the Administration Center of Preschool Education of Shenzhen Investment Holdings Company. It provided full-day education and care services for children aged 3–6. SEK spanned two campuses, one under reconstruction and the other active in Shenyun Village, Nanshan District of Shenzhen in mainland China. Founded in 1996, this kindergarten was accredited as a Quality Model Kindergarten in Shenzhen and a Band 1 Kindergarten in Guangdong Province. There were 12 mixed-age classes of 3- to 5-year-olds, with around 25 children per class. Most of the children were from middle-class families. SEK comprised 300 children, 36 in-service teachers, and two supervisors headed by one

school principal and three vice principals. The teacher-student ratio was about 1:8, with three teachers in one class.

According to school documents, SEK's school vision focused on "children's happiness by aiming to promote children's whole development in four aspects – intelligence, balance, happiness, and nature." Accordingly, SEK's school mission was to "advocate independent inquiries and strive to cultivate the qualities of autonomy, inquiry, self-regulation, and concentration in children." To achieve its vision and mission, SEK's strategic action focused on "integrating advanced ideas and best practices in early childhood education from both the East and the West into its curriculum and building a systematic curriculum that's open to change." Through effective teacher professional development, SEK sought to enhance its program quality and strive for excellence constantly.

The Intended Curriculum

The underpinning philosophy of SEK's intended curriculum was "the philosophy of going back to nature" (返本理念). Premised on the idea of nature, SEK believed that young children's experiences of today's happiness and tomorrow's happiness should be harmonized. Accordingly, SEK's intended curriculum focused purportedly on children's natural characteristics and needs against the backdrop of national Chinese culture and internationalization. Adults (including teachers and parents) were expected to follow children's interests and facilitate children's independent learning and development.

Guided by its philosophy, SEK's intended curriculum aimed to enhance children's all-around development in "intelligence, balance, happiness, and nature." According to SEK's definition, intelligence refers to children's cognitive development; balance refers to a harmonious state between body and soul, as well as between self and environment; happiness refers to children's positive emotional experiences stemming from explorations, achievements, and relationships; and nature refers to the original goodness of human nature without any pretension. Unfortunately, it appeared that this intended curriculum goal was too idealistic to guide the design of curriculum and pedagogical practices.

To make its intended curriculum implementable, SEK set up a special curriculum team led by the school principal. It consisted of deputy principals and one to two kindergarten teachers with high education levels. Furthermore, the Administration Center of Preschool Education in Shenzhen encouraged the development of an SBC in all kindergartens and granted independence to kindergarten principals for this development. In addition, unlike private kindergartens that attended to parents' needs and opinions as a priority, as a public kindergarten, SEK enjoyed favorable relationships with families given the competitive nature of student enrollment in SEK, with hundreds of families vying for a limited number of places there annually. Therefore, not having consumed themselves with parents' opinions, the SEK principal was at

liberty to experiment with innovative and even radical curriculum reforms that she deemed fit for her kindergarten. As such, these curriculum reforms were intrinsically and ideologically motivated.

According to the school principal, decisions and reforms for the SBC were influenced by similar practices she witnessed in Hong Kong kindergartens and prior experimentations with the Project Approach, where practical difficulties with collecting and accumulating rich curriculum materials were identified. To address this curriculum development issue, SEK's intended curriculum abandoned textbooks or any published learning packages in favor of following children's developmental and learning interests. For example, all the learning activities were developed by teachers specific to the various learning centers. While SEK's intended curriculum did follow the U.S.-originated High/Scope Curriculum, it made two adaptations to this educational approach: (1) increasing the variety and number of learning corners and materials and (2) incorporating theme-related discussions during children's activity planning sessions. SEK's intended curriculum reflected a combination of child-centered learning and teacher-directed thematic teaching.

The Implemented Curriculum

At SEK, all classes were multiaged (consisting of 3- to 5-year-olds) and followed the same daily routine as shown in Table 6.3.

Furthermore, each classroom was designated a learning center, with nine to ten learning corners accompanying each theme. In total, SEK had 12 classrooms transformed into two types of learning centers: (1) eight learning centers for creative expression, including Construction Center, Domestic Life Center, Music and Movement Center, Visual Arts Center, Language Center, Folk Culture Center, Science Center, Drama Center, and (2) four learning centers for operational cognition, such as Nature Center, Social and

Table 6.3 SEK's class daily routine

Time	Activities
8:00–8:30	Greetings and micro-community
8:30–8:50	Breakfast
8:50–9:20	Circle time, plan, and go to centers
9:20–10:10	Do – learning center activities
10:10–10:40	Review and transition time
10:40–11:30	Outdoor play
11:30–12:00	Transition time and lunch
12:00–12:20	A walk
12:20–14:30	Nap time
14:30–15:20	Transition time and high tea
15:20–15:40	Group activities (Arts, English, storytelling, music)
15:40–16:30	Outdoor play or gardening
16:30–17:00	Preparations for leaving

Cultural Learning Center, Math Center, and Intelligence and Cognition Center. Most learning materials in these centers were designed for creative expression and were not highly structured. However, high-structured materials were provided for training certain cognitive skills or introducing particular knowledge in centers for operational cognition. The setup of learning centers was determined by the curriculum team, and the setup of learning corners and materials was mainly decided by the class teachers of that learning center. These decisions were usually based on their pedagogical experiences and understanding of children's interests and abilities.

At SEK, the teaching approach was neither child-directed nor teacher-directed. Instead, it was material-directed. The typical High/Scope sequence "plan-do-review" was adopted to arrange main learning activities in learning centers. For planning and reviewing, small-group discussions among children in their classrooms were carried out. During planning, teachers would confirm with children their choices of learning corners and their chosen themes (e.g., frogs) to help them formulate their working plans related to the specific themes. The children would then conduct their plan-do-review activities in their chosen corners. Usually, children would carry out their working plans only if the learning materials allowed them to do so. During the doing time, the learning center head stays in their center classroom with two teachers. One teacher would circulate to different centers to observe, support, and take note of children's learning. The other teacher would stay in the focus learning center, where three to four teams of children were working together. During the reviewing time, children would gather their works and present their learning experiences to one another, and the teacher would make some suggestions if necessary. In addition to activities at learning centers, there were small-group activities for shared reading, music, arts, and English language as well. The children would be divided into groups by age. These small-group activities would be conducted mostly in a teacher-directed manner, focusing on the concept and knowledge building.

SEK would conduct both formative evaluation and summative evaluation. The formative evaluation was conducted using a booklet designed by the school. Every day after the doing session, children would record their learning experiences via presentations, such as drawings, numbers, and symbols, if time permitted. If not, children would complete this assignment at home and share their learning activities with their parents. Parents would then be required to note children's oral descriptions on the booklet and attach relevant pictures. Teachers would also have a part to complete involving commenting on children's learning experiences and outcomes in one to two sentences. Finally, at the end of the semester, teachers would complete summative checklists on children's performances in five domains based on their general understanding and observations of their learning. The five domains were: (1) health, (2) arts, (3) socio-emotional development, (4) science, and (5) language.

In sum, SEK's implemented curriculum was material-centered, through which children would be given abundant opportunities to interact with peers

and materials. However, this model has limitations. For example, children would need more support from teachers to dive deeper into their learning to grasp some basic concepts and skills. Moreover, children's interests might go beyond what learning corners and materials could offer.

The Attained Curriculum

SEK's implemented curriculum was comprehensive and inclusive because of the rich materials and activities in the learning corners that covered all the target domains of children's development. Teachers were involved in children's learning, including checking their booklets monthly to ensure they participated in various learning experiences in all target domains. Additionally, the arrangement of group activities and outdoor play contributed to the comprehensiveness of learning coverage, as did the assessment methods on children's learning experiences in target domains. The implemented curriculum was also balanced with child-centered learning, as young children could develop their knowledge, skills, and dispositions during learning corner activities that usually could integrate content from several domains. The number of learning centers for language and arts and those for science and math also reflected a balance of learning experiences.

However, from the perspective of the 3CAPs framework, SEK might need improvement. For example, SEK's implemented curriculum was material-centered with little attention to children's individuality and agency. As such, SEK ranked lower in the dimension of child-individually appropriateness than SLK. In addition, SEK's implemented curriculum did not address culturally and context appropriateness adequately. In their study, Li et al. (2011) found a belief-practice gap among Shenzhen kindergarten teachers who expressed child-centered beliefs but conducted mainly teacher-directed, whole-class teaching. This finding also appeared evident among SEK teachers.

The Misalignments among the Intended, Implemented, and Attained Curricula

There were some noticeable misalignments among the intended, implemented, and attained curricula in SEK. The first misalignment was between the intended and the implemented curriculum in that there was a weak operation of the intended curriculum. For example, every day, the 12 classes of children would rotate through the 12 learning centers. Hence, this arrangement created a logistic problem of moving around 300 children safely and smoothly. While implementing many different ways to guarantee the safety of children and division of responsibilities among teachers during the moving around phase, ensuring the 12 classes smoothly cooperate with one another was a huge challenge because chaos and clashes would occasionally occur even after careful consideration and well-planned arrangements. Given this basic logistic issue, while well-meaning, the intended curriculum was not practical nor replicable in other Chinese kindergartens.

The second misalignment was evident between the implemented and the attained curriculum. Although SEK emphasized the role of teachers in facilitating children's learning, teachers could not provide authentic scaffolding to children when they were busy traveling around the 12 centers. During the "doing" session, for instance, most children had a very limited time interacting with their teachers. Thus, they had few opportunities to receive constructive support from these teachers. Vice versa, their teachers also had few opportunities to get to know the children outside of the center activities. This situation might have rendered their daily assessments of children's learning incomplete and even impossible.

The third misalignment was that the learning materials were predetermined and fixed in nature. Ideally, changes to the learning materials would need to be made regularly to provide newness for exploring different learning. Furthermore, the mismatch between the existing materials and the chosen themes by children was often identified yet ignored. The main reason was that teachers could only make changes to corners in their classrooms, but the mismatch often resided in their colleagues' learning centers. In addition, even though most materials were lowly structured (thus flexible for free creation), most were assigned with specific purposes in mind by teachers. However, more teacher guidance on children's engagement with these materials would increase the possibility of a mismatch between learning materials and theme-based learning.

Recommendations for Improvement of Alignments

The case of SEK provided opportunities for reflection on improvement. First, SEK should consider refining this bold 12-center arrangement. Instead of making 12 classes move around all the classrooms, SEK could group them into three groups – Floor 1, Floor 2, and Floor 3. Each floor could have its own centers; thus, the children would only need to move around the four classrooms on the same floor. In this way, the benefit of shared resources and materials could be retained while managing the logic more practically, including shortening children's traveling distance and reducing chaos that might ensue.

Second, SEK could consider regularly exchanging learning materials and engaging in peer discussion among teachers so that they could help one another to make improvements. An alternative change would be to have a themed corner in each classroom in which teachers would provide themed materials of children's interests to make available in the chosen corners during the week.

Third, SEK could consider some school-based teacher professional development. This consideration is critical because successful implementation of a curriculum relies on the implementers – namely, the teachers – and, thus, are subject to teachers' interpretations, beliefs, and experiences. Therefore, a wide variety of professional development activities and a well-designed support system should be provided. Additionally, the sustainable development

of any SBC needs expert guidance and thus requires close partnerships among curriculum experts, teachers, supervisors, and principals (Li, 2005). If circumstances permit, SEK should cooperate with local scholars to elicit regular support and guidance from education researchers.

Lessons Learned from the Two Cases in China

SLK and SEK in Shenzhen as two case studies provide a valuable opportunity to deepen our understanding of the process and outcome of the glocalization of the ECC in China. There were similarities and differences between the two cases. For example, both kindergartens shared the same school-based fusion of diverse curriculum models. For instance, the High/Scope Curriculum became one of the major approaches in making the SBC activity systems work in the two kindergartens. The plan-do-review procedure was adopted to encourage the teachers' arrangement of daily routines for children's learning, and relatedly, the establishment of learning centers/areas with optional materials became popular. However, the learning centers/areas in SLK and SEK were supplied with plenty of well-prepared materials to achieve educational objectives.

While SLK's curriculum implementation has been considered successful, SEK has been criticized by many scholars and complained about by teachers. Why? This contrast may be understood by examining the three major distinctions between SLK and SEK. First, the intended curriculum should be realistic rather than idealistic. SEK set up a mysterious philosophy for its intended curriculum – "the philosophy of going back to nature" (返本理念). This intended curriculum was like "the moon in water," suggesting that it was not rooted in reality. For example, the High/Scope Curriculum is based on ideologies, such as individualism and child-centeredness, rooted in the Western world, which stands in contrast to the collectivist approach to learning favored in Chinese culture. From this perspective, the intended curriculum of SEK lacked contextual considerations and cultural responsiveness. Consequently, there were salient misalignments between the intended and the implemented curriculum at SEK.

Second, SLK considered teachers' professional development and engaged in collaboration with scholars on curriculum development and improvement research projects. These efforts seemingly helped SLK teachers become more skillful and experienced in curriculum implementation. In contrast, SEK relied on itself (the school principal and the teaching team) rather than collaborating with external experts. In fact, SEK chose to engage in teacher development on its own, a self-centered approach that was considered ineffective for making improvements and progress by many Chinese scholars.

Third, the balance between the imported and the local curricula was also a noticeable contrast. For example, SLK strategically and deliberately incorporated Western curricula into Chinese ones into a hybrid model to leverage the best of the two worlds (the East and the West). In contrast, SEK has transplanted the High/Scope Curriculum without any critical considerations

and adaptations. In this case, SLK could be regarded as a case of glocalization (a hybrid of globalization and localization) and SEK as a case of globalization.

Conclusion

The analysis of the two case studies leads us to an important conclusion: glocalization of ECC is better than globalization. The reason is that the latter pays little attention to cultural and contextual appropriateness. According to the "3CAPs" framework, a successful curriculum should be culturally, contextually, and child-individually appropriate. In addition, according to the "*Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He*" framework (discussed in Chapter 1) proposed by the authors of this book, a successful curriculum reform should carefully consider the time/timing, the context (e.g., social, cultural), and human capital (e.g., teachers' professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions).

Despite the rich discussion and critical analysis of the two case studies, there are limitations. First, caution is required when generalizing the findings of the two case studies to other contexts, especially those dissimilar ones. Case studies in other contexts in China should be conducted to better understand the ongoing EC efforts involving SBC innovations. Our analysis reveals misalignments among the intended, implemented, and attained curricula, which may have been affected by the influences of globalization. We suggest considerations of applying the model of glocalization when implementing imported curricular models. Just like previous studies (e.g., Chen et al., 2017), the two case studies demonstrate that adapting rather than adopting Western curricula would be the most viable and potentially sustainable solution. Furthermore, the two case studies provide evidence that corroborates our discussion on the concepts of globalization, localization, and glocalization in this book (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 8).

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7 Glocalization of Early Childhood Curriculum

Two Cases of Hong Kong

Philip Hui Li and Jennifer J. Chen

Hong Kong has been officially known as the Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China since 1997, when it was returned to Chinese sovereignty after 156 years of being under British rule. Over the decades, Hong Kong has ascended into a prosperous metropolis fused with cultural influences from both the East and the West. Its unique exposure to and maintenance of Chinese cultural values and global ideologies have been manifested in all sectors, including all levels of the education system. Notably, Hong Kong has been engaging in preprimary education reform, advocating constructivist, child-centered approaches to child development and learning (Curriculum Development Council, 1996, 2006, 2017).

The education reform force has been felt in Hong Kong kindergartens as they adopt and adapt globally promoted innovative curricula and pedagogical approaches along with locally-ingrained traditional methods, resulting in practices of glocalization (Chen et al., 2017). In this chapter, we analyze specifically the curriculum development and implementation of two Hong Kong kindergartens as case studies using the *Tian Shi (Timing), Di Li (Context), Ren He (Human Capital)* theoretical framework proposed by the authors of this book in a recent publication (Chen & Li, 2022). This framework is discussed in Chapter 1 of this book and later in this chapter.

In Hong Kong, kindergartens typically offer half-day programs (about three hours per day) for children (ages 3–6), with only a few whole-day programs. There are three levels of education for young children by age: (1) kindergarten 1 (K1) class for 3- to 4-year-olds, (2) Kindergarten 2 (K2) class for 4- to 5-year-olds, and (3) Kindergarten 3 (K3) for 5- to 6-year-olds.

Case A: Locally Developed School-based Curriculum

School Information

Apple Kindergarten, serving young children ages 3–6, was established in 1973 by a nonprofit-making religious organization. As a registered nonprofit kindergarten, Apple Kindergarten joined the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme in 2007 and the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme in

2018, receiving financial subsidies from education authorities. It was located within a public housing community for low-income families. Apple Kindergarten ran two half-day programs per day, each lasting three hours. In total, there were eight classes in the morning and eight in the afternoon. When we collected data in the 2018–2019 school year, Apple Kindergarten included 36 teachers and staff educating and caring for 480 children. Most teachers had worked at this kindergarten for more than ten years, and almost half had early children-teaching certificates (47%), 36% had a bachelor's degree, and 8% possessed a master's degree. All of the teachers were deemed qualified to teach kindergarten.

Apple Kindergarten's mission and vision were clearly stated on its school website: "A kindergarten is an important precondition of a person's development, and early years have a huge impact on children's later development, regular school life, and cultivation." Accordingly, the school aimed to cultivate children's minds by teaching them the importance of being merciful and forgiving. It also emphasized students' moral values, which were also highly valued by teachers and parents. Furthermore, according to Apple Kindergarten, the purpose of the early education program was to transmit the Buddhist spirit of compassion to children and inspire their all-around potential, creativity, and virtuous morality in an educationally sound way. To achieve these goals, Apple Kindergarten made concerted efforts to continuously develop its unique curriculum, create a caring and supportive environment, and promote home-school collaboration.

The Intended Curriculum

Apple Kindergarten's school-based curriculum (SBC) was founded on the Story Approach to Integrated Learning (SAIL 2.0) and Children's Potential to be Motivated (CPM). Specifically, since 2007, Apple Kindergarten's SBC has been adopting the school-based tailoring approach (Li, 2007) by incorporating three kinds of learning packages: (1) SAIL 2.0, (2) *CPM Toy Boxes*, and (3) *Practice and Research of Etiquette, Moral and Quality Education*. Developed by the first author of this book, SAIL is both a teaching approach and curriculum that utilizes stories as a form of integrated curriculum and as a basis for creating activities to facilitate children's learning (Li, 2007). CPM consisted of a set of educational toys to train young children's fine motor skills and facilitate their cognitive development. It is also incorporated into the SBC framework. Noticeably, SAIL 2.0 was applied as the prime curriculum to practice integrated theme-based teaching. At the same time, CPM materials were used to develop informal object-based activities for sensory training and concept reinforcement, complementing SAIL by linking content consistently across learning domains. The *Practice and Research of Etiquette, Moral and Quality Education* textbook was mainly used for promoting moral education, as Apple Kindergarten was engaged in a special mission of delivering a moral and religious education to young children.

Curriculum Beliefs and Goals

Apple Kindergarten articulated its curriculum beliefs as follows: "Everything is adjusted to suit children's development, improve learning and teaching culture, and enhance teachers' professionalism." Additionally, the kindergarten believed in cultivating children to be grateful to everyone, build a strong sense of justice, and develop courage in the face of difficulties. Accordingly, Apple Kindergarten categorized its SBC into four domains: (1) moral education, (2) health development, (3) intellectual development, and (4) arts. In particular, its moral education emphasized moral etiquette training by combining Buddhist and Confucian ethics, fostering in children the virtue of being caring, and establishing correct values of life. Its health development focuses on children's physical and mental development by providing a safe environment and diverse activities to help them build a strong body and a good temperament. Apple Kindergarten's intellectual development relied on SAIL and CPM learning, including incorporating various interdisciplinary learning areas and basic skills. Finally, its arts education was intended to stimulate children's curiosity and interest in exploring learning and enrich children's imagination and creativity by improving children's abilities to enjoy the aesthetics in the world. All these learning domains focused primarily on children's abilities to learn by engaging with SAIL stories and CPM toys.

SAIL

SAIL is a transdisciplinary teaching approach that uses stories to construct an integrated curriculum to introduce themes and learning activities (Li & Chau, 2010). SAIL was conceptualized as "a journey of story and exploration" by Li (2007). It was designed to embrace a transdisciplinary approach to promoting children's multiple intelligences through interesting stories integrated with real-life themes and learning activities based on postmodernist perspectives of education. Therefore, not only did SAIL cover all the requirements (e.g., the curriculum goals, the developmental objectives and learning areas for children, and the three principles for curriculum design) delineated in the *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006), but it also emphasized diversity and life education (Li, 2007; Li & Chau, 2010).

CPM

CPM was claimed to have developed from the Froebel Gifts, Montessori materials, and Dewey's "learning by doing" ideology. The "treasure boxes" were well-designed by education experts, with each toy box involving a mat, a task card, and purposeful objects with fixed operation methods and rules. The CPM toy boxes were designed to vary by the degree of difficulty and the type of tasks to satisfy children's individualized learning. Furthermore, CPM

was meant to be innovative via systemic hands-on games for achieving learning in different subject areas, such as mathematics, science, and the Chinese language. These games may encourage young children to explore what they desire to learn and then seek answers by themselves. CPM may also help children develop their motor skills and cognitive abilities.

Moral Education

Instead of instilling in children religious values and Chinese traditional virtues didactically via direct teaching, Apple Kindergarten engaged children in contextually meaningful activities, such as parent-child activities and community-based activities, in which children would learn how to express love, take responsibility as citizens, and develop some life skills. Additionally, children would immerse themselves in a caring environment where the teachers served as role models of good behaviors.

The SBC Implemented

Figure 7.1 illustrates that Apple Kindergarten's SBC has three major parts: SAIL 2.0, CPM, and moral education. Every theme-based activity reflected these three balanced dimensions to address the holistic developmental needs of each child.

SAIL 2.0

SAIL may be delivered in four steps: Step 1: storytelling, Step 2: theme-based activities, Step 3: follow activities, and Step 4: theme-based evaluation. Each theme lasts about one month. Figure 7.2 displays an example of how SAIL was delivered for one week. The theme of that week was "food and
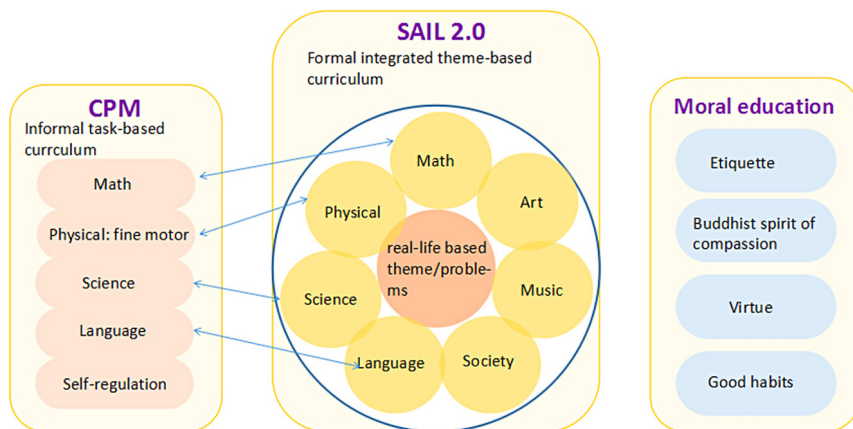
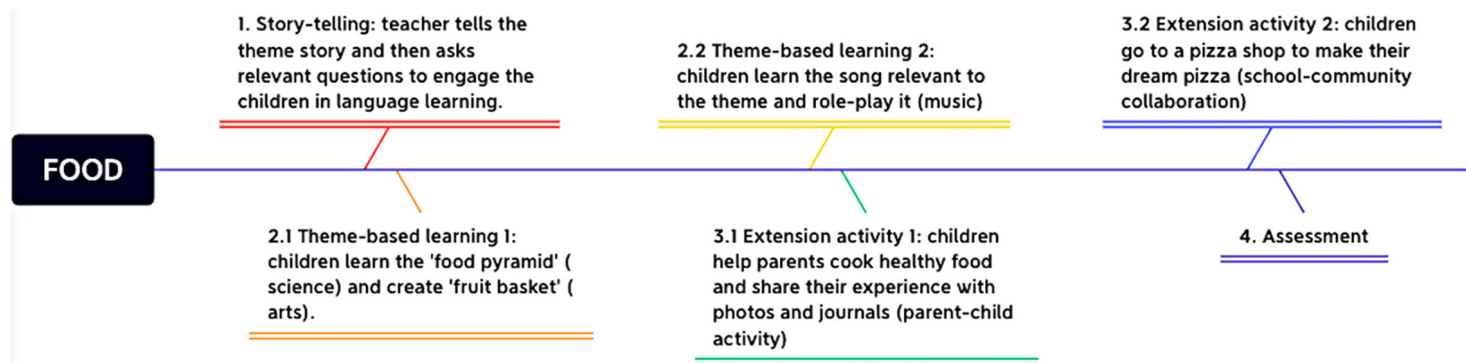*Figure 7.1* The framework of Apple Kindergarten's SBC.

Figure 7.2 The fishbone diagram of an example of SAIL implementation.

The content of the fishbone diagram:

FOOD

1. Story-telling: teacher tells the theme story and then asks relevant questions to engage the children in language learning.

2.1 Theme-based learning 1: children learn the 'food pyramid' (science) and create 'fruit basket' (arts).

2.2 Theme-based learning 2: children learn the song relevant to the theme and role-play it (music)

3.1 Extension activity 1: children help parents cook healthy food and share their experience with photos and journals (parent-child activity)

3.2 Extension activity 2: children go to a pizza shop to make their dream pizza (school-community collaboration)

4. Assessment

health." The whole week was planned using the fishbone diagram. All the integrated activities were carefully and sequentially organized along the fishbone.

Although SAIL is child-oriented and underpins an open framework for flexible teaching, in essence, the curriculum quality is still determined by the teacher's implementation. Two SAIL lessons, each in a K3 (upper kindergarten for 5- to 6-year-olds), were observed in Apple Kindergarten, revealing variations in the teachers' storytelling performance. The first K3 teacher seemingly dominated the story time by talking the most and seldom encouraging children to express their ideas. As a result, some children were unable to concentrate on the story. The second K3 teacher organized different story-based activities to engage everyone in the class, including asking critical-thinking questions and engaging children in group discussions and individual presentations to guide children in deepening their understanding of the story content. This teacher's approach was more child-oriented and, thus, could engage the children in story learning more than the first K3 teacher.

CPM

Compared to SAIL, the process of CPM activities is considered more teacher-directed. For example, Apple Kindergarten claimed that their CPM activities were play-based. However, class observations suggested that CPM activities were far from embodying the notion of play because the manipulation of learning toys was close-ended and structured with highly academic purposes in mind. For example, the children had little freedom to choose the toy boxes independently. In addition, as they were required to learn using the CPM materials quietly and individually, the children had few opportunities to interact with their peers and communicate with their teachers. Consequently, learning using CPM materials seemed more like an individually-focused academic exercise rather than child-centered play.

SBC in Action

Table 7.1 shows the half-day schedule (same for both the morning and the afternoon sessions) of an observed K3 classroom in Apple Kindergarten. The activities included teacher-directed and child-oriented ones, directly or indirectly related to the theme of the week. Thematic activities accounted for approximately 65% and free play for 15% in the K3 classroom. The children were given certain freedom to make their own choices, construct knowledge in their ways, and explore their interests during creatively self-selective and theme-based activities. Additionally, the teachers introduced some explicit skills by sometimes using directed instruction and making decisions on the learning content and materials. Considering that this SBC integrated child-oriented and teacher-directed activities, the implementation could be considered an open mode (see Figure 7.3).

Table 7.1 A half-day routine of a K3 Class at Apple Kindergarten

Time	Activity	Content	Types of activity
8:30–9:00	Welcome time	1. Hand in homework 2. Self-selected activities: CPM activity or physical exercise	Teacher-directed (CPM activity) Child-oriented (physical activities)
9:00–9:10	Circle time	1. Buddhist pray 2. Rhythm: dancing and singing in Mandarin 3. Say hello to the whole class	Both teacher-directed (less) and child-oriented (less)
9:10–9:30	Theme-based activities	1. Storytime 2. Theme exploration activity	Both teacher-directed (less) and child-oriented (more)
9:30–10:20	Group activities	1. Group one: Chinese writing or math exercise 2. Group two: theme-related worksheet 3. Group three: theme-based artwork or games Children take part in the three group activities in turn	Both teacher-directed and child-oriented
10:20–10:50	Free play	Play among different corners	Child-oriented
10:50–11:05	Theme-based whole-class English activity	Planned English activity taught by a foreign teacher	Teacher-directed
11:05–11:20	Rest time	1. Toilet 2. Wash hands 3. Snack time	Child-oriented
11:20–11.35	Storytime	Listen to the story in Mandarin Chinese through CD (SAIL story)	Teacher-directed
11:30–12:00	Theme-based music activity	1. Singing songs after teachers 2. Music role playing	Both teacher-directed (less) and child-oriented (more)
12:00	Leave school		

The SBC delivery approach was primarily teacher-directed and whole class–oriented. The teachers would follow a detailed lesson plan and associated timetable closely and rigorously. Each teacher would demonstrate content with a projector when the class was in session and bring up words on the
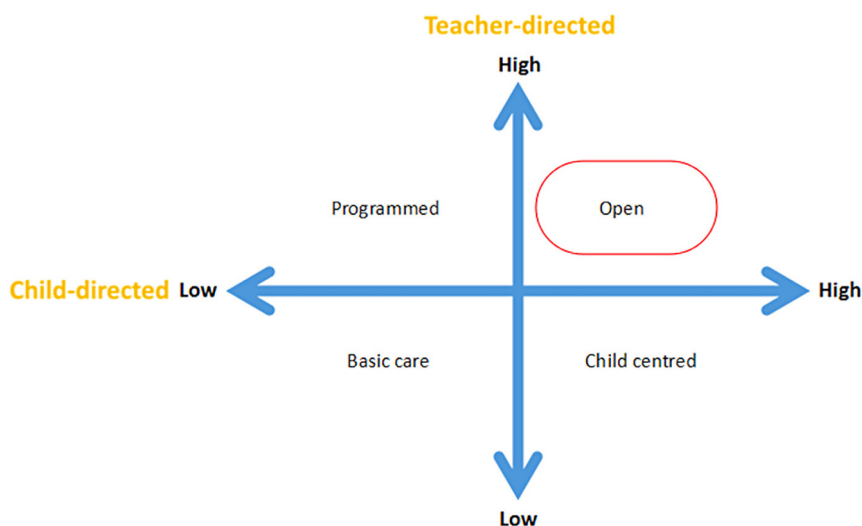
Figure 7.3 An illustration of the type of Apple Kindergarten's SBC.

whiteboard for children to learn. After this demonstration, the children would engage in CPM activities and learning corners in 15–20 minutes of self-choice time. Then, they would be assigned a certain activity and have to complete a particular task.

As the SBC was theme-based at Apple Kindergarten, the SBC consisted of seven to eight themes per school year, and every theme included two to three topics. Teachers could choose a relevant story from the SAIL learning package and one story from Hong Kong newspapers and then combine them as teaching materials for a specific topic. Young children could learn to read and write words based on these stories. In some K3 classes, when there was a special event, teachers could plan a drama activity and guide children in doing a drama show in the classroom.

Apple Kindergarten adopted a comprehensive evaluation policy to systematically and continuously evaluate young children's developmental outcomes using formative and summative assessments. Furthermore, because teachers, parents, and children were all engaged in the assessment process, they helped establish evaluation triangulation (see Figure 7.4). The teachers would assess children's developmental and learning outcomes based on observation checklists, individually documented portfolios, and CPM games. They would then report the results to parents every month. Additionally, parents would be invited to evaluate the curriculum through classroom observation, interviewing, questionnaires, and the school handbook. As the oldest age group, K3 children would also be encouraged to self-evaluate and peer-evaluate. Finally, at the end of each semester, all the assessment data would be analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively and reported in a professional document as a means to encourage ongoing reflection and improvement.
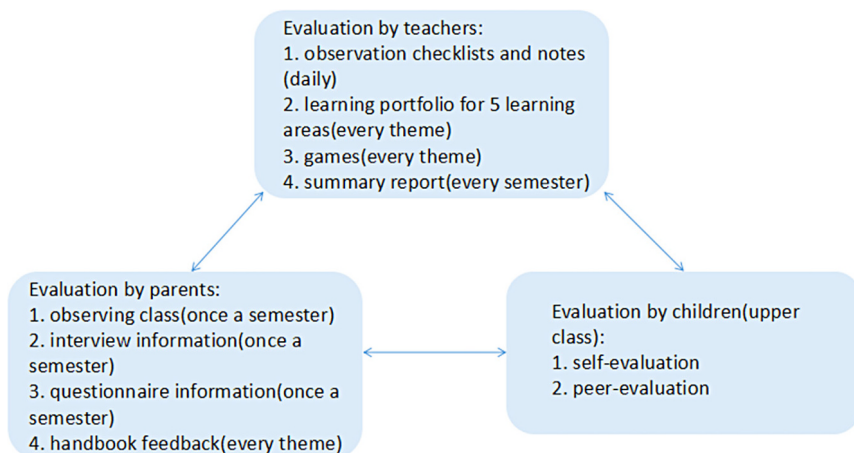
Evaluation by teachers:
1. observation checklists and notes (daily)
2. learning portfolio for 5 learning areas(every theme)
3. games(every theme)
4. summary report(every semester)

Evaluation by parents:
1. observing class(once a semester)
2. interview information(once a semester)
3. questionnaire information(once a semester)
4. handbook feedback(every theme)

Evaluation by children(upper class):
1. self-evaluation
2. peer-evaluation

Figure 7.4 Triangulation of evaluation at Apple Kindergarten.

A 3CAPs Curriculum

The SBC of Apple Kindergarten may be considered a "3CAPs" curriculum: (1) culturally appropriate practice, (2) contextually appropriate practice, and (3) child-individually appropriate practice (Li, 2007; Li & Chen, 2017). This consideration is grounded on three reasons. First, Apple Kindergarten did not adopt curricula or pedagogies imported from European-American contexts, such as the Reggio Emilia Approach and the Project Approach, which might not have fit into the Hong Kong context (Chen et al., 2017). Instead, Apple Kindergarten chose a combination of SAIL, CPM, and moral education as its SBC. By featuring Chinese values and moral education, the SBC was considered culturally appropriate.

Second, the "SAIL + CPM + moral education" model perfectly matched Apple Kindergarten's vision and mission, and it was also relatively doable for its teachers (Li, 2007; Li & Chau, 2010). It also matched the *Guide to Pre-primary Curriculum* (GPC), especially regarding moral education, school-home-community collaboration, and real-life themes (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). These findings suggest that Apple Kindergarten's SBC was contextually appropriate practice.

Third, the SAIL 2.0 learning package (including textbooks and teacher guides) provided an open framework that was sensitive and responsive to the needs and interests of children from diverse families. As all the stories could be rewritten and role-played by each child, they encouraged story comprehension and relatedness by applying their own experiences. The classroom teachers could also adjust and extend the use of the SAIL 2.0 learning package to meet children's individual differences flexibly. This pedagogical approach resembles child-individually appropriate practice.

The Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He *(天时, 地利, 人和) Theoretical Framework*

A detailed introduction of the new theoretical framework *Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He* proposed by both authors (Chen & Li, 2022) of this book appears in Chapter 1. To recap,

> *Tian Shi* refers literally to heavenly timing (meaning the right time or favorable timing), *Di Li* earthly auspice (meaning the right place or favorable contextual circumstances), and *Ren He* the right people or favorable human conditions (e.g., human harmony, human capital). In sum, "*Tian Shi, Di Li, and Ren He*" is commonly and colloquially interpreted as "the right people at the right time in the right place doing the right thing."
>
> (Chen & Li, 2022, p. 3)

Evaluating Apple Kindergarten's Curriculum Implementability Using the Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He *(天时, 地利, 人和) Framework*

In terms of *Tian Shi* (time/timing), it is not right for Apple Kindergarten because it offers only a three-hour half-day program. This time limitation made the teachers and children feel hurried daily to complete the planned learning activities. For example, because the teachers focused on delivering the SAIL activities already within time constraints, they did not seem to have time to engage children in post-story follow-up activities.

In terms of *Di Li* (context), family backgrounds might have limited parents' participation in their children's education. Specifically, Apple Kindergarten was located in a relatively low-income community, where parents might not have the education and financial means to support their children's learning. As a result, even though teacher-parent association and communication were operating smoothly, parents might not have the professional knowledge and resources to buttress their children's development and learning. In addition, the campus of Apple Kindergarten appeared outdated and constrained by the limited space. This contextual factor might have affected the teachers' ability to engage in more innovative teaching.

With respect to *Ren He* (human capital/resources), it could be improved. For instance, while SAIL 2.0 relied heavily on storytelling appropriate as a learning context for theme-based and follow-up activities, teachers would need to receive ongoing training on storytelling skills and related pedagogical approaches. Additionally, teachers would benefit from professional development on how to plan child-oriented activities based on themed stories.

Case B: Internationally Imported Curriculum

School Information

Hope Kindergarten was a nonvoucher, nonprofit-making early childhood institute. It was founded by the Christian education foundation in 1972 to provide half-day programs to local children (ages 3–6). Its main campus was

located in Causeway Bay (a popular shopping attraction with a fusion of local and imported global fashion trends and products) on Hong Kong Island. As the flagship kindergarten of the Christian education foundation, Hope Kindergarten enrolled nearly 600 children: 301 for the morning session, and 294 for the afternoon session. Just like many other kindergartens in Hong Kong, Hope Kindergarten offered K1 classes for 3- to 4-year-olds, K2 classes for 4- to 5-year-olds, and K3 classes for 5- to 6-year-olds. Most of the children came from middle-class families in the neighborhood. Hope Kindergarten comprised 45 certified teachers, 31 of whom were degree holders. The teacher-student ratio was 1:6.7 for the morning session and 1:6.5 for the afternoon session.

As a Christian education entity, Hope Kindergarten aimed to spread God's love by providing a Christian education to nurture their joyous development. Accordingly, included in the school's mission was the statement, "Every child has the right to enjoy a joyous childhood." As stated on its school home page, Hope Kindergarten's philosophy was described as follows:

> Children are active learners, their curiosity and creativity should be respected and protected; children should learn through play, and meaningful playing can effectively promote young children's development. The curriculum should be developmentally appropriate and consistent with the local context. Providing children with a well-organized and stimulatory learning environment can stimulate their inspiration and interests and encourage them to express themselves; helping them become active and enthusiastic learners and laying a good foundation for lifelong learning. Besides, integrating learning into daily life is also an important curriculum goal.

This publicly stated philosophy seemed to reflect Western ideologies about developmentally appropriate practice, including child-centeredness and play-based learning (NAEYC, 2020, 2022).

The Intended Curriculum

Hope Kindergarten's SBC reflected a mixture of the High/Scope Curriculum, the Project Approach, the thematic approach, the storytelling approach, and the integrated approach to achieve the breadth and depth of content. Specifically, to promote child-centered learning and development, Hope Kindergarten adopted the U.S.-derived High/Scope Curriculum and the Project Approach and leveraged play as a key source of learning for children.

Since 1998, Hope Kindergarten has been implementing the High/Scope Curriculum. The High/Scope Curriculum has been one of the most popular imported curricula in Hong Kong. The High/Scope Curriculum emphasizes child-initiated learning activities and promotes play-based learning

(Chen & Kacerek, 2022). The teachers at Hope Kindergarten would follow the typical High/Scope sequence: plan-do-review.

Additionally, Hope Kindergarten indicated that it has been implementing the Project Approach as supplementary to the High/Scope Curriculum. Furthermore, the children also engaged in group learning and different kinds of learning corners to carry out the 58 main experiences designed and delivered by Hope Kindergarten. This kindergarten grouped the 58 experiences into seven categories: (1) Social and Emotion, (2) Creative Representation, (3) Music, (4) Physical Fitness, (5) Language and Literacy, (6) Mathematics and Science, and (7) Creation and the Bible.

As a Christian kindergarten, the core of the curriculum at Hope Kindergarten also involved spiritual education, which was evident in a variety of learning activities. For example, Hope Kindergarten orchestrated special activities to celebrate Christian-related festivals and delivered Bible lessons and assemblies during which the teachers would teach children how to read scriptures from the Bible, sing religious songs, and pray to God. Additionally, Hope Kindergarten integrated spiritual education into its daily classroom routine. For instance, prior to eating during snack time, the teachers would guide children in praying and thanking God first.

The Implemented Curriculum

Hope Kindergarten's daily classroom schedule typically included four parts: free play time, assembly, learning corner, and small-group activities (see Table 7.2). During the free play time, children could go to any learning corner. During the learning corner time, children could only go to the learning corner chosen by teachers but could select any materials they would like and organize activities by themselves. At this time, the teachers would

Table 7.2 A half-day routine of a K1 class (Ages 3–4 years) at Hope Kindergarten

	Monday	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*
08:30–08:55			Free Play Time		
09:00–09:15	Story time		Assembly		
09:15–09:40	Exploratory	Art class	Bible class/	English/	Mandarin/
09:40–10:05	area/ Story class		Orff music class	Math class	Story class
10:05–10:30	English/	Orff	Art class/	Physical	Role-play
10:30–10:55	Tea time	music class/ Tea time	Tea time	activity/ Tea time	area/ Tea time
10:55–11:40	Language area/Art class	Math area/ Library	Physical activities	Construction area/ Exploratory area	Special activity

observe children and interact with them by asking questions or providing suggestions. During the small-group activity time, the children would have subject lessons (e.g., English, Mandarin Chinese, science, art, music), and the whole class would be divided into two groups. These lessons are usually directed by teachers in the whole-class teaching format, and the content is predesigned by teachers. All the subject areas were integrated into themes. Hope Kindergarten selected five themes annually: (1) "Our School," (2) "Baby," (3) "We love Hong Kong," (4) "Life," and (5) "Water." However, the theme-based and teacher-designed learning activities tended to lack alignment with the child-centeredness of the High/Scope Curriculum.

In addition to the High/Scope Curriculum, the Project Approach was implemented annually, during which children in each class would engage in two projects that emerged sometimes from the children's interests and other times from special events (e.g., special festivals) or the teachers' initiation. When making the project plan, the teacher and children would work together. The teacher would have an initial plan and then revise it according to the children's interests, suggestions, and needs. During the process, field trips may be arranged to investigate the topic further, and parents may get involved if necessary. Finally, as a culmination activity, the children would showcase their project results and products in the class.

Evaluating Hope Kindergarten's Curriculum Implementability Using the Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren *He Framework*

Tian Shi (Timing)

Given that Hong Kong's preprimary education reform promoted contemporary progressive child-centered curriculum and pedagogy, it seemed good timing for Hope Kindergarten to adopt the High/Scope Curriculum and the Project Approach. However, when considering the lack of *Di Li* (context) and *Ren He* (teacher knowledge and skills) as analyzed in the next sections, the timing did not seem right to render successful implementation.

The timing also did not seem favorable when the teachers and children were not provided with adequate time and space to process the learning content covered by the High/Scope Curriculum, especially considering Hope Kindergarten was only a three-hour, half-day program. For instance, the implemented High/Scope Curriculum became so overloaded that neither the teachers nor the children had adequate time to complete curricular activities (e.g., assembly, High/Scope learning corner activities, project work, theme-based learning tasks, music and movement, Mandarin Chinese and English language). Additionally, the teachers were overwhelmed with the demand of covering expected curricular goals and activities. As reflected in the teachers' journals and interns' reports, the teachers and children were always very hurried, rushing from one activity to another with little to no time to process. Additionally, while implementing the High/Scope Curriculum was already demanding too much, incorporating the Project Approach within

the High/Scope Curriculum seemed even doubly challenging. Not surprisingly, some teachers lamented that "it is hard to combine High/Scope with project work because doing projects is very time-consuming."

Di Li (Contextual Appropriateness)

It appeared that Hope Kindergarten had not rendered an optimal *Di Li* for successfully implementing the imported High/Scope Curriculum and the Project Approach for several reasons. First, the typical daily routine of Hope Kindergarten's implemented High/Scope Curriculum was different from that of the original High/Scope Curriculum. A comparison of the two is shown in Table 7.3, indicating that both allocated the most time to

Table 7.3 A comparison and illustration of High/Scope's daily routine and Hope Kindergarten's daily routine

High/Scope Routine (Holt, 2010)	Hope Kindergarten Routine
Greeting time. A smooth transition between home and school.	**Free time.** Free play time inside or outside the classroom. Children can choose the materials to play with or play with their parents.
Large-group time. Children and teacher share information together, tell stories, sing songs, or dance.	**Assembly.** Beginning with prayer activities and followed by singing and ending with dancing.
Small-group time. Adult-indicated, activity is presented, and children choose how they use the materials.	**Small-group time.** Children are led to a presented learning corner and choose the activities or material by themselves.
Planning time. Children indicated what they wished to do, what they might use, and who they might play with.	The "plan-do-review" routine and tidy-up time are mixed into small-group activities.
Work (do) time. Children carry out the Plans, and adults interact with children by extending their work.	• Children choose their learning corner. • Plan, do, and review. • Teacher observes and guides students • during the process. • Children choose their activities • and interact with their classmates.
Tidy-up time. Children and adults work together to tidy away the materials	
Review time. Children talk about what they do and show the work to each other.	
Snack time. Children are offered snacks, and lots of conversations are going on.	**Snack time.** Children are offered snacks, and lots of conversations are going on.
Large-group time. Songs and endings.	**Whole-class time.** Bible lessons, language lessons, or physical lessons.
Parents pick up children	***Parents pick up children***

child-centered activities, such as small-group time with the "plan-do-review" routine. However, since the context of its small-group activities relied heavily on specific themes and projects, Hope Kindergarten's implemented curriculum was highly teacher-directed and child-centered, reflecting an open mode of experience (see Figure 7.3). Furthermore, at Hope Kindergarten, the typical "plan-do-review" sequence was not clearly reflected in the educational process, as it was mixed with tidy-up time (see Table 7.3).

With respect to the implementability of the Project Approach at Hope Kindergarten, despite the well-intended efforts of the teachers and children, the projects initiated and completed by the children were often theme-driven and, at times, teacher-orchestrated. Thus, the project work was inconsistent with the authentic implementation of the Project Approach. Nonetheless, the theme-driven learning activities at Hope Kindergarten reflected the general educational reality in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the Chinese cultural belief about the teachers being the authorities and knowledge transmitters seemed evident in the theme-based and teacher-orchestrated project work.

Other curriculum demands also hindered the successful implementation of the High/Scope Curriculum and the Project Approach. For example, ever since the educational authorities in Hong Kong launched the "biliterate and trilingual policy" in 1998, most Hong Kong kindergartens began to implement an early language education that included biliteracy (Chinese and English) and trilingual (Cantonese Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, and English) (Li & Rao, 2000). Additionally, the GPC repeatedly urged kindergartens to include early bilingual or trilingual activities in their curriculum (Curriculum Development Institute, 2006, 2017). Accordingly, at Hope Kindergarten, while the dominant medium of instruction was Cantonese Chinese, children learned Mandarin Chinese (once a week) and English (twice a week), all of which were conducted during whole-class instruction. Although this arrangement satisfied the basic requirements of GPC, it was still far from meeting the children's needs and their parents' expectations. Moreover, high expectations on early biliterate and trilingual learning seemed to have placed even more demands on the teachers, a contextual factor that seemed to have impeded Hope Kindergarten teachers' ability to implement the adopted High/Scope Curriculum and the Project Approach in true fashion.

Ren He (Human Capital/Professional Preparation)

Reflecting features of the High/Scope Curriculum, Hope Kindergarten teachers appeared to have effectively created a conducive learning environment with various learning corners: Languages Corner, Mathematics Corner, Science Corner, Visual Art Corner, Block Corner, Imitative Corners, and Life Skills Corners. However, some teachers reported struggling to scaffold young children's learning during the learning corner time. For example, some indicated experiencing difficulties in guiding children to appropriately complete the plan-do-review cycle as intended by the High/Scope Curriculum. Additionally, although Hope Kindergarten teachers had been

implementing the Project Approach, it seemed that the teachers were not well prepared with the professional knowledge and skills needed to conduct the Project Approach in an authentic child-centered manner. For instance, these teachers ended up conducting project work in a thematic fashion, which suggests that the limited human capital might prevent Hope Kindergarten from implementing the imported High/Scope Curriculum and the Project Approach with fidelity.

Lessons Learned from the Two Cases in Hong Kong

"Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He" Matters

The curriculum implementation process and outcome of Apple Kindergarten and Hope Kindergarten were similar in some ways and different in others. A key difference was the fact that Apple Kindergarten's SBC involved the adoption of local curricula (e.g., SAIL 2.0, CPM). In contrast, Hope Kindergarten's SBC involved the adoption of imported curricula (e.g., the High/Scope Curriculum, the Project Approach) from the United States. Yet, they both were confronted with the same challenge of *Tian Shi* (timing) in implementing their own SBC. However, the timing was not right because of some contextually and pedagogically constraining factors. First, the overwhelming curriculum coupled with time limitations for teaching and student learning made it particularly challenging to implement a comprehensive SBC successfully. The phenomenon of hurried teachers and hurried children hurrying to cover the curriculum was typical of Hong Kong kindergartens, especially for half-day programs, as was the case for the two kindergartens.

Second, the findings from the analysis of the two cases suggest that despite their good intentions, both kindergartens had not yet rendered a cultural and educational environment conducive to the implementation of curriculum and pedagogical innovations advocated zealously in Hong Kong's preprimary education reform, which is a typical *Di Li* issue.

Third, both Apple Kindergarten and Hope Kindergarten had limited *Ren He* (human capital) due to contextual factors (e.g., time constraints, limited professional knowledge and skills). Thus, the teachers at the two kindergartens were not ready to implement their respective SBCs as intended. Instead, they implemented a fusion of curricular approaches involving a high level of both child-centeredness and teacher-directedness, which gave rise to an open mode of experience for children, as discussed earlier.

A Hybrid Model as a Solution

As demonstrated by both Apple Kindergarten and Hope Kindergarten, a hybrid model that appropriately incorporates or combines local and/or imported curricula and educational ideologies may sensitively put favorable *Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He* to render any curriculum implementation potentially successful. For example, Hope Kindergarten's efforts to implement

globally promoted curricular models (the High/Scope Curriculum and the Project Approach) alongside some traditional Chinese curricular and pedagogical methods (e.g., the thematic approach, teacher-directed whole group instruction) suggests that a hybrid curriculum would work more naturally and harmoniously. The hybrid model is optimal because it aligns the time/timing of implementation with social, cultural, educational, and contextual appropriateness, as well as with the necessary professional preparation and development of teachers. Furthermore, it bridges two apparently opposing forces (globalization and localization) into one harmonious dynamic: glocalization. The hybrid model has also been advocated by both authors of this book in their research studies (e.g., Chen, 2022; Chen & Li, 2022; Chen et al., 2017) and here as a practically realistic and potentially sustainable solution.

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8 The Reggio Emilia Approach Interpreted or Misinterpreted in Other Societies

The Case of the United States

Jennifer J. Chen and Philip Hui Li

The Reggio Emilia Approach: From Italy to the United States

The United States may have prided itself on being a much-admired inventor and exporter of various innovative educational ideas, such as John Dewey's progressive education, Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, the National Association of the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) framework of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), Diane Trister Dodge's Creative Curriculum, Lillian Katz and Sylvia Chard's the Project Approach, and David Weikart's High/Scope Curriculum, all of which have continued to shape the landscape of curricular policies and educational practices nationally and globally. Yet, the United States is also an avid importer of educational ideologies from other countries. Particularly, in the early childhood education (ECE) realm, some of the most influential imported ones have been Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf philosophy, Maria Montessori's Montessori Method, and Loris Malaguzzi's Reggio Emilia Approach originated in Europe.

However, perhaps no educational approach has generated more buzz than the Reggio Emilia Approach (sometimes referred to simply as "Reggio," and thus, this reference is also used hereafter) founded by the visionary Italian educator Loris Malaguzzi (1920–1994). The reputation of Reggio as exemplifying best practices has quickly catapulted it into the limelight of the United States. Most notably, in December 1991, based on interviews with many local and foreign authorities in international education, the American weekly magazine *Newsweek* named Reggio the best model of preschool education in the world (Wingert, 1991). Furthermore, in his forward to the most celebrated book about Reggio in the United States, *The Hundred Languages of Children*, American developmental psychologist and educator Howard Gardner (2012) also lauded Reggio as epitomizing for him "an education that is effective and humane; its students undergo a sustained apprenticeship in humanity, one that may last a lifetime" (p. xvii).

Given the popularity of Reggio as a symbol of educational excellence, we devote this chapter to explaining first the evolution of Reggio as a highly localized early childhood (EC) experience and then its revolutionary effects

on the world, especially the United States. Specifically, we discuss (1) the humble origins of Reggio as entwined with the political and cultural history of Italy; (2) its widespread influences on the thinking and practice of EC educators in the United States; (3) the challenges of adopting/adapting this educational approach in this country, reflecting imbued practical complexities and sociocultural incompatibilities with American educational tradition and culture; (4) the significance of Reggio as an example of globalized inspiration rather than globalized hegemony; and (5) implications of Reggio for reconceptualizing ECE among U.S. educators.

The Original Version of the Reggio Emilia Approach in Italy

The History and Origins of Reggio

Today, Reggio Emilia may be famously regarded by many as a beautiful, small city in northern Italy with tremendous economic prosperity in agricultural and industrial development and rich cultural vibrancy in art and architecture (Firlik, 1994), all of which have attracted numerous tourists the world over. Yet, for many EC teachers, beyond all of these splendors, Reggio Emilia holds an even more special significance and an additional cherished educational treasure that has magnetized masses of EC visitors from around the globe, especially in the last three decades. It is where the Reggio Emilia Approach (a nomenclature that pays homage to its birthplace) was conceived, delivered, and has continued to evolve and grow. As a result, Reggio has been claimed by many as the most innovative and best approach in the world for educating young children (from infant-toddler to pre-primary grades) (Edwards et al., 2012; New, 1990). As attention on and investment in the quality of ECE grows across many developed nations, Reggio has quickly ascented to dominance in the global discourse as an exemplar of educational excellence. Consequently, it has been imported into other cultural spheres worldwide.

Despite the various romantic or utopian views that many spectators may have formed about Reggio, this educational approach actually has a humble genesis rooted in social, cultural, and political struggles. In fact, Gandini (2012a) detailed in her interview with Malaguzzi that he described Reggio as emerging from "humble and at the same time extraordinary origins" and "surrounded by doctrines, politics, economic forces, scientific change, and human dramas; there is always in progress a difficult negotiation for survival" (pp. 36–37). Most notably, this innovative educational approach was born out of warfare.

During World War II, Italy was a war zone for two years. The war was finally over in 1945 and also left the country in shambles. In the city of Reggio Emilia in the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy, however, determination and big ideas were brewing. Families there were determined to lift themselves out of destructive remnants from the aftermath of World War II by rebuilding themselves and building a better future for their

children from the oppressive education system and the lack of opportunity for development that they had been enduring under the fascist regime.

As fascism was ending and Reggio citizens were recovering from its suppression effects, they saw this political transition as an opportunity to create hope, peace, and freedom in society (Edwards et al., 2012). Thus, the families collectively decided that building a school for young children was an imperative related to not only human survival but also the improvement of the lives of these children and the future of society (Gandini, 2011). This determined and optimistic mindset sent them on a path to building a school, literally from the ground up, "brick by brick," using whatever warfare equipment that was left by the retreating Germans (Barazzoni, 2000). If we believe the famous African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child!" then the grassroots effort of the community in Reggio Emilia epitomized the very ideal of educating young children as a collective responsibility.

Inspired by the Reggio community's grassroots mission, a local educator, Malaguzzi, joined forces to assist in its efforts of not only constructing the first of many post-war municipal preschools (serving children from infancy to age 6) but also germinating new localized educational ideas to replace those dictated by nationally centralized policy and prescriptive approaches considered to stunt children's natural learning (Malaguzzi, 1993a). Under the guidance of Malaguzzi, an alternative educational philosophy and pedagogy was born and has since been known as the Reggio Emilia Approach (Gandini, 1994; Malaguzzi, 1993b; New, 1990). As the cliché goes, "the rest is history."

Theoretical Inspirations Galvanizing the Principles of Reggio

"Inspirational" is one of the many affirmative words one may use to describe Reggio. Yet, Reggio's inspirational aura is not without its own roots of inspiration. Neither Malaguzzi nor his Reggio followers claimed Reggio to be a solely original and novel concept or a model for the rest of the world. Instead, they publicly acknowledged that the philosophical and pedagogical inspirations galvanizing the creation of Reggio were multiplex, reflecting a rich theoretical affinity to an eclectic collection of seminal conceptualizations. Specifically, Malaguzzi attributed the inspiration of his educational philosophy to noted thinkers, including constructivists (i.e., Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky) (Edwards, 2003) and psychologists (e.g., Urie Bronfenbrenner, Jerome Brunner, Howard Gardner) (Hall et al., 2014). Perhaps a most significant contribution to Reggio from the United States was John Dewey's progressive education (e.g., learner-centeredness, hands-on approach to learning through projects) that was particularly visible in Reggio, supporting children as active agents in their own learning (Edwards, 2003). Guided by these influential thinkers, Malaguzzi strongly believed that school was not a place of knowledge transmission (from the teacher to the students) but of knowledge construction by the child in relation to the physical and social world in which one lives (Firlik, 1996). Furthermore, inspired by the ideas of many noted theorists, Malaguzzi aptly transformed these ideas into

a cohesive philosophy that reflected the unique cultural context of Reggio Emilia. We interpret the principles encapsulating Reggio as representing six main areas: (1) "the image of the child," (2) "the image of the teacher," (3) "the image of the environment," (4) "the image of the family and community," (5) "the image of documentation," and (6) "the nature of knowing and the multiple forms of knowledge." All of these individual aspects collectively give rise to a coherent educational approach that is fluid and dynamic and that allows for children to freely apply their individual competence as they engage in a natural course of exploration and discovery of learning.

The Image of the Child in Reggio

Since the United Nations adopted the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" in 1989, awareness of and attention to the rights of the child have grown around the world. Way before then, when he founded Reggio, Malaguzzi was already a champion of children's rights advocating the understanding of these rights from a strengths-based approach. Malaguzzi's (1993a, 1993b) image of the child reflects the fundamental yet powerful idea that children have "rights" (and not "needs") as competent human beings connected to others through social relationships and that it is imperative for adults to recognize and incorporate these rights in their everyday work with these children (Malaguzzi, 1993a, 1993b; Rinaldi, 2012). Accordingly, the child's rights can be viewed as a moral standard expressed in the intellectual standards of how teachers should approach a child and their learning. Specifically, Malaguzzi (1993a, 1993b) made explicit the rights of children as learners to actively construct knowledge, competently direct their own learning, curiously seek to understand the world and their relationship to it, and innately yearn for social connections with others. These portrayals of the children's rights suggest that each child has unique knowledge and capacities that can be tapped and strengthened through social relationships with others.

The Reggio cultural view of the child from the lens of competence is both powerful and empowering, as it respects the child as a vibrant life force equipped with the capacity to learn and develop naturally. Against this backdrop, in the interview conducted by Gandini (2012a), Malaguzzi expressed decrying of the normalized world of traditional schooling (centered around the teacher discourse of instruction and relatedly the teacher's role as a didactic instructor as in primary schools in Italy) as not optimal for children's learning. In the traditional education model, the teachers' "language" becomes the dominant one in the teaching-learning discourse, and the "languages" of the children are rarely given a chance to be heard. The Reggio image of the child resonates with Pestalozzi's idea of respecting the "dignity" of children as learners with the potential to learn in a supportive environment. By the respectful ways in which they are treated and given a voice to speak their own "languages," Reggio children learn to be cultural consumers and creators, learning and expressing the moral rights of humanity (Edwards, 2002).

The Child as an Active Constructor of Knowledge

From the perspective of children as having rights rather than being the objects of instruction, Reggio sees the child as the constructor of knowledge (Katz, 1998). Accordingly, learning is not something that is imposed on the child, but rather it is something that a child naturally is inclined to do (Firlik, 1994). Thus, they are respected as "authors of their own learning" (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 55). As described by Gandini (2012a), Malaguzzi further emphasized the children's proactive learning in this way: "*What children learn does not follow as an automatic result from what is taught. Rather, it is in large part due to the children's own doing as a consequence of their activities and our resources*" (p. 44). This view ascribes children as having the autonomy to have control over what they want to learn and how they learn it. As epitomized by the famous metaphor "the hundred languages of children" (Edwards et al., 2012), Reggio encourages and values the children's diverse expressions of ideas through any media, a perspective that is at the very heart of supporting the children's own construction of knowledge and its meaning. For instance, these languages of expression include "words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, music" (Edwards, 2002, p. 6). Furthermore, reminiscent of Piaget's and Vygotsky's ideas of constructivism, the Reggio child's interactions with the environment and people in that environment are considered to impact not only his or her construction of knowledge but also his or her meaning making and expression of knowledge.

The Child as a Researcher

Within Reggio, the idea of the child as a researcher is in accordance with Piaget's (1973) concept of the child as an investigator and Dewey's (1966) notion that all thinking is rooted in research, investigation, and discovery. Thus, the image of the child as a researcher suggests that the child is capable of engaging in activities characteristic of research, such as inquiring, hypothesizing, predicting, reflecting, and experimenting. Furthermore, the role of the child as a researcher aligns fittingly with the Project Approach, referred to as an in-depth investigation of a specific topic of the interest of one or more children (Katz & Chard, 2000). In the Reggio context, the Project Approach to learning is evidently the chief means of the teaching-learning process.

The Child as a Relational Being

Going beyond Piaget's notion of the child as an active constructor of knowledge within oneself and much like Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, Reggio also highlights the child as an active constructor of knowledge within the context of social interactions with others (Malaguzzi, 1993a). That is, the child learns within the context of collaboration and co-construction with

peers and teachers (Edwards et al., 2012; Gandini, 1993). As such, the child is seen as innately capable of serving as a collaborator in social interactions and relationships with others in the teaching-learning process. While constructing knowledge in the context of reciprocal relationships with teachers, parents, and peers, children are also viewed as actively creating important connections with things and people in their environment and between ideas and media they use to express them. As relationships are at the heart of Reggio, the teachers enjoy building and maintaining long-term relationships with the same children, made possible by these children staying in the program for three years (Edwards, 2003).

The Image of the Teacher in Reggio

Within Reggio, the image of the teacher is not as a transmitter or director/instructor of knowledge. Instead, the teacher assumes collaborative roles, including as the co-constructor and co-learner of knowledge, all of which reflect the teacher's image vis-à-vis the child's image as a competent learner.

The Teacher as a Co-constructor and Co-learner of Knowledge

The role of the teacher vis-à-vis the child is collaborative in nature as partner, collaborator, and co-learner in the teaching-learning process (Gandini, 1997). The reciprocal exchanges of ideas are encouraged, and adaptations negotiable to foster and advance optimal growth in knowledge (Malaguzzi, 1993b). In essence, this process is seen as involving the teacher and the child in reciprocal collaboration to gain knowledge. Furthermore, the idea of reciprocity is clearly evident in the collaboration between the teacher and learner, in such a way that by respecting the child's rights, the teacher does not direct, control, or dominate the child's learning but rather facilitates or engages in joint learning, action, and decision-making (Rankin, 1992).

The Teacher as a Facilitator

Aside from serving as a partner with the child in the teaching-learning process, the teacher also takes on the role of the facilitator. At times, the teacher may observe the child's own knowledge construction to inform about his growth when appropriate. The teacher also plays an active role in providing the tools for and scaffolding the child's learning to achieve higher levels of mental functioning or cognitive development. This idea may be considered to align with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD), defined as the difference between what a child can achieve independently and what the child can achieve potentially with assistance. Within the ZPD, the teacher provides appropriate scaffolding to assist the child in reaching a higher level of potential (Vygotsky, 1978).

The Teacher as a Researcher

As a facilitator of children's learning according to their interests, ideas, and current mental understanding, it is also imperative that the teacher assumes the role of the researcher (Edwards, 1993; Malaguzzi, 1994). By observing carefully and listening actively to what the children are doing, asking relevant questions, and collecting and analyzing documentation, the teacher can assess these children's current learning progress and facilitate their further development (Malaguzzi, 1993b).

The Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner

Within the context of Reggio, as the child's learning evolves, so must that of the teacher, especially through reflection. The idea of deep reflection is reminiscent of Dewey's notion of reflective practice, a process through which a teacher improves one's practice by reflecting on what transpires during the teaching-learning process. The question is, how can teachers become reflective practitioners? The answer is explicitly clear in the Reggio world. Reggio makes it visible for reflective practice to naturally occur by teachers engaging in collaborative discussions with colleagues, parents, experts, and even children (Filippini, 1993; Malaguzzi, 1993a).

The Teacher as a Collaborator

Within Reggio, teachers do not rely on themselves to make magic happen to support children's learning. Instead, the teachers rely on a support system to sustain their own professional development. First and foremost, the "Reggio experience" is led by a *pedagogista* (a specialist or coordinator) and collaborates with teachers, often working in pairs (Edwards, 2003; Rinaldi, 2006). Understandably, learning to interpret the children's diverse creative expressions of thinking requires skills. To support teachers in this process, Reggio schools hire *atelioristas* (visual art leaders) and *atelieriste* (artists) to provide alternative views on children's creative outputs and potentials (New, 2007). Both the teachers and *atelieriste* collaborate to ensure that the learning environment includes a studio space known as *atelier*, as well as artistic tools and materials for the children to use to express their ideas and to think in symbolic media, such as clay, constructions, arts, and in drawings and paintings (New, 2007). In collaboration with colleagues, Reggio teachers would carefully prepare the environment to support the children's capability for learning and expressing their knowledge. Thus, Reggio's collaborative process is a hallmark of teacher engagement that ultimately supports children's learning and development.

The Image of the Environment as the Third Teacher in Reggio

Reggio educators strongly believe that there are three teachers in the classroom at any time: the child, the teacher, and the environment as the third

teacher. Viewing the environment as the third teacher gives rise to the imperative of carefully attending to the environment to promote the children's learning. Within Reggio, an important concept related to children's learning is "provocation," referring to how the child provokes and is provoked by the stimuli in the environment, whereby thinking is promoted (Malaguzzi, 1993a, 1993b). Furthermore, the environment is viewed as sending visible and powerful messages about the educational approach and the teacher's priorities, values, and respect for the children's rights as learners through "caring and learning spaces" (Gandini, 2012c). Thus, Reggio teachers carefully prepare and plan aesthetically attractive environments, including providing a rich array of artistic tools and materials to capture and promote the diversity of children's interests and creative abilities (Edwards, 2002; Gandini, 2012c). Specifically, within this environment, the *atelier* serves as a "place of provocation" for children's imaginative, creative, and aesthetic construction of knowledge expressed in multiple forms (Gandini, 2012b).

The Image of the Family and Community in Reggio

The folklore of collective efforts is clearly epitomized by Reggio educators who collaborate with all stakeholders (e.g., the child, teacher, the family, the community), a value that is deeply rooted in Italian culture (New, 2007). Epistemologically, Reggio regards both the children and teachers solicitously as learners and teachers who are learning with and teaching one another. In addition to collaborating with children, the teacher engages in collaborative efforts with colleagues and parents as a vital aspect of the educational experience for the child (Albrecht, 1996; Malaguzzi, 1993a). This kind of collaboration reflects the consideration of "a triad at the center of education – children, teachers, and families" (Malaguzzi, 1993a, p. 6). Additionally, Reggio recognizes the rights of families to participate in and learn about their children's educational experience and the rights of the community's responsibility to support collaborative partnerships between the family and teachers (New, 2007). Reggio's pluralistic, community-oriented approach encourages the participation of all stakeholders, including children, parents, teachers, administrators, politicians, and other community members (Edwards et al., 2012). All of these community members may participate in school decision-making processes, such as through parent-teacher boards and town council's community-wide committees (Finegan, 2001; Firlik, 1996). As collaboration is a cornerstone of Reggio pedagogy, teachers continuously engage in observing, listening, reflecting, and learning about the children and their work in collaboration with other educators, parents, and community members (Olsson, 2009).

The Image of Documentation in Reggio

Reggio emphasizes documentation as critical to understanding and making the children's learning "visible." It supports the image of the child as a

competent learner. The visibility of the children's learning can be evident in the displays of their documented work and dialogues among all stakeholders. The various forms of documentation include but are not limited to "photographs of the children engaged in learning endeavors, children's artwork in various stages of completion, videos, and transcribed audio recordings of the children's conversations as they engage in collaboration and reciprocal dialogue with peers and adults" (Hewett, 2001, p. 98). In addition to documenting artifacts, teachers systematically observe, take notes, and record their conversations with children (Katz & Chard, 1997). Through these intentional means, documentation serves as a catalyst for promoting interest and engagement in the furtherance of children's learning. In her interview with Malaguzzi, Gandini (2012a) detailed Malaguzzi's belief that documentation could motivate children to "become even more curious, interested, and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved" (p. 46). Furthermore, the documentation of children's learning also serves as a catalyst for provoking analysis, reflection, and discussion among stakeholders (i.e., teachers, children, and their families) (Edwards et al., 2012; Gandini, 1993). For all those reasons and more, it is no wonder that the documentation of children's learning is a standard practice in Reggio (Katz & Chard, 1997).

In Reggio, the purpose of documenting the learning process and products is multi-meaningful at the child, teacher, and family levels. At the child level, documentation serves as a visual "memory" of the children's achievement for them to revisit and expand on old ideas or draw inspiration from for the development of new ideas; at the teacher level, it provides teachers with a foundation on which to understand the children's thoughts and facilitate their further learning; and at the family level, it offers a means for teachers to share with parents about their child's learning and elicit input and collaboration for current and future projects (Edwards & Springate, 1993; Edwards et al., 2012; Gandini, 1993; Katz & Chard, 1997; Staley, 1998).

The Nature of Knowledge Construction in Reggio

Unlike some globally known American curricular approaches (e.g., the High/Scope Curriculum, the Creative Curriculum), Reggio does not prescribe a list of knowledge areas, skills, and standards to be learned by children and concomitantly taught and assessed by their teachers. In fact, Rinaldi (2012) believed that the child's potential is inhibited when the endpoint of learning is already prescribed. Instead, Reggio leaves the endpoint open-ended, inviting, and encouraging the child's fluidity and dynamicity of knowledge construction (Malaguzzi, 1993a; Rinaldi, 2012). As a result, when the children share their ideas, they bring special meaning to their constructed knowledge. However, Reggio also recognizes that knowledge and understanding may vary across children and the social context in which they occur (Malaguzzi, 1993a). Reflecting a theoretical affinity to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, an important vehicle through which children construct

knowledge in the classroom is within child-child and child-adult interactions. While understanding that conflicts may occur due to variant views across social participants, Reggio does not see cognitive dissonance as a hindrance but instead values it as a means to advancing thinking at higher levels (Malaguzzi, 1993a). This thinking is influenced by Piaget's (1973) notion of cognitive disequilibrium, potentially leading to higher mental capacity.

Multiple Expressions of Knowledge in Reggio

Reggio believes that in the social construction of knowledge, which is dynamic, no one truth is representative of all understandings. Instead, the truth may be represented by multiple forms of knowing. This view is consistent with the perspective of constructivists (e.g., Vygotsky) concerning knowledge construction and transformation. Since there is no objective truth to any knowledge construction, the Reggio school of thought opposes the idea of knowledge transmission. Accordingly, within Reggio schools, there are no prescribed curriculum guidelines or standards detailing what children should be learning, what teachers should be teaching, and how (Malaguzzi, 1993b; Rinaldi, 2012). Rather than teaching prescribed content as does the traditional method, the focus of Reggio is on children's initiated, project-oriented learning according to the course of their project development and investigative process in collaboration with the teacher and/or other children (Malaguzzi, 1993b).

Just as the belief that there are multiple forms of knowing, there are also a "hundred languages of children" in expressing, demonstrating, and making meaning of what one knows (Edwards et al., 2012). Within Reggio, the children are encouraged to express their plans, thoughts, and understandings using any creative outlet, including but not limited to drawing, painting, dance, drama, and writing (Edwards et al., 2012; New, 1990). According to Forman (1996), "[A]s children compare these various representations, they confront new possibilities and generate new questions that would not have occurred had they used only one medium" (p. 172). In this connection, Reggio is unique in encouraging children's multiple representations and expressions of knowledge by provoking thought and scaffolding further learning in children.

The American Version of Reggio Emilia Approach

Reggio in Italy became a global educational sensation when its educators began sharing their visual documentary of their work with the children by organizing exhibitions to tell the Reggio educational story. The inaugurated exhibition titled *When the Eye Jumps Over the Wall* began traveling around Europe in 1981 and a later exhibition with an evolving titled *The Hundred Languages of Children* made its way to North America beginning in 1987 (Edwards et al., 2012). Some of the earliest records of such exhibitions in the

United States include its arrival in St. Louis, Missouri (Fyfe, 1994) in 1991, and at California State University in Fresno, California, in 1998 (Abramson & Huggins, 1999), all of which attracted numerous EC educators. The exhibitions also inspired the revised North American version named *The Wonder of Learning: The Hundred Languages of Children*, which began traveling in 2008 (Edwards et al., 2012).

Especially given the hype of Reggio in the 1990s and ever since, U.S. educators have flocked in droves to Reggio Emilia for school visits to see for themselves how this world-class educational model operates (Edwards et al., 2012; Rinaldi, 2006). It is there that many educators experience Reggio tangibly and solidify it as a *prima facie* case of high-quality EC educational experience. Many U.S. educators have subsequently written reflections on Reggio and lessons learned based on their visits (e.g., Bredekamp, 1993; Fyfe, 1994; New, 1994). The image of Reggio as possessing exceptional quality has continuously been affirmed and reaffirmed by aficionados in the United States. For instance, Gardner (2012) extolled Reggio in this way: "To my mind, no place in the contemporary world has succeeded so splendidly as the schools of Reggio Emilia" (p. xvi). As U.S. educators seek better and more innovative approaches, it is not surprising that Reggio has caught their attention instantly. Now, it is time to examine some of the important questions against what we know:

1. How do U.S. educators interpret Reggio vis-à-vis their own cultural context?
2. What are some fundamental similarities and differences in educational ideologies between Reggio and the United States?
3. What cultural differences do U.S. educators observe as posing challenges to implementing Reggio in American EC settings?
4. Who benefits from the educational experience in Reggio schools and Reggio-inspired schools?
5. How might U.S. educators be supported in learning to implement Reggio-inspired practices?

How Do U.S. Educators Interpret Reggio Vis-à-Vis Their Own Cultural Context?

Reggio may have opened our eyes, hearts, and minds to a more innovative and much more thoughtful approach to conceptualizing teaching and child learning. The question is, in what ways can we appropriate Reggio's best practices in the U.S. cultural context? Recognizing that it is inappropriate and potentially impossible to transplant Reggio (deeply rooted in Italian cultural and political ideologies) directly into American soil, U.S. educators have variously adapted and integrated Reggio's meritorious principles into their own curricular and pedagogical practices and referred their schools appropriately only as "Reggio-inspired" or "Reggio Emilia-inspired." This reference highlights the inspiration that EC educators in the United States

draw from Reggio. However, adopting a foreign educational philosophy, curriculum, or approach can be both emboldening and onerous, given the lack of congenial conditions needed to support and sustain its implementation, let alone spur its growth.

Similarities and Differences in Educational Ideologies between Reggio and the United States

Analyzing the educational ideologies between Reggio in Italy and those in the United States, we notice clear paradoxes, one of which is related to the actualization of American philosophical ideals, notably those of Dewey. Education in the United States has had a long history, journeying from the 16th century to now the 21st century and witnessing myriad changes and progress. In particular, during the 20th century, American educator John Dewey's progressive education movement inspired an innovative and alternative educational discourse on teaching and the nature of child development and learning. His philosophy on child-centeredness as well as inquiry and project-based learning stood in contrast to the formalism of teaching-directed instructional tradition. Although progressive education has been championed in American education since Dewey's time, it has not fully materialized in the United States (Gardner, 1998). Thus, paradoxically, this progressive American educational philosophy remains an ideal in much of the United States. Yet, Dewey's progressive child-centered ideology has been flourishing in Reggio. In fact, Reggio founder Malaguzzi credited Dewey's work as a source of inspiration for the development of Reggio.

Similarly, Bredekamp (1993) observed another practical paradox as related to the principles of DAP rooted in the United States. While the principles of Reggio concur with those of DAP, Reggio educators have surpassed the ideologies of DAP in their priority placed on several areas, including the social construction of knowledge, as well as the important roles of the teacher especially as a co-constructor of knowledge with children and as a facilitator of documentation of the children's learning (Bredekamp, 1993).

Incongruence in Pedagogical Practice between Reggio and the United States

Reggio offers a splendid image of a high-quality ECE by respecting the images of the child, the teacher, the environment, and the family and community, all of which are deeply rooted in Italian culture. While U.S. EC educators continue to learn from Reggio preschools, we should also be conscious of the challenges in adopting or adapting educational methods with different cultural roots (Firlik, 1996). For instance, the fundamental cultural differences in their goals and expectations of child development between Italy and the United States make it challenging to implement Reggio in American EC classrooms. New (1998) has long observed that the Italian

culturally embedded element of routinely involving infants in family and community events is intentional to help foster their interdependent relationships and social competence. This picture contrasts starkly with the individualist-oriented American cultural system that values independence rather than interdependence, autonomy rather than social collaboration, and individual achievement rather than collective attainment.

Furthermore, although Reggio and EC educators in the United States concur on certain philosophical aspects of the teaching-learning process, they also diverge on specific principles and related practices. A case in point: both Reggio and U.S. educators recognize the importance of teacher-child relationships, but they differ in their views and, subsequently, their practices of these relationships. In 1998, Lilian Katz observed that in EC settings throughout the United States, the content of teacher-child relationships focused on the "routines and the rules of classroom life, especially during informal activity periods," and the children were treated as the subjects of direct instruction (p. 36). In contrast, Reggio focuses on the "work itself, rather than mainly on routines or the children's performance on academic tasks" (Katz, 1998, p. 36). Furthermore, Katz (1998) noted that in Reggio, "Both the children and the teachers seem to be equally involved in the progress of the work, the ideas being explored, the techniques and materials to be used, and the progress of the project itself" (p. 36). The image of the teacher-child relationships in Reggio as mutual collaborators and learners is particularized as a powerful testament to the educators' profound respect for children's rights as competent human beings. This image contrasts starkly with Katz's observation of teacher-child relationships in EC settings throughout the United States, with the teacher seemingly serving as an authoritative knowledge transmitter and the child the passive recipient of transmitted knowledge.

Unfortunately, this traditional mode of instruction observed in 1998 by Katz appears to still prevail in many U.S. EC settings today. This traditional instructional method goes against the grain of Reggio, premised on child-initiated learning that is not about finding answers to questions posed originally in the investigative process but generating additional or new questions to inspire further curiosity, inquiry, and learning (Turner & Wilson, 2010). If we truly believe in reciprocal teacher-child relationships as a critical part of a high-quality educational experience for young children, as do Reggio educators, we would need to reexamine and reinterpret the various aspects of the teaching-learning process, notably the images of the teacher and children and their relationships in the classroom.

Another example of the challenges facing EC educators implementing Reggio in the United States is related to treating the environment as the third teacher. Reggio educators take meticulous care to ensure that the ambience is aesthetically attractive, bright, and inviting to children, and the space is ample and promotes collaborative learning. It is not difficult to imagine that such an environment would encourage children to stay and explore all the wonders within it. Unfortunately, in many of the EC settings

in the United States that we have observed, such an inviting place is hard to come by. For many schools, the classroom lacks space, organization, a sense of quietude, and an array of educational materials needed to encourage children's exploration of ideas in that environment. Additionally, the concepts of hiring a *pedagogista* to offer guidance to the teachers, creating the opportunity for teachers to work in pairs, employing an *atelerista*, and providing an *atelier* are mostly pedagogically foreign to educators in the United States. Thus, these practices represent idealism that is difficult to realize in the American ECE system imbued with its own strictures.

Reggio for the Underprivileged and Reggio-Inspired for the Privileged

The child populations served between Reggio schools in Italy and Reggio-inspired schools in the United States are noticeably different. As the very first Reggio Emilia schools were initiated, built, and run by grassroots efforts of families before they all became funded publicly by the municipality, support for the local community remains a core identity of Reggio (Gandini, 1993; Malaguzzi, 1993b). Furthermore, A noble cause of Reggio schools in Italy is that they cater to children from underprivileged backgrounds and that children with special needs and those from single-parent households receive priority admissions (Finegan, 2001). This image contrasts starkly with the Reggio-inspired preschools in the United States that are mostly privately funded and operated to serve the affluent enclaves of families (Chertoff, 2013). Except for a few Reggio-inspired Head Start programs, most Reggio-inspired schools are not funded publicly to benefit children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and those who need a high-quality educational experience the most.

As such, consciously and unconsciously, these Reggio-inspired schools become a "privilege" practice for the privileged. It is not difficult to imagine why this may be the case when we factor in the costs associated with teacher education and the infrastructure needed to operate a Reggio-inspired school. For instance, to attempt to even resemble Reggio schools, Reggio-inspired schools in the United States would need to possess high-resource capacities to support their infrastructure, such as providing an optimal environment for learning and even including an *atelier*. It is also important that they sponsor teachers to experience true inspiration by affording them the opportunity to travel to Reggio to study its method or participate in local and national study groups and conferences to learn more about Reggio. All of these environmental factors and teacher education opportunities would be challenging, if not insurmountable, for lowly resourced schools to launch and maintain practices reflective of Reggio.

Although some publicly funded EC programs (e.g., Head Start) in the United States have attempted to implement Reggio to support the learning and development of children from low-income backgrounds, they are few and far between. Research on these schools has also demonstrated that they are mostly unsuccessful. For instance, research shows that one of the reasons

that Reggio's principles have been proven challenging to apply is related to low-income families' academically oriented expectations concerning pre-school education as preparing their children for kindergarten, which do not concur with the philosophical and pedagogical emphasis of Reggio (McClow & Gillespie, 1998). Similarly, low-income parents in Head Start programs have a limited understanding of Reggio, with some expressing educational expectations that are different from what the Reggio Approach affords (Smith, 2014). Notwithstanding, one aspect reminiscent of Reggio that these Reggio-inspired Head Start programs are able to implement more successfully is teacher-family partnerships (McClow & Gillespie, 1998; Smith, 2014). However, this aspect might not have been a result of Reggio's influences but rather a reflection of it being an already integral component of Head Start programs.

Conditions for Professional Learning

Implementing Reggio practices is meant to be a fluid and dynamic process, constantly evolving. Thus, there is no manual or guidebook outlining step-by-step plans for implementing Reggio, unlike other curricular approaches that are popular in EC classrooms. The challenge for U.S. educators learning to implement Reggio is understanding its underlying fundamental principles and how they may adapt them to fit their own cultural and contextual circumstances. For practitioners to do so, however, they would need to engage in ongoing professional learning from and with expert Reggio educators to receive much-needed guidance. The transformation to a novel educational approach is not smooth sailing, given the predetermined and prescribed curricular approaches that have governed much of the American EC discourse. Thus, for some EC educators in the United States, it may even be onerous, if not insuperable, to take the bold steps to make the pedagogical paradigm shift to Reggio, which is built on an open-ended, emergent approach to supporting children's learning. Understandably, Reggio-inspired educators can implement Reggio in EC classrooms more successfully when they are given the opportunity for professional learning and support. New (2007) noted that success is made possible by the visible, collaborative processes between U.S. educators and Italian educators, with more master teachers from Italy providing guidance to help U.S. Reggio-inspired educators learn to conceptualize their roles in their work with young children.

In addition to cross-cultural collaborations, the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA), established in 2002, has been serving as a special turf for Reggio educators in North America to share, collaborate, and learn from one another. According to NAREA, since its establishment, it has supported thousands of educators across the United States and Canada. Since the 1990s, Reggio has also gained endorsement from NAEYC, the largest national association of early educators with about 60,000 members. Furthermore, organizations such as NAEYC, NAREA, and Reggio Children,

have convened Reggio-themed conferences to further support the development and professional exchange of Reggio-inspired educators.

Professional exchanges and collaborations, as in the case of Reggio, serve as a great reminder of what the American education system should consider and reconsider as the needed conditions for professional development for teachers (New, 2007). Accordingly, support for professional learning continues to be needed in developing and sustaining teachers' commitment to implementing effective teaching practices (Chen, 2016; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). More importantly, just as a critical aspect of Reggio focuses on professional learning through reflection, discussion, and collaboration with all stakeholders, this component needs to take a center stage in Reggio-inspired schools among U.S. educators. Knowing the fundamentals of Reggio is only the beginning, educators need to aptly assess, discern, and translate appropriate knowledge into implementable practices that can still retain high levels of fidelity to the American cultural and educational contexts. In sum, continuous professional learning is critical for educators to translate theoretical principles of Reggio to practice.

Lessons Learned from the Case of the United States

Between Idealism and Realism

The most important lesson that U.S. educators can learn from Reggio is that it should prompt them to reflect on and reconsider their own educational approaches and reinterpret how they may adapt Reggio while ensuring that their adaptations are compatible with the American cultural values. For instance, in Reggio, the hallmark of collaboration among children, teachers, families, and community members should challenge us to rethink American priorities of optimal EC practices. Considered idealistic rather than realistic is the practice of crafting time and space for teachers to engage in dialogue about their documentation of the children's learning with one another and the child, families, and community members. These ideals can only be described as tantalizing for many U.S. educators seeking to adapt Reggio into the American EC settings.

It became even more palpable that some American EC settings do not nurture nor sustain a culture of sharing and collaboration of ideas. As a case in point, the second author reached out to a few teachers in a Reggio-inspired EC center in the state of New Jersey of the United States, only to find that they were either hesitant or failed to follow up on their promise to share documentation from their work with young children. In particular, one teacher cited "being overwhelmed" as a reason for not being able to share. Unfortunately, the reluctance to share knowledge by some Reggio-inspired teachers is not conducive to fostering Reggio's fundamental value of engagement in conversation and collaboration with other educators. This is just an example that illustrates the challenge of implementing and sustaining Reggio practices in EC settings in the United States.

Reggio as a Catalyst for Rethinking ECE in the United States

Reggio's focus on the competence of children, collaboration among all stakeholders, the practice of documentation, and other specific aspects collectively make this EC approach a truly unique one in the world. While the Reggio Emilia Approach cannot be replicated or transplanted directly in its entirety to any other cultural setting, it certainly has and can continue to serve as an inspiration and model for ECE everywhere, particularly in the United States. Specifically, in recognizing the important role of high-quality early learning experiences in preschool children's readiness and success in formal schooling, since 1965, the United States has invested federal funding in providing public preschool to children (ages 3–5) from low-income backgrounds in Head Start programs who need educational support the most (Chen, 2013). Providing much-needed funding is a sign of commitment and progress toward helping socioeconomically disadvantaged children succeed, thereby potentially creating a better society in the future. As Reggio caters to the underprivileged, perhaps the United States can take cues from this noble crusade to rethink curricular approaches for the underprivileged throughout the country.

While being inspired by Reggio, many U.S. educators generally subscribe to DAP guidelines in supporting young children's learning and development. Since the first edition of DAP (Bredekamp, 1987) and three additional revised renditions later (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2022), the DAP framework has also served as a guidepost for many EC teacher education programs nationwide. At the level of teacher education preparation, in addition to focusing on DAP, EC teacher educators should continue to introduce a variety of educational models to teacher candidates in both coursework and fieldwork to provoke discussion, reflection, examination, comparison, and analysis of philological and pedagogical differences between EC practices in the United States and those in other cultural contexts. Such academic engagement and exposure to local and global educational approaches may inspire teacher candidates to consider the possibilities of developing innovative approaches or adapting existing ones, such as Reggio.

Conclusion

Since the 1980s, the seeds of Reggio have been spread, planted, and flourished in some congenial foreign soils. Reggio has also become a catalyst for dialogue among educators in many countries, especially in the United States. At the very fundamental level, just as New (2007) reflected, "*Reggio* has become a catalyst for conversations about a society's responsibility to its youngest citizens" (p. 5). If educators believe in the truism that children are the future of society, then they should pause to reflect on and reevaluate their beliefs and value systems regarding these children and their education. The Reggio Emilia Approach has a wellspring of potential to make a difference in

young children's lives, thereby creating a better society for them in the future. However, it is imperative that we recognize its entwined complexities as inherently rooted in its political and cultural circumstances. To implement the Reggio-inspired philosophy, the conditions must be optimal. From our analysis and observations of EC settings in the United States, many of them are not equipped with conditions that are felicitous to fostering the principles of Reggio, including the different images analyzed in this chapter.

As human knowledge is constantly evolving, so is the search for better and more effective approaches to teaching and student learning. Although considered the best educational model in the world, Reggio is not a monolithic phenomenon. On the contrary, its founder and followers continue to envision it to be situated in an ever-evolving, refining, and fluid state. Importantly, in an interview as described by Gandini (2012a), Malaguzzi articulated Reggio educators' school of thought:

> We think of a school for young children as an integral living organism, a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and children. We think of school as construction in motion, continuously adjusting itself. Certainly, we must adjust our system from time to time while the organism travels on its life course.
>
> (p. 41)

While adjusting educational practices, educators in the United States have been wrestling with many contradictions and paradoxes. Gardner (2012) specifically raised some salient paradoxes as follows:

> In America, we pride ourselves on being focused on children, yet we do not pay sufficient attention to what they are actually expressing. We call for cooperative learning among children, yet we rarely have sustained cooperation at the level of teacher and administrator. We call for artistic works, but we rarely fashion environments that can truly support and inspire them. We call for parental involvement but loathe sharing ownership, responsibility, and credit with parents. We recognize the need for community, but we so often crystalize immediately into interest groups.
>
> (pp. xiv–xv)

To date, the paradoxes outlined by Gardner (2012) still linger in the United States. Perhaps it is only to the extent that these paradoxes and others are addressed can EC educators truly attend to providing the right kinds of supportive conditions to nurture children's rights as competent learners so that they may naturally flourish. We resonate with American psychologist Jerome Bruner's reflective analysis that to promote the achievement of human potential, "it requires the atmosphere of reciprocal respect and support, the type of support that distinguishes schools that achieve success – like the municipal preschools of Reggio Emilia" (p. xviii).

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9 Early Childhood Curriculum

From Globalization and Localization to Glocalization

Jennifer J. Chen and Philip Hui Li

Summary of the "Big Ideas"

As implied by the title of this book, *The glocalization of early childhood curriculum: Global childhoods, local curricula*, we deconstructed three of the most catchy yet complex ideas (namely, globalization, localization, and glocalization) in the world, with reference specifically to the field of early childhood education (ECE). Of particular relevance, we elucidated several universally shared yet locally significant big concepts. These concepts included childhood, curriculum, and culture (see Chapter 1); child-centeredness and/versus teacher-directedness, constructivism and/versus instructivism (see Chapters 2 and 3); developmentally appropriate practice (DAP; see Chapter 4); play and/versus learning (see Chapter 5); and globalization, localization, and glocalization of early childhood curriculum (ECC; see Chapters 6–8). We further analyzed these concepts using case studies and research evidence from several countries around the world including Australia, New Zealand, and Sweden (see Chapters 1 and 5), China (see Chapters 1, 2, and 6), Hong Kong (see Chapters 2 and 7), Singapore (see Chapters 1 and 3), and the United States (see Chapter 8).

To better grasp the adoptability and/or adaptability of globally promoted ECC and pedagogical approaches in local contexts, we discussed several analytic and theoretical frameworks, including the duality theory of child-centeredness and teacher-directedness (see Chapter 2); Van Den Akker's (2003) three-pronged typology of curriculum: (1) the intended, (2) the implemented, and (3) the attained (see Chapter 6); Chen's (2022) newly developed "foreground-middle ground-background" framework (see Chapter 1); Chen and Li's (2022) newly proposed framework of "*Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He*," derived from the ancient Chinese philosophy (see Chapters 1 and 7); the application of the analogy of the "*yin-yang*" concept from Taoist philosophy to play and learning (see Chapter 5); and Li's (2007) and Li and Chen's (2017) framework of the 3CAPs (culturally appropriate practice, contextually appropriate practice, and child-individually appropriate practice) (see Chapters 1, 6, and 7).

Another important feature of this book is that we also analyzed the implementation of globalized ECCs in local contexts, such as the U.S.-derived

High/Scope Curriculum and the Project Approach in Hong Kong (see Chapter 7), and the Italy-originated Reggio Emilia Approach in the United States (see Chapter 8). Additionally, we examined local curricula, including Li's (2007) "SAIL" used in Hong Kong (see Chapter 7), "*Te Whāriki*" in New Zealand (MoE of New Zealand, 2017), "The Early Years Learning Framework" in Australia (AGDET, 2009), and the "Nurturing Early Learners" framework in Singapore (MoE of Singapore, 2003) (see Chapter 1). Furthermore, in light of zealous debates on play and learning in early childhood (EC), we also highlighted localized pedagogies, especially the "Relational Play-Based Pedagogy" in New Zealand (Hedges & Cooper, 2018), the "Play-Responsive Teaching" in Sweden (Fleer, 2019), and the "Eduplay" Approach in China (Rao & Li, 2009) (see Chapter 5).

"The Major Lessons" Learned

Lesson #1: The Insensitivity of Globalized Childhoods

Globalization has affected us all to various extents. Although youth and adults are the main active receivers, retainers, and influencers of globalization, young children (albeit passive agents) have also been shaped by this process as evident in their daily lives from food habits to information consumption (Dey, 2017). Thus, increased globalization has accordingly altered the essence of childhood. For example, children have become more technologically savvy in accessing global information, which, in turn, may have spurred them to shift away from their traditional cultures (Dey, 2017). Additionally, the globalization of ECC and pedagogy has further exposed children to globalized ideas and behaviors from which they may essentially experience "globalized childhoods." The concept of *globalized childhoods* is seemingly based on the conceptions of children and childhood arising from hegemonic European-American standards and White-male norms. However, this European-American-centric perspective appears insensitive and inapplicable to the unique values of other cultures.

Lesson #2: The Inapplicability of Globalized EC Practices

ECE has been catapulted to prominence in many government policies and education reform agendas worldwide, especially in light of the globalization of childhoods and EC practices. Yet, while childhood and child development are universal processes, a globalized ECC does not seem contextually (e.g., social, cultural, educational) functional in certain local contexts. It appears that an ECC represents the manifestation of specific cultural features (e.g., values, ideologies, aspirations) through which children are socialized and learn to become productive citizens of their society. Thus, it is only to the extent that an ECC incorporates the social, cultural, and contextual dynamics of a particular culture that it can be viable in addressing local needs, concerns, and aspirations.

Relatedly, as every culture has its unique value system guided by history and tradition, childhoods are considered to be socially situated, contextually defined, and culturally shaped. Thus, an open-minded and respectful approach would be to recognize and understand the role of culture in a society's unique approach(es) to education. For instance, China and the United States each has its own distinct cultural system and educational merits, and neither is superior to the other. Instead, they can certainly learn from each other, while recognizing and maintaining their own unique cultural, social, and educational strengths. Unfortunately, during the past few decades, we have witnessed China's zealous efforts to learn from the United States, including adopting its various early childhood curricula to the extent of nearly overlooking its own cultural values and educational merits. It is now time for China to reflect and reexamine its unique cultural strengths to assess how it may combine them with those of the United States to engage in hybrid practices as suggested by the case studies analyzed in this book.

Lesson #3: Reasons for the Unsuccessful Globalization of ECC

The case studies of China, Hong Kong, and the United States in Chapters 6–8, respectively, suggest that the avid importation of curricula directly from foreign countries has dominated the discourse on the globalization of ECC. Yet, such a direct effort has largely been unsuccessful due to incongruence in social, cultural, educational, and other contextual realities across societies.

First, the direct importation of curriculum lacks consideration of cultural appropriateness. As a solution, when planning a curriculum reform or importing a foreign curriculum, curriculum developers and reform leaders should be culturally minded and prepared to handle any potential cultural collision by engaging in cultural harmonization of the curriculum in a localized, hybrid version of imported and local practices.

The second concern of the direct importation of curriculum is the lack of contextual appropriateness. School leaders and curriculum developers should be cautious about contextual differences between the imported and the local curriculum. Some imported curricula and pedagogies might not suit the local context. For instance, as the Reggio Emilia Approach (Reggio) became globally trendy, especially during the 1990s and 2000s, many societies, including the United States (see Chapter 8) and Hong Kong, began adopting Reggio into their EC practices. Unfortunately, the direct adoption of Reggio in Hong Kong, for example, has resulted in failure due to various factors, including Hong Kong parents' emphasis on academic learning over creative arts activities. A productive solution would be to engage in tailoring at the school level by adapting the imported curriculum to meet the unique needs of a specific EC context. Li (2005) called this process the first level of tailoring.

The third concern of the direct adoption of a foreign curriculum is the lack of appropriateness at the child level. A specific curriculum, whether imported

or local school-based, should be appropriate for the children within a given local, educational context. Hence, for a curriculum to survive and thrive, it needs to be tailored to meet the children's diverse developmental and learning needs with comprehensive and inclusive content. Li (2005) referred to this process as the second level of tailoring. At this level of consideration, a child-sensitive approach should be adopted, meaning that the implemented and even the intended curriculum should be sensitive to young children's developmental needs and learning interests.

Lesson #4: The Contention of Disneyfication

In recent decades, a global educational trend exists involving adopting innovative ECC models and pedagogical approaches originated in the West (especially the United States). This book makes it evident that Eastern societies, such as China, Hong Kong, and Singapore, are actively doing so (see Chapters 1, 6, and 7). Even the United States itself is also an avid importer of foreign practices, such as the Reggio Emilia Approach from Italy (see Chapter 8). The phenomenon of importing foreign curriculum and pedagogical practices from one sociocultural context to another may engender a process and product of "Disneyfication" or "Disneyization."[1] The concept of *Disneyfication* – which originated in the field of sociology – is described as the replication of commercialized things resembling the Walt Disney brand (e.g., theme parks, Disney environment, and items) into a simplified version elsewhere (Zukin, 1996). Klugman (1995) further characterized Disneyfication as "the application of simplified aesthetic, intellectual or moral standards to a thing that has the potential for the more complex and thought-provoking expression" (p. 103). In the Disneyfication process, the complexities are reduced to simplicity, thereby resulting in the superficiality and artificiality of purely imitating something far more complex socially, culturally, and contextually. Hong Kong's adoption of the U.S.-derived High/Scope Curriculum is such an example (see Chapter 7). Another example is the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach (Reggio) in the United States (see Chapter 8). We believe that socially-, culturally-, and contextually-based curricula are not designed or meant to be universally applicable. For example, despite receiving worldwide accolades as exemplary, Reggio is still a locally developed method. Thus, we urge education authorities and reformers as well as educators everywhere to meditate critically on the suitability of foreign practices for their own social, cultural, educational, and other contextual circumstances. If not, they may end up doing "Disneyfication" of these adopted methods.

As what is considered high-quality early childhood curricula and pedagogies from the West reverberate across the globe, we advocate engagement in critical contemplation and consideration. We believe that it is one thing to admire and emulate an exemplary educational approach; it is quite another to embrace it to the extent of fanaticism without giving it any critical reflection, examination, and analysis. The latter could lead to some form of hegemony. For example, while some have interpreted Reggio as simply

inspiring to educators everywhere, others have feared its unintended hegemonic influences. Johnson (1999) interpreted Reggio as becoming "normative, hegemonic practices of colonization" (p. 67). New (2007) also noted, "For some, [Reggio's] rapid rise to acclaim represents an unwelcome and increasingly globalized hegemony regarding children's early care and education" (p. 5).

As Reggio is not intended by its founder (Loris Malaguzzi) and followers to be promulgated globally as a homogenizing or hegemonizing force to erode other cultures, we caution that interpretations of Reggio must be made in context, recognizing it as felicitous to its humble origins and Italian historical, sociocultural, and political roots, of which Reggio educators are highly conscious. As to whether Reggio represents "globalized hegemony," we believe that Reggio will continue to remain an inspiration for its unique quality and that just like any other globalized educational practice (e.g., DAP, the High/Scope Curriculum, the Project Approach), it only becomes intellectually dangerous if we jump on the bandwagon without thought and reflection. From this perspective, we believe that at this moment, Reggio as well as other globally promoted approaches may have occupied a significant place in the world and captivated the attention of educators in a historical time when those in developed and developing nations continue to seek effective solutions to improve the quality of early learning experiences for their children. However, due to their specific, social, cultural, educational, and contextual origins, we contend that no approaches, no matter how innovative, should be hailed as universal, normative standards of any EC practice or a singular best practice, but they may be considered inspirations for countries seeking to balance their own unique traditional practices with these innovative methods. Notably, the analyses of the country-specific case studies in this book have led us to conclude that a hybrid model may be the most productive approach to EC practices because it is amenable to both tradition and innovation.

Conclusion: The Multiplicity Phenomenon

In conclusion, the case studies analyzed in this book and the aforementioned lessons learned suggest a multiplicity phenomenon: multiple realities of childhood, multiple perspectives on curriculum, multiple "best" educational practices across societies, and multiple cultural value systems worldwide. This multiplicity phenomenon, in turn, contends that any consideration of or attempt at unifying the world with a single curriculum/pedagogy or a set of curriculum and pedagogical approaches would be socially and culturally inappropriate as well as educationally unproductive. Such an action would also be considered advocating globalized hegemony and colonization of EC practices.

In this increasingly globalizing world, it is conceivable that globalization is here to stay, and its influences on localization might become even more progressively mighty in the future. Thus, instead of swimming against the current, we might as well embrace globalization while continuing to uphold our unique cultural values and ideologies in the form of glocalization. This

is because the world is not a simplistic, standardized singularity, but encompasses complex, diversified, and multilateral dimensions. Thus, we *should not* uncritically accept globalization at the expense of localization. Instead, we *should* seriously consider forsaking all extremist views and shift toward more balanced or eclectic perspectives that incorporate dichotomies into hybridization as well as position globalization and localization of ECC and pedagogy in the form of glocalization (a portmanteau of the two words, globalization and localization).

The idea of glocalization suggests that the globalization process does not overtake or replace localization of practices, but instead, it generates a new process involving merging both globalization and localization. Furthermore, glocalization is considered to embody the "best" of the two worlds: the specific wisdom of the local culture and the global knowledge of child development and progressive contemporary ideologies of ECC and pedagogy. This may be the ideal space where we "stay local while going global" (Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010, p. 2). Just like any endeavor, the successful navigation of the ECC terrain requires continuous examination and reflection guided by theoretically sound frameworks. With this in mind, we have offered three such theoretical frameworks for future studies: (1) the "3CAPs" framework (a three-level process occurring at the culture, context, and child levels) (Li, 2007; Li & Chen, 2017), (2) the "foreground-middle ground-background" framework (Chen, 2022), and (3) the "*Tian Shi, Di Li, Ren He* (天时, 地利, 人和)" framework (Chen & Li, 2022). Based on our critical analyses throughout this book, we conclude that the glocalization of ECC is a theoretically as well as empirically sound and potentially sustainable solution to any global-local dissonance in ECC development, implementation, and improvement.

Note

1 Similar concepts include "McDonaldization" (Ritzer, 1993, 2005) and "Starbuckization" (Ritzer, 2005).

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