INSIDE PRESENT-DAY HONG KONG PARENTS’ MINDS—WHAT VALUES, BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, AND EXPECTATIONS DO THEY HOLD REGARDING YOUNG CHILDREN’S DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION?
A CASE FOR REGGIO EMILIA IN HONG KONG

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Abstract

The compatibility between present-day Hong Kong parents’ thinking and the values of Reggio Emilia—an Italian approach to preschool education—was explored in this study. Surveys were administered to 74 parents whose child attended a preschool program at the time of study and follow-up interviews were conducted with nine parents. Eight topics were covered, including: (a) image of the child and learner, (b) expectations of child’s education and development, (c) ideal child characteristics, (d) appreciation for art and beauty in education, (e) conception of the role of early childhood education, (f) attitude toward parent participation in schools, (g) parents’ current experience and views on learning, and (h) parents’ reaction toward a Reggio project. Participants’ level of education attainment, household income, and prior overseas experiences were also examined in relation to the results. Overall, parents’ images of children and learners were mostly congruent with the Reggio images, and conceptions of Hong Kong parents’ fixation on homework and achievement were not supported by the data. Parents believed that being engaged in the subject and having opportunities to ask questions were essential to effective learning. The importance of pre-academic skills paled in comparison with language skills, social skills with peers, and other qualities such as self-confidence, curiosity, and ability to express oneself. The value of art in fostering creativity and stimulating children’s thinking was appreciated. Interviewed parents were greatly impressed by the Reggio project, calling it an “ideal way of learning”. They believed the activity was not only fun but made learning more memorable because children could experience things first-hand and make meaning by themselves. Regarding transition to primary school, parents expressed their feelings of helplessness; they did not want to pressure their child, and yet they felt they had no choice if their child were to study in a local primary school. Parents’ moderate level of satisfaction with children’s current learning outcomes also deserves attention. The results
suggest that Hong Kong parents straddle Eastern and Western values, and they would welcome Reggio practices if appropriate adaptations are in place. Implications of the results are discussed and future directions are proposed.
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................... ii
Table of Contents ................................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables ....................................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures ..................................................................................................................... ix
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................. x
Dedication ............................................................................................................................. xi

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1
1.1 Purpose of the Study ........................................................................................................ 1
1.2 What is Reggio Emilia? ................................................................................................... 2
1.3 Rationale for Studying Parents’ Values and Beliefs ......................................................... 3
1.4 Research Question and Topics ....................................................................................... 4
   1.4.1 Image of the child and learner ............................................................................... 5
   1.4.2 Expectations of child’s education and development .............................................. 5
   1.4.3 Ideal child characteristics .................................................................................... 6
   1.4.4 Appreciation for art and beauty in education ......................................................... 6
   1.4.5 Conception of the role of ECE ............................................................................. 7
   1.4.6 Attitude toward parent participation in schools ..................................................... 8
   1.4.7 Parents’ current experience and views on learning outcomes ............................... 8
   1.4.8 Parents’ reactions toward a Reggio project ............................................................ 9
1.5 Definition of Terms ........................................................................................................... 9

Chapter 2: Literature Review ................................................................................................. 11
2.1 Overview of ECE in Hong Kong .................................................................................... 11
2.2 Reggio Emilia in Hong Kong ......................................................................................... 12
   2.2.1 A Reggio project with Hong Kong children ........................................................ 12
   2.2.2 Ecological differences between Reggio Emilia and Hong Kong ......................... 13
2.3 Related Studies on the Research Topics ......................................................................... 15
   2.3.1 The image of the child ......................................................................................... 15
   2.3.2 Expectations of child’s education and development ............................................ 17
   2.3.3 Ideal child characteristics .................................................................................... 20
   2.3.4 Appreciation for art and beauty in education ......................................................... 22
   2.3.5 Conception of the role of ECE ............................................................................. 23
   2.3.6 Attitude toward parent participation in schools ..................................................... 24
   2.3.7 Parents’ current experience and views on learning outcomes ............................... 25
4.1.5 Attitude toward parent participation in schools ................................................. 40
4.1.6 Parents’ current experience and views on learning outcomes ......................... 41
4.1.7 The influence of education, income, and previous location of residence .......... 42

4.2 Qualitative Results .................................................................................................. 44
  4.2.1 Bracketing the Researcher’s Previous Experiences and Assumptions ............. 44
  4.2.2 Thematic Analysis ............................................................................................ 44
  4.2.3 Section 1: Expectations of child development ................................................. 46
  4.2.4 Section 2: Ideal child characteristics ............................................................... 46
  4.2.5 Section 3: Appreciation for art in education .................................................... 47
  4.2.6 Section 4: The role of ECE ........................................................................... 48
  4.2.7 Section 5: Parents’ current experience and views on learning outcomes ......... 48
  4.2.8 Section 6: Reactions toward a Reggio project ................................................. 49
  4.2.9 Theme 1: Thoughts on kindergarten education .............................................. 51
  4.2.10 Theme 2: Perceptions of children’s nature and what learning should be like ... 53
  4.2.11 Theme 3: Thoughts on Reggio and its application in Hong Kong ................. 53
  4.2.12 Theme 4: Parents’ impression of education in Hong Kong ............................... 54
  4.2.13 Theme 5: Transition into primary school ..................................................... 55
  4.2.14 Theme 6: The relationship between parents, children, and schools ............. 56
  4.2.15 Theme 7: Attentiveness to children’s temperament and traits ..................... 56

4.3 Links between the Survey and Interview Data ....................................................... 57
  4.3.1 Image of the child and learner ....................................................................... 57
  4.3.2 Expectations of child education and development ......................................... 57
  4.3.3 Communication between parents and schools ................................................. 58
  4.3.4 Inconsistent results: recognition of play ......................................................... 58

Chapter 5: Discussion ................................................................................................... 86
5.1 On Pre-academic Skills ......................................................................................... 86
  5.1.1 Ranking vis-à-vis other developmental skills ................................................ 86
  5.1.2 Effects of education, income, and previous location of residence ................. 86
  5.1.3 Parents’ dilemma .......................................................................................... 87
  5.1.4 The pressure of transition ............................................................................. 88

5.2 Other Things that Parents Value ......................................................................... 89
  5.2.1 Children’s learning interest ............................................................................ 89
  5.2.2 Curiosity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills ................................. 90
  5.2.3 Competence in English .................................................................................. 90
  5.2.4 Reggio values ................................................................................................ 92
  5.2.5 Co-existing Chinese values ......................................................................... 92
5.2.6 Other developmental skills ................................................................. 93
5.3 Parents’ Westernized Views on Learning .................................................. 94
5.4 Parents’ Involvement in Schools .............................................................. 96
5.5 Parents’ Views on Art and Beauty in Education ....................................... 97
5.6 Other Findings ...................................................................................... 97
  5.6.1 Parents’ use of the internet ............................................................... 97
  5.6.2 Moderate level of satisfaction with learning outcomes .................. 98

Chapter 6: Conclusion ................................................................................ 99
6.1 Is There Room for Reggio to Make a Contribution in Hong Kong? ...... 99
6.2 How Can Hong Kong Benefit from Reggio-Inspired Practices? ........... 99
6.3 Adapting Reggio in Hong Kong .............................................................. 100
  6.3.1 Incorporate more academic learning .............................................. 101
  6.3.2 Start with full-day childcares ....................................................... 101
  6.3.3 Train reflective practitioners ....................................................... 101
6.4 Final Words ....................................................................................... 103

References ............................................................................................... 104

Appendix A: Survey (English Version) ....................................................... 112
Appendix B: Interview Questions ............................................................... 119
Appendix C: Study Background Information Sheet .................................... 121
Appendix D: Welcome Email to Parents ................................................... 124
Appendix E: Demographics Section in Survey .......................................... 126
Appendix F: Follow-up Interview Consent Form ...................................... 131
Appendix G: Copy of the UBC Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval ... 133
List of Tables

Table 1: Topics in the Survey and Interview ................................................................. 37
Table 2: Number of Participants in Each Income Group ............................................. 59
Table 3: Other Demographic Information .................................................................. 60
Table 4: Highest Level of Education Attained by Parents ......................................... 61
Table 5: Types of Education Parents Received Abroad ............................................... 62
Table 6: Results for Image of the Child ....................................................................... 63
Table 7: Results for Image of the Learner ................................................................... 65
Table 8: Significant Differences between Incompatible and Compatible Item Ratings Regarding Image of the Learner ................................................................. 66
Table 9: Ranking of Developmental Skills .................................................................. 67
Table 10: Ranking of Ideal Child Characteristics ...................................................... 68
Table 11: Parents’ Communication with School and Participation in School Events .... 69
Table 12: Importance Attributed to Learning Outcomes ........................................... 70
Table 13: Satisfaction with Learning Outcomes ....................................................... 71
Table 14: Effects of Education, Income, and Previous Location of Residence on Mean Ratings ........................................................................................................... 72
Table 15: Effects of Education, Income, and Previous Location of Residence on Parents’ Ranking of Pre-academic Skills ................................................................. 74
Table 16: Themes, Categories, and Codes for the Interview Data .............................. 75
List of Figures

Figure 1. Comparing Parents’ Importance and Satisfaction Ratings on Learning Outcomes ................................................................. 82
Figure 2. Effects of Parents’ Education Level on Ratings .......................................................... 83
Figure 3. Effects of Parents’ Household Income Level on Ratings ........................................ 84
Figure 4. Effects of Previous Location of Residence on Ratings ........................................ 85
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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to a number of people who directly and indirectly contributed to this project—

To my parents who always share my joys and burdens in a heartbeat even though we are miles apart; to my sister who knows my quirks and twists but believes in me nonetheless; to my loving partner, Steven, whose faraway (in Dublin!) yet steadfast devotion sustains me during the most challenging times.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

All of what is visible in Reggio Emilia…is in response to the collective desire to present a more positive and compelling image of children than is currently held in contemporary society, with the aim of generating ‘hopes for a new human culture of childhood’. The success of Reggio Emilia in convincing themselves and others of the possibility of such a ‘new human culture’ reveals the possibilities of theory, passion, and practice…. (New, 1998, p. 278-279)

We also need more Reggios, not in the sense of Reggio clones, but of other communities which are prepared to embark on local cultural projects of childhood, to combine utopian thought and action, to dream about the future, to hope for a better world. (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006, p. 21)

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Educators from around the world have shown great enthusiasm toward Reggio Emilia, an Italian approach to early childhood education (ECE), and the literature is replete with “bringing Reggio home” experiences. The merits of Reggio Emilia have extended to countries in Asia, including Korea and Japan, and yet its growth has been limited in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (referred to hereafter as Hong Kong). There have been discussions surrounding Reggio Emilia’s compatibility with Hong Kong’s socio-cultural context; an article written by Li and Wong (2001) gave a systematic reflection on the feasibility of implementing Reggio in Hong Kong where the social and cultural realities are fundamentally distinct from Italy. Yet, the question of whether Reggio Emilia is implementable in Hong Kong was never approached by taking a look at what parents think. Since parents are powerful consumers of the privatized educare sector in Hong Kong (Ho, 2008), what parents expect and value in their children’s education and development can play an influential role in steering the field’s future directions. In determining whether there is potential for Reggio-inspired practices to thrive in Hong Kong, the discussion would be
incomplete without considering what parents think about early child development and education.

The purpose of the current study was to understand what values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations present-day Hong Kong parents hold regarding young children’s education and development, and to see how compatible their thinking is to the Reggio pedagogy. This study was intended to be a first step in examining whether there is room for Reggio in Hong Kong by giving voice to an important group of stakeholders: the parents who are investing in their children’s education. This study also highlighted potential gaps between what parents hoped to see in their children’s preschool education and how satisfied parents are with their children’s current education. If parents expected more from their children’s learning experience, then it would be worthwhile to examine whether Reggio could fulfill those needs.

1.2 What is Reggio Emilia?

Reggio Emilia is a small town in northern Italy whose exemplary ECE practices have come under the international spotlight over the past 40 years. Thousands of scholars have joined study tours to visit the government-funded preschools which are characterized by aesthetically beautiful spaces, child-originated projects, detailed pedagogical documentation, and diverse forms of art created by young children. These preschools are situated in a culture that views education as a communal activity, encourages participatory democracy, and believes that children have rights to civic conscience (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). The historical roots of the Reggio Emilia preschools are in leftist politics and the early women’s movement (Rinaldi, 2006). The first preschool was built shortly after the Second World War by women and men who salvaged bricks and found money for the construction work by selling abandoned trucks and horses (Malaguzzi, 1998). Today, parents continue to be actively involved in their young children’s education, and the close partnership between parents and teachers is yet another admirable feature of the preschools.

Terms such as the Reggio Emilia approach and Reggio practices refer to the philosophical and pedagogical assumptions, methods of school organization, and principles of environmental design that are embraced as a whole by Italian Reggio educators (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). In this paper, any references made to Reggio or Reggio Emilia refer to this set of ideologies. It should be noted that although the Reggio system may be described as a framework or an approach, it is “not a model, a programme, a ‘best practice’ or benchmark” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006, p. 20). Instead, it is embedded within a rich historical,
political, and ethical context, and thus it is not an exportable product but rather “a relationship of hope, a utopia or dream or both” (Dahlberg & Moss, p. 20).

1.3 Rationale for Studying Parents’ Values and Beliefs

In the early years, particularly from birth to five years of age, children acquire a range of important life skills within physical and social environments that are largely shaped by adults (Opper & Olmsted, 1999). Being the significant adults in young children’s lives, parents consciously and subconsciously choose certain “developmental niches” (Super & Harkness, 1986) based on their expectations, which in turn influence a child’s development (Opper & Olmsted). Opper and Olmsted define expectations as the views that adults have about the importance of various areas of child development. These expectations guide parents’ decisions in how they prepare their children for the future, including what school experiences they provide for their children (Opper & Olmsted). For instance, researchers have found that parental expectations for pre-academic skills led to greater pressure on preschoolers (Rescorla, 1991). Other constructs such as adults’ attitude and beliefs have also been grouped with expectations under the umbrella of adult ideas, all of which can influence early learning and socialization (Goodnow, 1988).

Many Hong Kong parents wish for their children to be in elite schools, which put immense pressure on kindergartens to prepare their young students for entrance into academically rigorous primary schools (Chan & Chan, 2003). Shaw (as cited in Ho, 2008) underscored the key role of parental preference in influencing the provision of preschool education in a free market; in order to survive, kindergartens need to meet parents’ demands for their children’s academic readiness. This resulted in the adoption of formal academic curricula and teacher-centered approaches even though teachers know that they are not in the children’s best interests (Chan & Chan).

Recently, a new government policy has set up education vouchers as a form of subsidy for parents whose three- to six-year-old children are enrolled in kindergartens (Hong Kong Government, as cited in Ho, 2008). Given the free market in which the Hong Kong pre-primary education is situated, this policy intended to promote positive competition among local preschools by enhancing parents’ consumer power, thereby improving the overall quality of ECE (Ho). With greater purchasing power, parents are more able to afford to send their children to programs that suit their ideals and needs. It has yet to be determined how many preschools are offering high-quality programs that meet children’s all-round development.
However, in recent years, more programs with non-mainstream approaches have started to emerge at the primary and secondary school level. The RTC Gaia School which builds its entire primary curriculum around environmental protection has a 1:10 teacher-to-student ratio and uses children’s strengths as grouping criteria. From the parents’ testimonials on the school’s websites, terms such as “having fun” and “being happy” can be found in what parents view as valuable in their children’s schooling and development (RTC Gaia School, n.d.). It should be noted that Hong Kong provides nine years of free and universal education to children between 6 and 15 years old in public schools. Therefore, the fact that some parents are willing to invest extra money in a different kind of education for their children suggests that new ways of thinking may have emerged.

In an exploratory study that looked at new ways to describe Hong Kong parents’ relationship with their children, Luk-Fong (2005) highlighted Hong Kong’s unique identity as a place where “East meets West” (Education Commission, as cited in Luk-Fong, p. 112). In conceptualizing modern parent-child relationships in Hong Kong, the term hybridization was used: “It can be seen that there are ‘western’ and ‘Chinese’, ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ values and practices coexisting in parent-child relationships in Hong Kong, which can be appropriately described as hybrid” (Luk-Fong, p. 131). Indeed, the study found evidence for continuity in certain Chinese traditional values but also changes in how parents and other stakeholder groups portray the actual and desired parent-child relationship (Luk-Fong). Could the influx of western ideas also influence how modern parents view young children and their education? As the author cautioned, what counts as “Chinese” or “western” and “traditional” or “contemporary” is not static, and what research does is to take a snapshot of what the current thinking is (Luk-Fong). This is what the current study hoped to do—to take a snapshot of how present-day Hong Kong parents conceptualize young children’s development and education. With the government’s new focus on early learning in its education reform agenda (Chan & Chan, 2003), the timing is now ripe to carry out this study and assess what potential for improvement may lie ahead.

1.4. Research Question and Topics

The two-part research question for this study was: What are the core values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations that present-day Hong Kong parents hold regarding young children’s early childhood education and development? And how compatible is their thinking with the fundamental philosophies of Reggio Emilia? In addition to surveying parents’ general
views on education and child development, specific types of values and beliefs related to the Reggio approach were also explored. There are many dimensions surrounding these ideas that could be explored, but to limit the scope of the study, eight topics were chosen. This is to maintain a balance between offering sufficient depth on each topic while providing adequate coverage. The rationale for each topic is briefly discussed below, with more details provided in the literature review section. The eight topics were: (a) image of the child and learner, (b) expectations of child’s education and development, (c) ideal child characteristics, (d) appreciation for art and beauty in education, (e) conception of the role of ECE, (f) attitude toward parent participation in schools, (g) parents’ current experience and views on learning outcomes, and (h) parents’ reactions toward a Reggio project.

1.4.1 Image of the child and learner. The image of the child is central to the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia such that the rationale behind all aspects of its practice can be coherently linked to the idea of a rich and competent child who is endowed with resources and virtues, and is autonomously capable of making meaning out of his or her experiences (Malaguzzi, 1998). Since the image of the child plays such a pivotal role in the Reggio approach, knowing how Hong Kong parents perceive children is fundamental to gauging how receptive parents may be to Reggio-inspired programs. The image of the child can be interpreted as underlying beliefs or views people have of children’s nature, their abilities, and their behaviour. While Reggio educators talk about their image of the child, there is also the traditional Chinese image of the child that may characterize Hong Kong parents’ thinking (see Literature Review section 2.3.1). In order to paint a picture of how Hong Kong parents view children from this study, a number of images drawn from different orientations were presented to parents in the survey. Parents were asked to indicate how much they agreed with each statement, which reflected the degree to which their image of the child matches that of Reggio educators.

The image of children as learners or the beliefs about how children learn is also central to the research question. Li (2005) raised an important point when analyzing why many education reforms often fail. Failure can be attributed to the lack of understanding of the beliefs surrounding learning in different cultures. Since western and Chinese ideas around how children should behave as learners are different in a number of profound ways, it is interesting to see where today’s Hong Kong parents stand in the continuum.

1.4.2 Expectations of child’s education and development. Research from over 10 years ago already suggested that Hong Kong parents’ expectations of child development were not solely focused on pre-academic skills (e.g. Lam, 1999). Therefore it was worthwhile to
supplement the literature with a more recent snapshot of what parents expect their preschoolers to learn. In the literature review section, an elaborate cross-national study that shed light on the topic, “What should young children learn?” is considered in depth (the IEA Pre-primary Project; Weikart, 1996). The study looked at how parents and teachers ranked the importance of a number of developmental skills, what they predicted each other’s priorities to be, and what responsibilities they assigned to themselves and each other regarding children’s development. Some of the measures used to study parents’ expectations of children’s learning were adopted in the current study.

1.4.3 Ideal child characteristics. Ideal child characteristics refer to the traits that parents believe are good and hope their children to have (Shek & Chan, 1999). This concept is distinct from the image of the child; it is not about how parents view children’s nature but rather what qualities they value and want their children to have.

In Reggio Emilia, infant-toddler centers and preschools are regarded as places of culture, where values and knowledge are not simply transmitted but constructed as well (Rinaldi, 2001). Parents, as much as teachers, strive to nurture their children to have qualities which they believe are valued in the society (LeVine, as cited in Pearson & Rao, 2003). As mentioned previously, parents will consciously and subconsciously select environments that are in line with what they believe are good for their children, and this applies to their educational choices as well (Opper & Olmstead, 1999). Therefore, by studying Hong Kong parents’ ideal child characteristics, we can imagine the kinds of learning culture and environments that parents would want their children to be in. When these characteristics are compared to the ideals that the Reggio pedagogy upholds, the compatibility between the two can be gauged. By looking at how parents think these qualities can best be nurtured in school settings, the current study can suggest how receptive parents might be to the Reggio learning atmosphere.

1.4.4 Appreciation for art and beauty in education. Although Reggio is not a type of art education and the students are not given formal art lessons, the use of art as a visual representation for self-expression and communication is prominent. The dedication to support children in articulating ideas through a wide range of media and art forms can be appreciated through the role of the atelier and atelierista; each preschool has its own atelier, or art studio, where “children can become masters of all kinds of techniques” (Vecchi, 1998, p. 140). Also, the documentation of how children’s creations come about is the Reggio educators’ means of making learning visible (Rinaldi, 2001). Through documentation, parents and teachers are able
to witness the learning that takes place as children hypothesize, experiment, and refine their work, and this presents a different kind of assessment (Rinaldi). This assessment stands in contrast to more typical forms of evaluation, such as receiving a report card with marks and grades at the end of an academic year.

As Li and Wong (2001) asserted, appreciation for beauty is not an integral part of the Hong Kong culture as it is in Italy. However, among the five focus areas outlined by the Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 2006), developing children’s awareness and appreciation for aesthetics was one of the new directions set forth by the Hong Kong government. While policymakers have identified the need for aesthetic development, how do Hong Kong parents feel about this agenda? What do they think about having children express themselves in non-conventional ways (i.e., not just through writing)? How important do parents think it is to have beautiful and stimulating learning environments for children? Related questions explored in the study could indicate whether aesthetically amiable Reggio programs would be welcomed and embraced in Hong Kong.

1.4.5 Conception of the role of ECE. As Woodhead (1998) pointed out, how parents define quality in ECE is dependent on a framework of beliefs, values, and knowledge about childhood and their perceived goals and functions of early childhood programs. The IEA Pre-primary Project showed that there was a mismatch between what Hong Kong parents see as the responsibility of teachers and what teachers see as their duty (Ojala, 1998). In choosing the three most important skill areas for which teachers are responsible, self-sufficiency skills (79%) and social skills with adults (51%) received the highest rating from parents. Meanwhile, 76% of teachers felt that equipping children with pre-academic skills was one of the three most important responsibilities that they have, followed by language skills (59%) and social skills with peers (56%; Ojala). In Phase 1 of this project, among the ten participating countries (Belgium, China, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Nigeria, Portugal, Spain, Thailand, and the United States), Hong Kong was the only one where parents reported not being satisfied with pre-primary services they received because they were either too academic or not sufficiently so (Katz, 1994).

What parents believe the roles of ECE to be will determine what they expect from preschool programs, which will then affect how satisfied they are with their children’s education. Reggio Emilia has a clear vision for ECE, and knowing what Hong Kong parents expect from their young children’s education would show where the two intersect. The
findings will also be helpful for Hong Kong educators in considering what future directions to take in terms of education reforms.

1.4.6 Attitude toward parent participation in schools. Reggio Emilia is said to be an education based on interrelationships, where the cooperation and participation of the three central protagonists—children, teachers, and parents—are believed to be able to produce a higher level of outcome (Malaguzzi, 1998). The schools strive to create an atmosphere of positive receptiveness that promotes open and democratic dialogue among all those concerned (Malaguzzi). It is seen as the teachers’ responsibilities to learn how to talk, listen, and learn from parents, which will encourage parents to be more inquisitive and to contribute more to their children’s learning experience (Malaguzzi).

Some scholars suggested that Hong Kong parents’ lukewarm interest in participating in children’s schooling will pose a challenge to adopting Reggio in Hong Kong (Li & Wong, 2001). However, this contention was not sustained by systematic evidence, which is why the current study sought to explore this topic directly by asking for parents’ thoughts. There are many levels of participation, from occasionally volunteering in classrooms to being on a parent advisory board, and it is conceivable that active parent participation depends on a multitude of factors. But setting practical constraints aside, how do parents feel about being more involved in their children’s school? Answers to this question would show how well the close partnership between Reggio schools and parents fits in with existing practices in Hong Kong.

1.4.7 Parents’ current experience and views on learning outcomes. The percentage of people receiving post-secondary education in Hong Kong tripled between 1988 and 1998 (Hong Kong Annual Report, 1998), and in 2000, 18% of those between the ages of 17 and 20 were enrolled in local universities. In addition, 12% pursued other forms of higher education or had gone to study overseas (Hong Kong Yearbook, 2000). The number of students receiving education abroad deserves special attention. In 2001, the total number of visas issued to students studying in the United States, Australia, and Canada was 15,075 (Hong Kong Yearbook, 2001). It should be noted that this number does not include those who hold overseas citizenship, which means the number of students pursuing overseas education could be even higher. What these figures imply is that, in general, the recent generation of parents has a higher level of education compared to previous generations, and many have substantial exposure to western ways of thinking. How do these trends affect what the current cohort of parents view as important in children’s education and development? Are they satisfied with the current system or do they see room for improvement? Because the provision of quality
programs can conceivably be influenced by consumer demand, it is valuable for those who are providing educare in Hong Kong to know if there are any gaps between what parents want and what is available in the field.

1.4.8 Parents’ reactions toward a Reggio project. Since the study aimed to explore whether Reggio has room to flourish in Hong Kong by looking at parents’ perspectives, it would be interesting to see how parents react to a typical Reggio activity. Long- and short-term projects carried out by groups of children are the primary way of learning in Reggio settings (Rankin, 1998). With the teachers’ delicate support, these projects can be large in scale and can extend over long periods of time (Rankin). Sophisticated artwork is often born out of these projects, be it sculptures, installations, or drawings, and teachers take great care in documenting the entire process as it unfolds. The “Inspirations from a Puddle” project carried out by children in the Diana school is a representative example of what Reggio projects look like (referred to as the puddle project hereafter; Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1998). An ordinary everyday phenomenon—a puddle in the courtyard—captured the interest of the 5- and 6-year-old children, which then became the topic for exploration. The documentation of this project shows minimal adult direction and intervention; children were allowed to freely construct their ideas about reflections in the water. However, the Reggio teachers were attentive and thoughtful in putting out certain materials (e.g., a mirror on the ground) to provoke associations and further learning at opportune times. In this activity, children drew pictures that demonstrated their understanding of shadows and reflections, and the final drawings contained a high level of detail after several revisions. By asking what parents think about this approach to learning, this topic can directly shed light on the research questions.

1.5 Definition of Terms

The following terms are commonly used throughout this paper. To ensure accurate understanding, the following definitions are applied in the discussions.

1. Attitude. In Psychology, attitude is "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Eagly & Chaiken, as cited in Eagly & Chaiken, 2007, p. 1). In the current study, parents’ attitude toward parental involvement in schools refers to the extent to which parents like or dislike participating in their children’s school affairs.
2. **Values.** Feather (1995) defined values as follows:

Values can be conceived as abstract structures that involve the beliefs that people hold about desirable ways of behaving or about desirable end states. These beliefs transcend specific objects and situations, and they have a normative, or oughtness, quality about them. They have their source in basic human needs and in societal demands. They are relatively stable but not unchanging across the life span. They are assumed to function as criteria or frameworks against which present experience can be tested. Values vary in their relative importance for the individual, and they are fewer in number than the many specific beliefs and attitudes that people possess. (p. 1135)

In looking at ideal child characteristics, the qualities that parents hope their children to have reflect the virtues they value in people. In other words, what do parents think are desirable ways for the children to behave? What kind of person do they want their child to be?

3. **Educare.** Although educare, which is one of the Latin roots of the word *education*, means to train or to mould (Bass & Good, 2004), it is used more broadly in this paper to denote educational services provided to children under the age of six in Hong Kong. As Smith (1996) pointed out that quality care is educational and quality education is caring, the word educare challenges the dichotomy of care and education in the early childhood sector.

4. **Preschools.** In Hong Kong, pre-primary services are provided by private institutions which include early childhood education and care services for two- to five-year-olds. Here, preschool refers to all kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-childcare centers (childcares that provide kindergarten education) in Hong Kong. Playgroups are excluded because of the difference in nature and structure of these programs offered to children as young as 18 months old. Lastly, preschool is also used synonymously with the term *educare* in this paper.

5. **Present-day parents.** This refers to the cohort of parents whose three- to five-year-old child was enrolled in a preschool at the time of study (i.e., in year 2009). The lifestyle and characteristics of each generation of parents constitute a continuum rather than clear-cut categories, and there are idiosyncrasies within each cohort of parents. However, for the purpose of this discussion, the sample is confined to this group of parents.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Overview of ECE in Hong Kong

Early childhood education and care services are provided by two separate types of institutions in Hong Kong: half-day kindergartens for three- to five-year-old children, and full-day childcare centres for two- to five-year-olds (Chan & Chan, 2003). Day crèches serve children younger than two years of age. In 2006, the school attendance rate for children between the ages of 3 to 5 was 89% (Census and Statistic Department, 2006), and in 2008-2009, a total of 137,360 children were enrolled in the 964 local and non-local kindergartens in Hong Kong (Education Bureau, n.d.). Tuition fees need to be approved by governing institutions, namely the Education Department for kindergartens and the Social Welfare Department for childcares, but the range can vary widely: from HK$2180 to HK$7000 per month for a half-day program offered to equivalent age groups (GeoBaby.com, 2007).

One of the many issues vexing the ECE sector in Hong Kong is the downward pressure on kindergartens to adopt formal academic curricula to equip children for entrance into academically rigorous primary schools (Chan & Chan, 2003). Preschool curriculum and teaching approaches are greatly influenced by what schools believe parents want, namely, academic school readiness (Chan & Chan). As a result, teachers resort to using rote-learning techniques, forcing children to memorize difficult English words and do computations even before they have grasped relevant math concepts (Chan & Chan).

Since the handover of Hong Kong from British rule back to Chinese governance in 1997, the Government has demonstrated considerable commitment to improving the education system which began with a thorough review by the Education Commission in 1999 (Chan & Chan, 2003). For the first time, ECE was given attention and emphasis in the education reform, in which its role as the foundation for life-long learning is acknowledged (Chan & Chan). The Education Commission outlined five main areas of focus for pre-primary education: enhancing professional competence, improving the quality assurance mechanism, reforming the monitoring mechanism, enhancing the interface between early childhood and primary, and the mode of subsidy (Chan & Chan). The Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 2006) emphasizes well-balanced development of children and outlines five broad curriculum goals in the areas of social and emotional development, intellectual development, aesthetic awareness and appreciation, physical development and coordination,
and linguistic competence. However, the existing quality assurance mechanism— which entails annual school inspections carried out by government officials and general curriculum guidelines—is insufficient to uphold the standard of ECE (Chan & Chan). In recent years, there is an increasing demand from the public to enforce a more powerful mechanism to ensure the quality of ECE services (Chan & Chan).

2.2 Reggio Emilia in Hong Kong

2.2.1 A Reggio project with Hong Kong children. As educators from around the world engaged in dialogues about introducing Reggio practices to their home schools, Hong Kong early childhood scholars also explored the utility of the Reggio approach in their local childcares and kindergartens. A study headed by the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education provided an opportunity for its Higher Diploma students in the Childcare and Education program to carry out Reggio-like projects with local kindergarten children (Lee & Tsang, 2005). The purpose of the study was to enhance the student teachers’ understanding of Reggio Emilia through direct experience, and the projects were intended to allow children’s individuality to be developed and expressed (Lee & Tsang). Since Professor Lilian Katz spoke about the Project Approach in Hong Kong in 1990, the use of projects as an interactive form of learning has gained significant attention in preschools (Lee & Tsang). It should be noted that although Reggio shares a lot in common with the Project Approach in terms of how projects are formulated and carried out, Reggio as an educational philosophy entails much more than doing group projects. It is the pedagogical stance and rationales behind the educational choices that distinguish Reggio from other similar approaches, and one would have to look beyond the surface to appreciate the differences.

The projects carried out by the Higher Diploma students are rare examples of applying Reggio in Hong Kong that have been documented in the literature. Consistent with the Reggio approach, the project topics were based on questions raised by the children, the teachers acted as the children’s resource and partner instead of playing the traditional instructor’s role, and the student teachers made detailed pedagogical documentation of the entire process. Two projects were generated – the Sheung Wan Story that involved a group of kindergarten children, and the Chinese Opera Project that was done with children from a childcare centre (Lee & Tsang, 2005). Both projects involved field trips to relevant sites of interest that deepened children’s understanding of the topic. Children went to the Antique Street and tea houses that gave them a glimpse of the rich history behind Sheung Wan, which is the district where their school is
located. In the Chinese Opera Project, children visited the Opera Art Club and were introduced to a variety of costumes, singing styles and dramatic gestures (Lee & Tsang). As a culminating activity, children in the Sheung Wan Story project set up their own tea house in the classroom and invited their parents and relatives to the opening ceremony, where children proudly served hot tea and dim sum to their guests (Lee & Tsang). The children in the Chinese Opera Project also concluded their activity on a high note; with the teachers’ help, they created their own Chinese opera and made a performance at their graduation ceremony.

The authors described the intensity of the children’s interest as “beyond expectation” and stated that “this project had immense potential as a basis for both academic and creative learning” (Lee & Tsang, 2005, p. 45). Although this Reggio experience was positive for all those involved, the authors did mention the practical challenges of pursuing Reggio as a universal model for Hong Kong preschools. Specifically, the concerns surrounded the role of the atelierista and pedagogista (Lee & Tsang). In Reggio Emilia, each school has an atelierista who is trained in art education; he or she works closely with the teachers in enriching and furthering children’s learning through utilizing diverse materials and resources (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). The atelierista acts as a consultant who offers suggestions on how to introduce certain materials to children, and helps teachers see the possibilities of themes and projects that may not be readily apparent (Vecchi, 1998). Furthermore, all the education programs serving children under the age of six are supported by a group of pedagogisti, appointed at the municipal level, who ensure that the Reggio philosophies are implemented consistently throughout the system (Filippini, 1998). Each pedagogista is in charge of a number of schools, and their role is multifaceted; from identifying themes for professional development to supporting teachers in their daily communication with parents, the pedagogista is active at different levels of the system (Filippini, 1998). The pedagogista does not work with the children directly, but his or her work is critical in maintaining “the ‘backbone’ of the system conceived as an organism” (Filippini, 1998, p. 130). As Lee and Tsang pointed out, Hong Kong preschools do not have trained staff to fill the designated roles of an atelierista and pedagogista, and extra funding and personnel would be needed if schools were to adopt the Reggio approach.

2.2.2 Ecological differences between Reggio Emilia and Hong Kong. Other researchers also identified a number of inherent characteristics in the Hong Kong education system that render the adoption of Reggio a “daunting task” (Li & Wong, 2001, p. 13). The shortage of financial and human resources is just one of the many obstacles that the ECE field faces in
Hong Kong (Li & Wong). Using Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (as cited in Li & Wong), the authors delineated a host of socio-contextual issues that make the implementation of Reggio Emilia in local preschools challenging. Two of the limitations that are relevant to this study are highlighted below:

1. The lack of appreciation for beauty in the culture ( Macrosystem):

   In Hong Kong, we have not placed much importance on beauty in preschools but just put great importance on children’s achievement, such as early literacy and numeracy. The parents push their children urgently by asking teachers to provide tons of paper exercises either in the classroom or at home. (Li & Wong, p. 5)

2. Unlikely support and interest from parents (Mesosystem):

   A large proportion of young children’s activities except for IQ, EQ or MI (multi-intelligence) training programs in Hong Kong preschools are unlikely to engage the interest, participation, enthusiasm, or loyalty of their parents, especially compared with the Reggio Emilia children who enlist parents’ interest and support. (Li & Wong, p. 8)

   Other constraints that are not discussed here are also legitimate considerations that admittedly are not easy to resolve. However, even though the authors concluded that the feasibility of adopting the Reggio approach in Hong Kong “might not be positive” (Li & Wong, 2001, p. 13), they recommended that scholars re-examine what it is about Reggio Emilia that serves Hong Kong well. Li and Wong outlined three primary concerns that should be considered in this endeavour: (a) what characteristics of Reggio are beneficial and achievable given the Hong Kong environment, (b) how the approach may be adapted so that it will be sustainable for Hong Kong in the long-run, and (c) how to be inspired by Reggio, instead of merely importing a model, to establish a work culture in the field of educare that is suited for Hong Kong. Findings from the current study are believed to touch on some of these issues. Although a deeper understanding of what parents value and believe may not directly translate into practical solutions, it will offer insights into what the needs and demands of present-day families are. This in turn will point to whether Reggio has something valuable to offer in meeting those needs, and can direct educators to focus their energy on coming up with policies and strategies to create a model that works for Hong Kong.
2.3 Related Studies on the Research Topics

2.3.1 The image of the child. Central to the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia is what is called the *image of the child*. “Ours is a different way of thinking and approaching the child” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 64). Through the Reggio lens, children are seen in the most positive light: “We talk about a child who is competent and strong—a child who has the right to hope and the right to be valued, not a predefined child seen as fragile, needy, incapable” (Rinaldi, p. 64). Children are believed to be active learners (Rinaldi), protagonists in their own and others’ growth (Filippini, 1998), who are eager to communicate and build relationships with others (Rinaldi, 1998; 2006). This view of the rich and competent child is a unifying theme across different core features of the approach, including the pedagogy of listening and documentation. It is because children are respected and valued, teachers take time to listen to what the children have to say, and teachers see the worth in documenting children’s words and work with care.

Hong Kong is a “very Chinese city, with British characteristics” as the last Hong Kong governor Christopher Patten stated (quoted in Lau, as cited in Luk-Fong, 2005). Although what parents think nowadays may be less traditional compared to previous generations (Tam, 2001), certain Chinese values and beliefs still hold strong in today’s parents’ minds (Luk-Fong, 2005). A brief introduction to the Chinese image of the child will be provided here which can be contrasted with the Reggio image of the child.

Tang (2006) identified three stages through which the Chinese view of the child has evolved. Stage one comprises the traditional view which considers children as the family’s private property (Liu, as cited in Tang). Children were expected to obey the orders of the elders without hesitation or questioning, and they were strictly disciplined according to the criteria of respected adults. In the next stage, which developed during the new cultural movement in the 1920-30s, the modern view of the child was very much influenced by the progressive education reformer John Dewey (Xiong & Zhou, as cited in Tang). For a while, children’s right to think was respected, and educators began to realize the importance of structuring educational programs according to children’s developmental needs (Tang). However, shortly after that, students were once again required to be subordinates of authority figures and young children even became tools for politicization during the Cultural Revolution (Yu, as cited in Tang). The third stage involves the contemporary view of the child, which is in close alignment with the Western concept of the child (Tang). Here, the value of childhood in its own right is recognized, and children are seen to have potential in learning and development (Ministry of
Education, as cited in Tang). The notion of children as active learners appeared, and children are no longer seen as “naïve, innocent, incompetent, and redemptive” (Tang, p. 343).

Bai (2005) examined the traditional Confucian image of the child in great detail with regards to play. The neo-Confucian image idealizes a precocious child as being quiet and mature, having a dislike for play, displaying no childish traits, and being sedate in demeanour (Bai). Although liberal educators later on proposed to assimilate play or pleasure into education, which resembles the idea of learning through play on the surface, the rationale behind doing so was that children will imitate what they observe in their surroundings through play (Bai). This type of “sober and educational play” (Bai, p. 15) is instrumental in nature, and children’s right to play for the sake of expressing and enjoying themselves is not considered (Bai).

A particular aspect of the child, that of a learner, is also relevant in the current study since the focus is on what Hong Kong parents think is valuable and needed in children’s early education. In Reggio, children do not passively receive knowledge that teachers pass on, but learning takes place in large and small group settings that rely on the active contribution of the learners themselves (Reggio Children, 2001). Indeed, Reggio Emilia endorses a sociocultural theory to knowledge construction and believes that knowledge is constructed by the learner rather than transmitted to the learner (New, 1998). Seen as active learners who are curious and ready to explore, children in Reggio engage in short- and long-term projects with support from teachers. They carry out in-depth investigations on all kinds of subjects, and children are encouraged to hypothesize and continually refine their understanding as the projects unfold. Dialogues between children and teachers as well as among the children themselves are essential in this learning process because as a community, everyone serves as a cognitive and emotional resource for each other (Krechevsky & Mardell, 2001). This overlaps with what Li (2005) regards as European-American beliefs about learning, where the learner aspires to question the known and discover the new, and to communicate one’s understanding or knowledge to others. Creative problem-solving skills are valued, and learners are taught to feel proud of themselves when they succeed (Li).

The Chinese image of learners which has evolved over more than 2000 years is quite different from the Reggio or European-American image (Li, 2005). Personal passion is deemed as important but not necessarily intrinsic to learning, and the respect for knowledge and teaching authorities is emphasized more (Li). Rather than feeling proud of their accomplishments, learners should be humble and continue to self-perfect. The virtues of
diligence, perseverance, and concentration are held in high regard; when learning something new, learners are expected to learn and contemplate solitarily rather than engaging in reflective dialogues with others on the subject (Li).

After contrasting the image of children and learners between the East and the West, it would be interesting to know where Hong Kong parents stand. As explained previously, Hong Kong’s history as well as its status as an international hub resulted in a culture that blends Eastern and Western influences together. In fact, ideas from the West have shaped the field of education greatly, and this can be seen in how learners are described in the Guide to Pre-primary Education (Curriculum Development Council, 2006): “[Children] are born to be learners and with the ability to construct knowledge” (p. 8); “Children are active learners who are curious and interested in exploration. Given proper resources and adults’ assistance, children can construct knowledge on their own. A safe, comfortable, enjoyable, and challenging environment is conducive to children’s learning” (p. 10). However, it has yet to be determined whether Hong Kong parents also share these beliefs, and the current study will take a step forward in shedding light on these concepts.

2.3.2 Hong Kong parents’ expectations of children’s education and development. Li and Wong (2001) pointed out that Hong Kong parents place a strong emphasis on their children’s academic achievement, which is a well-recognized phenomenon. In a study that explored Hong Kong parents’ conceptions of an ideal child, the category of academic-related attributes was one of the four domains that emerged from the parents’ responses (Shek & Chan, 1999). Specifically, this included having good academic results, demonstrating a positive attitude toward studying, fulfilling responsibility in studying and reaching high education attainment (Shek & Chan). Although the participants in the study were parents of adolescents, the push for academic excellence is also strong at the preschool level for pragmatic reasons. The top elementary and secondary schools in Hong Kong that are favoured by parents are highly academically oriented and competitive, and therefore parents opt for kindergartens that can best prepare their children for school even though they understand the tremendous pressure added on their children’s shoulders (Chan & Chan, 2003). Indeed, in a survey that looked at Hong Kong parents’ reasons for sending their children to kindergarten, 54% of all participants (N = 14328) agreed to the statement “I hope they [my children] would acquire the 3R’s, i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic” (Lam, 1999, p. 20).
A large-scale cross-national study conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), called the *IEA Preprimary Project*, also looked at parents’ expectations for young children. This study was done across 17 countries spanning four continents and was divided into three phases: Phase 1 consisted of a household survey that sought to identify the major early childhood care and education settings used by families with 4-year-old children; Phase 2 studied the quality of life of 4-year-old children as well as how programmatic and familial characteristics impact children’s development at that age; and Phase 3 was a follow-up study that investigated how pre-primary experiences affect children’s school progress and development when they reach 7 years old (Opper & Olmsted, 1999). Hong Kong was one of the cities that took part in all three phases of the project and pertinent findings from Phase 2 will be reviewed here.

The Expectations Questionnaire was developed to understand the relative importance that participants place on eight developmental domains that children between the ages of 3 to 5 years should learn: language skills, motor/physical skills, pre-academic skills, self-assessment skills, self-sufficiency skills, social skills with adults, and social skills with peers (Opper & Olmsted, 1999). During data collection parents were asked to sort through eight cards that had a particular skill category and its subskills on one side, and culturally-appropriate drawings that illustrated the skill category on the other side. Respondents first ranked the three most important skills, then the three least important skills, and finally fit in the remaining two accordingly (Opper & Olmsted). The national-level rankings based on the responses of 198 Hong Kong parents were as follows (decreasing order of importance): (a) pre-academic skills, (b) language skills, (c) self-sufficiency skills, (d) social skills with peers, (e) motor/physical skills, (f) self-expression skills, (g) social skills with adults, and (h) self-assessment skills (Opper & Olmsted). Specifically, 59% of parents ranked pre-academic skills as one of the top three important skills for preschool children to learn, while 56%, 52%, and 46% chose self-sufficiency, language skills, and social skills with peers respectively (Opper & Olmsted). With regards to the subskills within each skill category, the ability to count from 1 to 10 and recognizing letter and numbers was selected to be “the most important” by parents. The two subskills that received the highest rankings in the next top skill categories were: “ask questions when confused” and “pronounce words correctly” for language skills, “attend to personal needs” and “recognize/avoid danger” for self-sufficiency skills, and “initiate/form friendships” and “share toys” for social skills with peers.
Phase 2 of the IEA Preprimary Project also explored what responsibilities parents attributed to themselves and teachers regarding children’s care and education (Opper & Olmsted, 1999). An exceedingly high percentage of parents – 82%—regarded pre-academic skills as one of the three most important responsibilities of parents, followed by social skills with peers (51%). Meanwhile, in choosing the three most important responsibilities for teachers, self-sufficiency skills (79%) and social skills with adults (51%) received the highest rating from parents (Opper & Olmsted). This interesting result suggests that while parents value pre-academic skills, they do not necessarily assign this responsibility solely to teachers; instead, they have other expectations of what children should learn at school. In fact, a survey conducted by Lam (1999) found that parents prioritized other areas of development as much as, if not more than, academic skills. This finding is quite different from the common conception of Hong Kong parents’ predominant focus on academic achievement, and suggests a more balanced picture of what parents want for their children.

The survey conducted by Lam (1999) solicited responses from 14,328 parents; 53% and 40% of respondents rated total development and self-care skills, respectively, as “extremely important” in their children’s kindergarten education, compared to 26% who rated reading, writing and arithmetic as extremely important. As for why parents chose to send their children to kindergarten, 55% strongly agreed with the statement, “Kindergarten education will enhance their [my children’s] total development, i.e. establish positive attitude toward learning, cultivate self-confidence and prepare themselves on the path from the home to the society” (Lam, p. 20), while only 39% of parents strongly agreed with the statement regarding the acquisition of the three Rs (Lam). The author made an important statement in her conclusion that calls into question whether existing schools are only partially fulfilling parents’ expectations by over-focusing on pre-academic skills:

It is crucial to recognize from the results of this study that the parents viewed enhancement of children’s development, establishment of positive attitude toward learning, cultivation of self-confidence, preparation from home to society, self-care and inter-personal communication as more important learning outcomes than the traditional three R’s. (Lam, p. 23)

These results do not undermine the importance of academic learning but they clarify that parents value other aspects of development as well. Therefore, while parents may not be ready to accept a preschool program that prioritizes other aspects of development over academics, programs that only emphasize pre-academic skills may not suffice in satisfying parents either.
In the following section, a recent study on how Hong Kong preschool children’s parents define quality early childhood programmes is reviewed. Taken together, these findings suggest that Hong Kong parents’ views on early childhood education and development may be changing. The current study attempted to seek a better understanding of present-day parents’ primary concerns about preschool education in Hong Kong.

2.3.3 Ideal child characteristics. In Reggio Emilia, developing children’s civic conscience and preparing them to participate in a democratic society is a goal the preschools work toward (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002). Participation is defined as feeling a sense of belonging and partaking, and the Reggio educational experience mindfully employs organizational methods and strategies that allow such participation to be possible (Rinaldi, 2001). The emphasis Reggio educators place on listening to children reflects these values of democracy and participation; teachers provide a safe space for children to explore, communicate, and negotiate their ideas with each other in respectful ways. Closely related to the value of democracy is the value of difference; children grow up in a school environment where difference in gender, race, religion, and culture are embraced (Rinaldi, 2001). Through teachers’ gentle and sensitive guidance, children are encouraged to deal with conflicts and differences through acts of love and acceptance rather than confrontation (Malaguzzi, 1998). As Vecchi (2005) puts it, “If skills of collaboration and negotiation are deemed to be important in a given society, then school is perhaps one of the places where they can most easily be explored, developed, and practiced” (p. 178). Indeed, children in Reggio schools have plenty of opportunities to learn how to cooperate with others through the numerous group projects they engage in, where ideas are exchanged, discussed, and modified (Malaguzzi).

What hopes do parents of preschool children in Hong Kong have for their young? A cross-cultural study done by Pearson and Rao (2003) examined the differences in socialization goals and parenting practices between Hong Kong Chinese mothers and United Kingdom English mothers, and their effects on preschoolers’ social competence. An important premise is that parents try to cultivate qualities in their children that they believe the society values, and these values form the socialization goals that influence parenting practices (Schaffer, as cited in Pearson & Rao). The study focused on three areas of socialization: Academic achievement, filial piety, and emotional security and social skills development. It was hypothesized that Hong Kong mothers would be more concerned about the former two while Caucasian mothers would place more emphasis on their children’s psychosocial development (Pearson & Rao). Indeed, the results supported the contention that Hong Kong mothers attach more importance
to academic achievement and filial piety than English mothers, which is consistent with traditional Chinese values (Pearson & Rao). However, there was no significant difference between Chinese and English mothers in how they valued social-emotional development.

Other than analyzing general socialization goals that parents have, a small number of studies also looked into what parents think about specific qualities that are relevant to the current study. In particular, Hong Kong parents’ conceptions about curiosity (Chak, 2007) and thinking (Lam, Lim, Chen, & Adams, 2003) had been examined. These two concepts are valuable in this discussion because the Reggio approach supports and builds on children’s curiosity in the learning process, and the way teachers encourage children to hypothesize and exchange ideas with one another is an indication that they believe in the importance of fostering children’s independent thinking skills. Therefore, knowing how Hong Kong parents of preschool children think about curiosity and thinking will suggest how receptive they will be to a preschool model that capitalizes on these aspects.

Through administering questionnaires to 126 parents and 195 preschool teachers in Hong Kong, Chak (2007) compared how the two groups of participants (a) conceived the characteristics of curiosity, (b) saw the importance of encouraging it, (c) thought that it was important to learning, and (d) specified the circumstances that they thought would encourage or discourage it. With the use of quantitative and qualitative questionnaire items, the researcher found that Hong Kong parents and teachers held positive views of curiosity and exploration in general (Chak). When interpreting the results, the author found that the influence of the adult-directed Chinese culture played out in the degree of control parents had over children’s exploration. This highlights the importance of culture in affecting people’s beliefs and behaviour: Parents who believed that they were in charge of their children’s activities and learning would decide for their children what was or was not worthwhile to explore (Chak). In the study conducted by Lam, Lim, Chen, and Adams (2003), discrepancies were also found between the value that teachers and parents placed on thinking skills in the preschool classrooms; teachers emphasized children’s independent thinking more whereas parents’ responses were more concerned with following rules, staying on task, and behaving appropriately. The authors suggested that this might have stemmed from parents’ bias against an unstructured classroom environment that permits children to freely talk about their work, play, and interests; or simply put, an environment that nurtures effective thinking skills in young children (Lam et al.). Meanwhile, both groups of respondents acknowledged the importance of helping young children develop problem-solving skills so that they would be
able to make the right choices when faced with challenges and conflicts in the future (Lam et al.). The fact that parents recognize the value of nurturing problem-solving skills in children and yet do not think that these skills need to be deliberately taught in the classroom (Lam et al.) suggests that early childhood educators may have to help parents see the connection between the two.

Whether parents want their preschool children to become curious and independent-thinking individuals will be explored in the current study. Descriptions of how these traits are defined and manifested were borrowed from the two studies mentioned previously, in concert with some items from the scales on parental socialization goals. Lastly, characteristics that Reggio educators endeavour to cultivate in young children were also added to the current measures.

2.3.4 Appreciation for art and beauty in education. In 1976, a group of educators from the United States embarked on a journey to China, Japan, and Hong Kong to look at how aesthetic experiences were afforded and nurtured in young children (Honig, 1977). “Aesthetics involves the development of taste, appreciation, and love for the beautiful which pervades all aspects of living” (Honig, p. 3). The aesthetic climate consists of a myriad of factors: for instance, creating a harmonious balance between active and quiet time over the course of the school day will help children develop a sense of time and rhythm, and efforts to enhance theatrical and dance performances with costumes will sharpen aesthetic sensitivity (Honig). Upon visiting kindergartens, childcare centres, parks, streets, and homes in several of these Asian cities, the author observed that the growth of aesthetic sensibility and artistic skills was encouraged in each of the visited sites, but different facets were emphasized in each habitat (Honig).

Li and Wong (2001) pointed out that the designs of kindergartens in Hong Kong do not afford beautiful learning environments; with scarce space, the classrooms are often crowded and separated by long and dim corridors. They also contrasted the commercial classroom decorations with the natural beauty that permeates the Reggio classrooms in Italy (Li & Wong). While these descriptions may be true, the emphasis placed on Aesthetic Development in the Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum suggests that positive change may be probable. A section on Aesthetic Development is extracted from the guide:

Aesthetic sensitivity is cultivated through observation and feelings.
Imagination is stimulated when one observes the environment with one’s senses and compares the forms of different things. Children express their inner
thoughts, feelings, emotions and imagination through the language of different media. The objectives of art education for early childhood include:

i. to allow children to explore different art media and symbols in an aesthetically rich and diversified environment.

ii. to enrich children’s sensory experiences and encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings.

iii. to stimulate children’s creative and imaginative powers, and encourage them to enjoy participating in creative works.

iv. to enhance children’s quality of life and foster their interests in life by guiding them to appreciate the surrounding environment.

(Curriculum Development Council, 2006, p. 20)

Although schools are largely responsible for designing aesthetically appealing and stimulating learning environments for children, it would be helpful to understand whether parents believe this is an area that is worth investing in. Indeed, if parents are indifferent to sterile classrooms, then schools may not see the need to improve their physical environments. Knowing whether parents pay attention to the physical aspects of the learning environment may prompt schools to create more amiable classrooms in Hong Kong.

2.3.5 Conception of the role of ECE. ECE was never a priority in Hong Kong until recently, and the importance of the early years has only begun to receive more recognition over the past decade (Chan & Chan, 2003; Chen-Hafteck & Xu, 2008). The education reform blueprint proposed by the Education Commission in 2000 acknowledged the role of ECE as the foundation for life-long learning (Education Commission, 2000). But how about the parents—what do they think about the role of ECE?

Lam (1999) administered a short questionnaire (10 questions) to 14,328 parents and studied the views they had of kindergarten education. On a 5-point Likert scale, 92% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that children should attend kindergarten before entering Grade 1, and 83% agreed or strongly agreed that kindergarten education is essential (Lam). Regarding the reasons for why parents send their children to kindergarten, most parents agreed that they hope their children to learn pre-academic, interpersonal, and self-care skills. However, compared to these reasons, it was the hope that kindergarten would enhance children’s total development (e.g., establish positive attitude toward learning, cultivate self-confidence) that was deemed as “extremely important” by more parents (Lam).
In a more recent study, Ho (2008) interviewed 17 parents and found that the theme of high learning motivation was commonly cited as a quality in good early childhood programs. Parents believed that preschools should arouse children’s motivation to learn, support their all-round development, and create an enjoyable learning experience for their young students (Ho). Taken together, these findings suggest that parents value the role of ECE in nurturing positive attitudes and providing positive experiences for children, not just for their future learning but also for their wholesome development.

Although there is considerable overlap in the questions explored by the researchers discussed above and the ones that will be covered in the current study, parents’ conception of the role of ECE was included nonetheless for a number of reasons. First, instead of having parents respond to a given set of “reasons for sending children to kindergarten”, the open-ended questions raised in the interview allowed parents to come up with their own ideas which we may not have expected. Second, because interview questions should be asked in relevance to the bigger research context and what we ask affects the information we get from respondents (Glesne, 2006), the insights gained from this study have the potential to add to and extend previous findings. Lastly, parents were explicitly asked to compare the role of ECE to that of primary and secondary education, which showed whether parents see a unique role in early learning.

2.3.6 Attitude toward parent participation in preschools. In Reggio Emilia, the participation of families and exchange of ideas between teachers and parents is viewed as an integration of different wisdoms and an element of collegiality (Spaggiari, 1998). The interaction between teachers and parents begins even before the child officially starts school, and parents are often brought in as experts to help with classroom projects (Spaggiari). There are ongoing parent-teacher meetings throughout the school year, and parents share the responsibility of making educational decisions with teachers as well as other adults who work in the schools (Spaggiari).

It is believed that Hong Kong parents are not very enthusiastic about being involved in their children’s preschools and would at most show interest in children’s extra-curricular activities (Li & Wong, 2001). Some studies have found that even with regards to extra-curricular activities, parents are more willing to invest money than time in promoting them (Lam & Wong, 1997). However, a more recent case study found support that Hong Kong parents enjoyed close communication between home and schools and that they appreciated opportunities to participate in school affairs through visits and volunteering (Ho, 2008). The
participating parents felt that a good program goes beyond the care and education of the children, but should also maintain close communication with families through open days, parents’ meetings, and even phone calls (Ho). It should be noted that parents’ eagerness to receive information from schools (e.g. through newsletters) does not necessarily imply that parents are willing to take part in school affairs proactively. The current study looked at parents’ attitude toward a two-way interaction between home and schools, and what level of participation they are comfortable with.

Several researchers have acknowledged the increasing participation of Hong Kong parents in their children’s education since the decentralization of school governance in 1997 (e.g., Ng, 2007a; 2007b). Parents’ presence at school events and meetings is more common, and parents’ voices in the realm of their children’s education have gained more recognition (Ng, 2007b). Indeed, the importance of close collaboration between parents and schools is underscored in the Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 2006), where an entire chapter explored how effective partnerships can be built with families. The Curriculum Development Council recognizes the need to increase communication channels, encourage parents’ participation in volunteer work, and involve parents in matters of school administration (2006). As existing schools begin to establish closer connection with families, it would be interesting to know how parents feel about their involvement in their children’s schools.

2.3.7 Parents’ current experience and views on learning outcomes. Given the “backwash effect” (Ho, 2008, p. 223) of primary education that induced Hong Kong preschools to emphasize school readiness, Ho investigated how two schools successfully managed to reconcile conflicts between parental expectations of academic preparation and the staff’s professional value of learning through play. A kindergarten and a childcare centre that were rated as excellent according to the Education Bureau Performance Indicators were chosen for this case study (Ho). As of 2005, only 120 kindergartens and 20 childcare centres were inspected by the Education Bureau, and only a few of them received the highest level of rating. The four domains in which schools are evaluated are: management and organization, learning and teaching, support for children and school ethos, and child development (Ho).

In addition to collecting basic demographic information through questionnaires, school governors, principals, teachers, support staff, and parents were interviewed individually and in small groups for 60 to 90 min (Ho, 2008). The 17 parents who were interviewed consisted of those who had 5- to 6-year-old children attending the schools at the time and those whose
children had graduated and transitioned to Grade 1. Themes and categories were identified after analyzing the interview transcripts, and the findings that pertain to parents’ responses are selectively reported here.

Four general themes emerged from the participants’ responses regarding education quality: high learning motivation and effectiveness, close communication with parents, total support given to families, and intimate staff-child relationship (Ho, 2008). With respect to learning, parents were in agreement with the school’s view that all-round development should be fostered and that learning should be tailored to individuals’ needs. However, parents were concerned about the intrinsic motivation to learn as much as the learning outcome (Ho). The author reasoned that by showing parents how children can be motivated to learn through play, parents may feel more reassured that their children are not falling behind academically in a play-based program (Ho). The next theme, close communication with parents, is particularly noteworthy because it stands in contrast to the nonchalant image of parents that is portrayed in the Li and Wong (2001) article. According to Ho, parents’ view of a good program went beyond children’s education and included how closely the schools maintained contact with them. Parents made use of the various channels to be connected to their children’s schools, which included making class observations and doing voluntary work (Ho). Not only did this open communication offer opportunities for parents to voice their opinion, it also helped schools gain parents’ support by allowing parents to witness children’s learning and gain understanding of the rationale behind the school’s operation (Ho). The total support given to families included elements that were beyond the formal roles of preschools, such as free after-school custodial care, emotional support, and financial assistance (Ho). Although parents may not have expected schools to offer these types of support, parents’ evaluation of the school were more favourable in light of a caring relationship between the school and families. This suggests that parents are not merely consumers of educare where there is little exchange between them and the schools, but rather parents want to participate in their children’s school life and feel supported by the staff.

2.3.8 Parents’ reactions toward a Reggio project. There is a paucity of research on parents’ reaction to Reggio programs, and much less on Asian parents’ views. One rare study looked at how Asian and non-Asian parents viewed a Reggio program that was implemented in a preschool in North America. There was a mix of ethnicities in this sample, and only a few of them were from Hong Kong. Through administering a questionnaire and interviewing 12 Asian parents and 15 non-Asian parents, Goh, D’Amico, and Fraser (2002) found that Asian parents
were very satisfied with children’s hands-on learning experiences in the Reggio-inspired program. They also appreciated that children were given a chance to think and carry out different activities. However, nine of the Asian parents voiced their grievances that the program did not explicitly “teach numbers” and did not provide enough opportunities for children to practice writing (Goh et al., 2002). The program’s lack of emphasis on children’s disciplinary and self-help skills were also a concern the parents had.

It is unfortunate that the documentation of the two Reggio projects carried out in Hong Kong (Lee & Tsang, 2005) did not look into parents’ reactions to culminating activities. To supplement the literature, the current study seeks to understand Hong Kong parents’ views on a Reggio project carried out in Italy, namely the puddle project. It would have been ideal if parents could see the original Hong Kong Reggio projects, but because the documented images and video recording were not readily accessible, other resources from the Reggio literature were used. By looking at pictures and descriptions of the puddle project in the follow-up interviews, parents were able to visualize what the approach looks like in action and could make specific comments about it.

2.4 Summary

Whether the Reggio approach is implementable in Hong Kong is a question that local educators have explored, and yet this question has never been examined in association with Hong Kong parents’ perspectives. Because the educare sector operates in a free market, parents of young children in Hong Kong have an influential role in affecting the direction of preschools. Therefore, if we want to see if a new ECE approach would work in Hong Kong, it is important for us to know what parents think about their children’s early development and education.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The current study attempted to uncover present-day Hong Kong parents’ values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations with regards to their preschoolers’ development and education. This was done through a survey and follow-up interviews that tapped into eight topics: (a) image of the child and learner, (b) expectations of child’s education and development, (c) ideal child characteristics, (d) appreciation for art and beauty in education, (e) conception of the role of ECE, (f) attitude toward parent participation in schools, (g) parents’ current experience and views on learning outcomes, and (h) parents’ reactions toward a Reggio project. Findings from this study provided a snapshot of Hong Kong parents’ current thinking which was then compared to the tenets of Reggio. The degree to which the two overlaps suggests whether there is potential for the merits of Reggio to extend to Hong Kong preschools.

3.1 Outline of Themes Covered in the Survey and Interview

Table 1 shows the topics that were covered in the survey and follow-up interviews (see Appendix A for the survey and Appendix B for the interview questions). In order to keep the questionnaire succinct, the number of open-ended questions was kept to a minimum. The purpose of having interviews was to explore certain topics in greater depth with the participants while being mindful not to belabor points that were already covered in detail in the survey. Therefore, while there is considerable overlap in the topics covered in the survey and interview, some topics were only addressed in one format and not the other.

3.2 Development of Questions

The purpose of this study was to learn about the attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations that present-day Hong Kong parents’ have regarding different aspects of child development and education. The significance rests in its contribution to the literature on the applicability of Reggio Emilia in the Hong Kong preschool context. Therefore, in addition to gathering information on parents’ general views on ECE, topics that tapped into specific characteristics of the Reggio philosophy were also examined. Eight topics were chosen, and the development of each topic’s questions is explained below.
3.2.1 Image of the child and learner. Images of the child that came from the Reggio philosophy, western conceptions, as well as Chinese cultural conceptions were used. Following an extensive review of the Reggio literature, adjectives describing the Reggio image of the child and learner were compiled. This list was then compared to items on the Child-rearing Practices Report (CRPR; Block, 1965) and the Items and Scales for Parents’ Socialization Goal and Parenting Practices (Pearson & Rao, 2003), which contained images of the child and learner from the western orientation. Images that were common between the two were selected for the current study, and images that were unique to the Reggio pedagogy were also included. Lastly, items representing the Chinese images were created based on the literature regarding Confucian and contemporary views of the child and learner (e.g. Bai, 2005; Tang, 2006). However, instead of categorizing the final set of statements into Reggio, western, or Chinese images of the child and learner, the items were categorized as being “compatible with the Reggio image” (Compatible items) or “incompatible with the Reggio image” (Incompatible items). This distinction was considered to be more useful since the current study hoped to see if the Reggio approach was suitable for Hong Kong. Therefore, it was important to find out if Hong Kong parents’ image of the child and learner was compatible with the Reggio image or not. Items from existing scales were modified in order to maintain a consistent format and new items were added to supplement the set. A total of 22 statements were generated for this survey topic, and 12 of them were Compatible statements. Parents were asked to indicate the degree to which each statement reflected their beliefs about children on a 5-point Likert scale.

3.2.2 Expectations of children’s education and development. The Expectations Questionnaire from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement IEA Pre-primary Project (Weikart, 1999) was modified so that it could be self-administered. Parents were asked to rank the eight developmental skill categories by order of importance. However, instead of ranking all eight skills, parents were only asked to rank the top three and bottom three choices. This was an attempt to modify the original Q-sort format so that the measure could be self-administered online. To avoid confusing the parents and to reduce the chance of having the same skill chosen twice by mistake, participants were not asked to fit in the remaining two skills into the fourth and fifth position. The eight categories were: language skills, motor/physical skills, pre-academic skills, self-assessment skills, self-sufficiency skills, self-expression skills, social skills with adults, and social skills with peers (Opper & Olmsted, 1999). In the interviews, parents were asked if they felt their child’s school had been supporting the two developmental domains that they rated as most important for 3- to
3.2.3 Ideal child characteristics. Thirteen statements about different hopes that parents might have for their children were listed. Participants were asked to choose the top five qualities they wanted their children to have and to rank them in order (“Top choice” to “5th choice”). Similar to the image of the child, the list of ideal child characteristics was derived from multiple sources: the Reggio Emilia literature and past research on Chinese values surrounding learning (e.g., Li, 2005) and character development (e.g., Huang & Charter, 1996; Shek & Chan, 1999). The Reggio-compatible and incompatible distinction also applied here, with eight Compatible items and five Incompatible items. Interviewed parents were asked to describe the kind of learning environment that would help children nurture the ideal qualities that they valued the most. Parents reviewed the top two choices that they made in the survey and were asked to talk about them separately.

3.2.4 Appreciation for art and beauty in education. In the survey, a number of statements that portrayed different aspects of an aesthetically rich preschool program were used. These descriptions were based on some key Reggio features as well as what the Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council (2006) outlined as objectives of art education. It was interesting to know how important each of these characteristics was to parents’ conceptions of a “good early childhood education program”. In the interviews, parents looked at different images of artistic activities common in the Reggio classrooms, and then they were asked if these activities had any value in preschool children’s everyday learning. They were also asked if they would like their child to spend more time engaging in those artistic activities within regular school hours.

3.2.5 Conception of the role of ECE. This construct was examined only in the interview, based on the speculation that data collected on this rarely discussed concept would be richer if parents could be prompted to elaborate on their responses. Parents were asked what they wanted the most for their child to get out of kindergarten, and whether they thought pre-primary education played a unique role in children’s development compared to primary and secondary education.

3.2.6 Attitude toward parent participation in schools. This construct was examined to understand how parents felt about being more involved in their children’s schools. It was therefore important to know about the current home-school relationship. A number of questions were designed to gauge whether there was two-way communication between parents
and their child’s school, as well as how parents were involved in the past. Aside from obtaining information about the current level of participation, a question about the level of involvement that parents would be comfortable with was asked. Three short descriptions of program styles that involved varying degrees of parent participation (low, medium, and high) were presented in the survey. Parents were asked to indicate which type of relationship they preferred the most. Lastly, parents were asked if they would be willing to be more involved at the school and what types of activities they would be comfortable engaging in.

3.2.7 Parents’ current experience and views on learning outcomes. In the survey, parents were asked to rate how important it was for their child to achieve a set of learning outcomes in their early childhood program (the Importance Scale). Then, parents were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with their child’s current learning experience with respect to each outcome (the Satisfaction Scale). In the interview, parents were asked to talk about two things that they liked about their child’s school and two areas for improvement.

3.2.8 Parents’ reactions toward a Reggio activity. After reading an excerpt about the puddle project that contained colourful images and captions, parents were asked if they thought the children learned any knowledge or skills from the activity. Then parents were asked to comment on things that they liked and disliked about this learning approach, and to also evaluate whether the activity could help children develop the pivotal skills and ideal characteristics that were mentioned in the first two sections of the interview.

3.3 Ethics

3.3.1 Providing exact information about the research. Since the study was conducted in a culture that might have a different research tradition from the North American model, cultural sensitivity was exercised to ensure that participants’ rights were protected. Instead of delineating all the study details in a single consent form, information about the study was provided to parents in a step-wise fashion to aid comprehension. In the welcome email for online survey participants, I summarized the procedures as clearly as possible and highlighted key information for them. Meanwhile, to ensure that participants understood the purpose of the study and their rights as participants, a more comprehensive Study Background Information Sheet (see Appendix C) was attached for further reading. Regarding parents who completed the paper surveys, a succinct Chinese flyer that covered basic information about the study was included in the research package, along with the detailed Study Background Information Sheet.
3.3.2 Voluntary participation and confidentiality. Information about voluntary participation and confidentiality was reiterated on the first page of the online survey, and participants still had a choice to withdraw from the study at that point. By submitting a survey, parents were consenting to participate in the study, and this was specified on the first page of the survey. The online survey was launched through my3q.com, a secure website that provides survey tools for research purposes. Data collected were subject to the Privacy Policy of my3q.com and participants were assured that the results would not be made public. Participants accessed their own survey by direct invitation (through email) and were not asked to provide their names or the name of their child in the survey.

For the parents who filled out the paper survey, a number of steps were taken to ensure that participation would still be voluntary and the participants’ data would be kept confidential. First, the school principals were told that there would not be any consequences for the parents or the school even if the turn-out rate was low, and it was emphasized that parents should be allowed to decline participation. Participants’ rights to voluntary participation were also stated on the first page of the survey. Second, to ensure confidentiality, participants returned their surveys in sealed envelopes to the principals. The envelopes had participant numbers on them and the principals were asked to mark down the names and corresponding codes of those who returned the survey. This procedure was necessary because the survey did not contain any identifying information; the only way to find out whom to contact regarding follow-up interviews and lucky draw results would be to refer to this list. However, to maintain confidentiality and maximize anonymity, the principals and I kept the list and the sealed surveys separately. I had to approach the principals whenever I needed to contact a participant, and at the same time, the completed surveys were not seen by any of the school staff.

3.3.3 Informed consent. Upon logging into the online survey, participants were asked to review an informed consent agreement before they proceeded to the demographic and questionnaire section. The information in the consent was essentially the same as the Study Background Information Sheet, except there was a statement at the end of the page: “By submitting a survey, you are consenting to your participation in this study. Your information will only be used for the purpose of this research study. Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.” The Study Background Information Sheet received by the paper survey participants also had a statement specifying implied consent. Lastly, participants in the interview were asked to sign an informed consent form on the day of the interview.
3.3.4 Compensation. All participants who filled out the online survey received a colorful “resources for parents” brochure that contained excerpts of parenting articles and links to educational resources. Parents would completed the paper survey entered a Lucky Draw that was comprised of 5 prizes (gift cards at the value of HK$100 each). Parents who took part in the interviews received HK$100. In addition to monetary compensation, participants could request a summary of results when they become available in the summer of 2010.

3.4 Recruitment

At the time of study, parents whose child was enrolled in a preschool program (including kindergartens and childcares) in Hong Kong were eligible for the study. Recruitment began in mid-September 2009; advertisements were posted on six online forums, and flyers were distributed through preschools and learning in October 2009. Interested parents were asked to email me directly, whereupon a welcome email that contained more information on the study was sent to them.

Among the different organizations that assisted in recruitment, two preschools offered to hand out paper surveys to the parents at their schools. The principals suggested that I prepare hard copies of the Chinese survey, since some of the parents might not be familiar with computers and their command of English might be limited. Arrangements were made accordingly, and packages were sent to the schools; parents received a flyer, a Study Background Information Sheet, a survey, and an envelope. Parents were instructed to submit the completed surveys to the principal in sealed envelopes.

3.5 Participants

3.5.1 Online survey. Participants were asked to indicate their language preference (English or Chinese) upon receiving the welcome email (see Appendix D). One participant’s data were excluded from the analysis because the child was not enrolled in a preschool at the time of study. Although the child attended a playgroup regularly, due to differences in the nature and format of playgroups, the parent’s response was considered unsuitable to be included in the analysis. In the end, 33 participants completed the online survey.

3.5.2 Paper survey. Forty-one parents were recruited from two local kindergartens in Hong Kong and they all completed the Chinese survey. The two schools were located in different districts (one in Kowloon Peninsula and the other on Hong Kong Island); one of them
was a kindergarten operated by a non-profit organization, and the other a for-profit kindergarten-cum-nursery.

3.5.3 Follow-up interviews. Ten participants were chosen from the 74 participants based on their monthly household income and education level. The original distribution was to have three, four, and three participants from the low (HK$5000-20,000), medium (HK$20,000-35,000), and high (HK$50,000 and up) income groups respectively. Within each group, participants with varying education backgrounds were chosen in order to capture the voice of a wider range of parents. Among the 10 interviewees was the parent whose child attended a playgroup instead of a preschool, and therefore her data were excluded from the final analysis.

3.5.4 Demographics. Among the 74 survey respondents, 11 were fathers, 61 were mothers, 1 was a grandparent, and 1 did not indicate his or her relationship with the child. It was decided that the grandparent was eligible for the study because even though he was not the child’s biological parent, his involvement in the child’s education and life was equivalent to that of a father figure. For the purpose of data analysis, this participant was put in the father category. As for the participant who did not specify his or her relationship with the child, the data was excluded from analyses where mothers and fathers’ data were looked at separately.

The majority of respondents were between the ages of 35 and 40 (48.6%); 25.7% were between 30 to 35 years old, and equal numbers of participants were between 20 to 25 and 40 to 45 years old (10.8% respectively). Among the 68 participants who provided information on their nationalities, 45 reported being permanent Hong Kong residents, 4 held Chinese residencies as well, and 7 held a foreign passport in addition to their Hong Kong citizenship. The remaining 12 participants were equally divided between holding foreign or Chinese nationality only. Most respondents had lived in Hong Kong all their lives (45.9%), 29.7% had lived in Hong Kong for over 10 years, and the rest had stayed in Hong Kong for at least a year. Information on participants’ monthly household income is provided in Table 2, and other demographic information such as the average amount of time parents spend with their child can be found in Table 3.

3.5.5 Fathers’ education and overseas experience. Whether the respondent was the mother or father, the survey collected information on both parents’ educational background. The highest level of education attained by the parents is represented in Table 4. Thirty-nine fathers had lived abroad at some point and 31 of them had studied abroad: eight received their Bachelor’s degree, one pursued a master’s degree, and one went to professional school. Please refer to Table 5 for the types of education received abroad by the fathers. Seventeen fathers had
lived in mainland China, one in Africa, one in South East Asia, and one in New Zealand. The remaining 17 fathers had lived in North America, the United Kingdom, Europe, or a combination of the above. Lastly, 2 fathers had lived abroad for two to five years, and 26 of them had spent over five years living abroad.

3.5.6 Mothers’ education and overseas experience. Meanwhile, 39 mothers had previously lived elsewhere and 38 had studied abroad: 20 went to high school, 10 received their Bachelor’s degree, and 5 pursued a master’s degree. Table 5 shows the types of education received abroad by the mothers. Nineteen mothers had lived in mainland China, one in South East Asia, and one in Australia. Seventeen mothers had lived in North America or the United Kingdom; some had lived in multiple cities across continents. Finally, two mothers had lived abroad for two to five years, and 28 of them had been abroad for over five years.

3.6 Overview of the Data Collection Approach

3.6.1 Online and paper survey. The content in the online and paper surveys were the same, with only slight variations in the graphics (unlike the colorful online version, the paper survey was black-and-white). The first part of the survey collected basic demographic information (see Appendix E), and the survey itself was divided into six sections. It took around 20 min to fill out the entire survey. The survey was translated into traditional Chinese by a friend who holds a translation degree from the Hong Kong Baptist University. Parents were asked to indicate in their email whether they wanted to complete the English or Chinese survey.

The online survey was launched through a secure website, and participants received an email invitation with a link to the survey. Because the recruitment process took longer than expected and had to continue even after data collection began, the deadline for different participants depended on when they signed up for the study. There were three main start dates that stretched across mid-October to mid-November, and all participants had about one week to submit the survey. An email reminder was sent out 3 days before the given deadline, and parents received a colorful “resources for parents” brochure shortly after they submitted their online surveys. Five parents who did the paper surveys won gift vouchers in the lucky draw (valued at HK$100 each) and received their prizes in January 2010.

3.6.2 Interviews. Throughout November, interviews were set up with 10 participants that took place in public venues, such as libraries, kindergartens, and cafes. The interviewees were chosen from the pool of participants who indicated that they would like to be contacted
for the interviews. Due to time constraints, recruitment of interviewees began mid-way through
the collection of surveys. To ensure that participants who submitted their surveys at a later
stage could also have a chance to take part in the interviews, participants were enlisted
proportionally according to the number of incoming surveys. For instance, it was projected that
there would be about 25 respondents (one-third of target sample size) in the medium income
group. So when 13 parents belonging to this group had submitted the survey, two of them were
chosen for the follow-up interview. The remaining two spots were filled after another 12
parents in the medium-income category were found.

Each interview lasted for about 35-40 min and all of them were conducted in Cantonese.
After the parents arrived, I briefly explained the procedures involved and asked the parents to
read through and sign the consent form (Appendix F). The interviews covered six topics; the
first two topics were extensions from the survey, two topics were unique to the interviews and
were not covered in the survey, and another two topics focused specifically on Reggio
practices (see Appendix B). For the first two topics, parents saw the questions as it appeared in
their survey and were reminded of the choices they made before I posed the interview
questions to them. Then they were asked to answer the interview questions based on their
survey responses. For the topics that aimed to understand parents’ thoughts on Reggio’s artistic
activities and projects, parents looked at colorful images and captions that were extracted from
the literature. In particular, the puddle project (Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1998) was
translated and used to illustrate a typical project in a Reggio setting. The visual aids were put in
a clear folder on separate pages, such that interviewees only saw text or images that were
relevant to the corresponding question at a given moment. The sessions were digitally recorded
and no notes were taken during the interviews; any noteworthy remarks were written only at
the end to minimize distraction during the interview. At the end, parents were thanked for their
time and given HK$100 as a token of gratitude.
Table 1

Topics in the Survey and Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Image of the Child and Learner</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Expectations of Children’s Education and Development</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Ideal Child Characteristics</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Appreciation for Art and Beauty in Education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Conception of the Role of ECE</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Attitude Toward Parent Participation in Preschools</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Parents’ Current Experience and Views on Learning Outcomes</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Parents’ Reactions toward a Reggio Project</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4

Results

The survey and interview data were analyzed separately, using statistical procedures and qualitative methods respectively. The results are first presented independently and then connections are drawn at the end of this chapter. Given the moderate sample size, participants who completed the online survey and the paper survey were grouped together in the quantitative analysis. For items with missing data (i.e., $N < 74$), the number of respondents is made clear when reporting the results.

4.1 Quantitative Results

4.1.1 Image of the child and learner. Parents’ mean ratings for the 14 image of the child statements are provided in Table 6. The higher the rating, the more strongly the participants agreed with each statement. In this part of the survey, statements that are compatible (Compatible statements) and incompatible (Incompatible statements) with the Reggio image were interspersed. However, for the purpose of discussion, the Compatible and Incompatible statements are grouped separately in the table, with the highest rated item at the top of each section.

Overall, the ratings for the Compatible statements were higher than the Incompatible statements. The frequencies at the two extreme ends of the scale are also provided in Table 6. It is interesting to look at the extreme ratings because according to the error of central tendency seen in social research, respondents tend to shy away from giving extreme ratings (Thyer, 2009). So when respondents choose an extreme rating, it may suggest a strongly held belief or value. Here, a large number of parents strongly agreed with the Compatible statements; up to 49 parents rated 5 (strongly agree) for “Young children's thoughts and feelings deserve to be listened to and respected.” There were parents who strongly disagreed with some of these statements as well, but the numbers were low; at most 6 parents rated 1 (strongly disagree) for “Young children can construct knowledge on their own when given the proper support and guidance.” In contrast, there were far fewer respondents who strongly agreed with the Incompatible statements: at most 27 parents rated 5 for “Young children always need adults to teach them the right way to do things.” Moreover, there were more participants who strongly disagreed with the Incompatible statements, with the frequencies going up to 17 and 30 parents for the last two items.
Similarly, the results for the image of learners are presented in decreasing order of mean ratings, with the two types of statements divided (see Table 7). The mean ratings for the Compatible and Incompatible statements ranged from 4.26 to 4.45 and 3.12 to 3.65 respectively. Furthermore, no participant strongly disagreed with any of the Compatible statements. Another point worth highlighting is that the number of participants who chose rating 3 (neither agree nor disagree) for the Incompatible statements was much higher than that for the compatible statements. Two of the Incompatible items had close to 30% of respondents choosing this option, namely “It is necessary for children to commit the learning material to memory” (29.7%), and “It is necessary for children to concentrate and work on their own in class” (28.4%). These figures can be compared to the numbers for the Compatible category as shown in Table 7.

The Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test was used to test for the difference between participants’ ratings on the Compatible items and Incompatible items, and the results are presented in Table 8. After making the Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, all the z values were greater than the critical value ($p < 0.006$), meaning that all of the Compatible images of learners had a significantly higher mean rating than any of the Incompatible images.

4.1.2 Expectations of child’s education and development. Table 9 shows the number of parents ranking each skill in the six ranks. For easier comparison, the frequencies in Rank 1 to 3 for each skill were summed to produce frequencies for the “Top 3” ranks, and the frequencies in Rank 6 to 8 were summed to produce frequencies for the “Bottom 3” ranks. Language and social skills with peers stood out among others in two interesting ways: (a) there were far more parents putting them in Top 3 ($n = 48$ and $n = 44$ respectively) than other categories such as pre-academic skills ($n = 27$); and (b) the difference in the number of respondents putting them among the Top 3 versus the Bottom 3 was more prominent than any other skill. The reverse trend was observed for social skills with adults, self-sufficiency skills, and self-assessment skills. They were most frequently placed in the Bottom 3 ranks, and at the same time, least chosen to be among the Top 3 ranks. While there were 17 parents who put pre-academic skills in Rank 1, 16 respondents ranked it in Rank 8, and the difference between the Top 3 ($n = 27$) and Bottom 3 ($n = 20$) frequency was moderate. There was a tie between the number of parents putting motor skills among the Top 3 and Bottom 3 positions. Finally, for self-expression skills, 23 parents ranked it among the Top 3 and 29 parents ranked in among the Bottom 3.
4.1.3 Ideal child characteristics. Table 10 shows the percentage of parents who ranked each certain skill among the top five skills \((N = 74)\) and the number of respondents who placed that skill in the highest position. The items are arranged in descending order of priority based on the percentages. “I want my child to be happy and feel secure” was most frequently chosen to be in the top five positions \((77.03\%)\), followed by “I want my child to be able to solve problems independently” \((70.27\%)\) and “I want my child to be curious, to explore and question things” \((60.81\%)\). In contrast, only \(14.86\%\) and \(12.16\%\) of respondents put “I want my child to be competitive among his or her peers” and “I want my child’s academic standing to be in the top 5% in school” as their top five choices respectively. The six most popular items chosen by more than \(50\%\) of the respondents were all compatible with Reggio ideals. As discussed later, the ideal characteristics that were most embraced by parents converged with the findings from the qualitative data. However, Compatible characteristics such as “I want my child to be creative” and “I want my child to understand the reasons behind events and actions” were infrequently prioritized by parents. The three Incompatible items about academic standing, competitiveness, and accomplishments were among the least commonly chosen qualities. At the same time, an Incompatible item “I want my child to agree with others so that he or she can be accepted into the peer group” was chosen by \(52.7\%\) of parents to be in the top five positions.

4.1.4 Appreciation for art and beauty in education. Overall, parents assigned relatively high importance to artistic and aesthetic experiences in a good ECE program. On a 5-point Likert scale, 30 respondents felt that it was “very important” for the school to encourage children to express themselves through different art forms \((M = 4.34, SD = .61)\). Parents’ ratings for having a pleasing physical environment that nurtures children’s sensitivity and appreciation for beauty was also high: 34 believed this was “very important” while 29 rated this quality as “quite important” \((M = 4.29, SD = .81)\). The mean rating for having a rich environment for children to explore with different art media was 4.18 \((SD = .71)\), and the mean rating for allowing children to learn and experiment with various material was 4.05 \((SD = .70)\). Finally, 25 participants indicated that it was “very important” to use different methods of evaluation to reflect children’s learning rather than assigning a final grade at the end of a school year \((M = 3.99, SD = .92)\).

4.1.5 Attitude toward parent participation in schools. A number of participants considered their communication with their child’s school as close \((n = 24)\), while others had average communication \((n = 44)\) or not much communication at all \((n = 5)\). Parents usually communicated with the schools through more than one avenue, and among the eight methods
outlined in the survey, the two most common channels of communication were newsletters or notices ($n = 44$) and daily conversations with the teacher or principal during drop-off or pick-up times ($n = 45$). Quite a number of parents had phone calls with school staff as a main way of communication ($n = 29$), and some relied on parent teacher meetings ($n = 16$). The frequencies for the other forms of communication are shown in Table 11.

Most parents ($n = 46$) felt that the opportunities provided by the schools for parents to be involved in the school were “somewhat” sufficient, while 19 felt that there were plenty of opportunities, and 6 said that there were none at all. As to how the parents had been involved, most of them had attended school trips or other school activities in the past ($n = 52$). Many had meetings with teachers regarding their child’s performance at school ($n = 31$), and some helped out in school events ($n = 8$) or attended school meetings regarding administrative matters ($n = 8$; please refer to Table 11 for other frequencies). The majority of parents felt that parents’ voices were “somewhat” or “very much” heard and respected by the school ($n = 38$ and $n = 32$ respectively), while 2 parents did not think so at all. Parents also indicated their preference for ECE programs that varied in their degree of parent involvement: 23 respondents preferred a program with high involvement; 47 wanted programs with a medium-level of parent participation; and only 1 wished for a program that rarely invites parents to participate in school affairs. Lastly, when asked if they would be willing to participate more in their child’s school, 12 parents said “yes” and 32 said “no”.

4.1.6 Parents’ current experience and views on learning outcomes. In this section, parents were first asked to indicate how important each learning outcome was to them (the Importance scale), and then they were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with their child’s attainment on each aspect (the Satisfaction scale). The mean ratings for the two scales are presented in Table 12 and Table 13 respectively. Interestingly, the lowest rating on the 5-point Importance scale was given to pre-academic skills ($M = 3.93$), while the highest rating went to developing self-confidence ($M = 4.72$). The mean ratings for the Reggio-compatible learning outcomes were fairly high, ranging from 4.23 (for “handling conflicts and independent problem-solving”) to 4.69 (for “being happy and enjoying the overall learning experience”). Upon further analysis, the number of parents who rated pre-academic skills as “very important” ($n = 20$) was much lower than almost all other skills, such as “getting along with other children” ($n = 45$), “being able to express their thoughts and feelings” ($n = 50$), “being happy and enjoying the learning experience” ($n = 53$), and “having self-confidence” ($n = 57$). Table 12 also contains the $z$ values of the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test; except for “learn how
to handle conflicts and solve problems independently”, all the other Compatible items were rated significantly higher than that of pre-academic skills after the Bonferroni correction ($p < 0.005$).

Overall parents were fairly satisfied with what their child was getting out of his or her school. The highest satisfaction rating went to “being happy and enjoying the learning experience” ($M = 4.26$), while the lowest rating went to “handling conflicts and solving problems independently” ($M = 3.46$). The ratings for the other skills are presented in Table 13 and ranged from 3.58 (developing their own ideas) to 4.03 (being able to play with and learn from other children). The difference between the Importance and Satisfaction ratings are shown in Figure 1; except for pre-academic skills, there is a gap between the two ratings.

4.1.7 The influence of education, income, and previous location of residence. Using the Kruskal-Wallis test, significant differences were found between the three education levels (Education; low, medium, high), the three income levels (Income; low, medium, high), and the three locations of previous residence (Location; Hong Kong, China, North America/Europe) in the mean ratings for items shown in Table 14. Please note that only the education background of the respondent was used in the analysis, since the survey was completed by the respondent and not the spouse. In addition, the “other” category for Location was excluded from the analysis because the $n$ was too small. Using Kendall’s tau $b$ for ordinal data, a significant positive correlation was found between Income and Education ($\tau = .618$, $p < .01$). To enhance readability, parents who had only lived in Hong Kong are referred to as HK-parents, parents who had lived in China before are referred to as China-parents, and parents who had resided in North America or Europe are referred to as NA/Europe-parents.

The influence of Education was evident in the greatest number of items (see Figure 2), followed by Income and Location. The Kruskal-Wallis test showed that for the Incompatible item “Young children should be protected from failures and disappointments”, the more education the parents received, the less they agreed with the statement (downward sloping line). The reverse trend was true for all the other Compatible images of the child, meaning that the higher the level of education attained, the more parents agreed with the statements (generally upward sloping lines). Similarly, for the three items under appreciation for art and beauty in education where significant differences were found, the higher the level of education received, the more important parents believed these items were to a good ECE program. Interestingly, for the Importance scale on learning outcomes, there was a U-shaped association between Education and the Kruskal-Wallis mean ratings. That is, parents with low-Education and high-
Education rated Compatible items more highly (i.e., attributed greater importance) than the parents who had a medium-Education.

The trends for income level were all linear, with positive associations for the Compatible items, and a negative association for the Incompatible item (see Figure 3). For items under image of the child, appreciation for art and beauty in education, and the Importance scale for learning outcomes, the higher the household income level, the higher were the mean ratings. The reverse trend was observed for “It is necessary for them to be quiet and obey everything the teacher says”; the higher the income level, the less parents agreed with this Incompatible image. In contrast, all the trends for Location were U-shaped for the Compatible items and inverted U-shaped for the Incompatible item (see Figure 4). This means that HK-parents and NA/Europe-parents gave higher ratings to the Compatible items than China-parents. The opposite was true for “It is necessary for them to be quiet and obey everything the teacher says”, with China-parents agreeing with this the most.

Referring back to the results for expectations of child’s education and development, there were almost equal number of parents putting pre-academic skills in Rank 1 \((n = 17)\) and Rank 8 \((n = 16)\). Since the literature often speaks to Hong Kong parents’ high expectations on children’s pre-academic skills, the demographic breakdown for this item was specifically looked at to see if some perspectives could be gained. Please note that due to small cell sizes, comparison of means could not be performed. But the consistent trends suggest that correlations are probable, which can be investigated further in the future.

Two comparisons were made: (a) **across** each level of the demographic factor, and (b) **within** each level of the demographic factor (see Table 15). The number of parents putting pre-academic skills in Rank 1 was the lowest at the highest level of each factor. Meanwhile, for Rank 8, a U-shaped association was found for Education and Location but not Income. Low-Education and high-Education parents, as well as HK-parents and NA/Europe-parents were more likely to put pre-academic skills in Rank 8 than medium-Education parents and China-parents.

Lastly, within the low and medium education level, there were more parents putting pre-academic skills in Rank 1 than in Rank 8, but the pattern was reversed at the highest level. In other words, low-Education and medium-Education parents were more likely to view pre-academic skills as more important, but high-Education parents tend to see it as least important among other developmental skill categories. The same pattern could be seen for the other two demographic factors as well.
4.2 Qualitative Results

4.2.1 Bracketing the researcher’s previous experiences and assumptions. After returning back to Hong Kong from Canada when I was 9 years old, I studied in local primary and secondary schools until I pursued my undergraduate studies in Toronto. Having been an “insider” of the two education systems, I see the strengths as well as the shortfalls in the Hong Kong education system. In particular, I think schools have only been educating minds without educating hearts; there has been plenty of intellectual or academic development but minimal character development. This resulted in students who are smart and capable but lack social and emotional skills to build healthy relationships and make responsible decisions. In reaction to cases of student suicide on the news and observations of aggressive and destructive behaviours in teenagers, I feel that changes in the education system and the society as a whole is urgently needed to restore balance before it is too late.

Reggio as a way of approaching relationships and learning instils inquisitiveness in children while helping them acquire other skills that are essential in life (e.g., how to handle conflicts, how to articulate thoughts and feelings, how to work with and learn from others who have different beliefs). I would like to know if Reggio could be a platform for change in Hong Kong. This is why I decided to conduct my thesis on this topic: to help me better understand what kinds of values are held by Hong Kong parents and how they envision their children’s future. By knowing parents’ fundamental beliefs as well as their specific thoughts on Reggio as early learning framework, I hoped to examine what types of educational practice would or would not be suitable and beneficial for Hong Kong.

4.2.2 Thematic analysis. I used thematic analysis as the qualitative method to organize the interview data and I coded the transcripts according to the guidelines proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The coding approach was inductive in the early stages, where I went through each transcript and highlighted points of interest without linking them to the core research questions. The inductive orientation was adopted because, in this exploratory study, I wanted to remain open to unexpected insights that might be gained. I evaluated the prevalence of the points by looking at both the frequency of occurrence and uniqueness of perspective within and across the interview questions, and determined which points to convert into codes. After going through the entire data set and collating relevant codes, categories were derived using an inductive approach as well. Categories were created as long as there were sufficient codes that could be grouped together (each category had at least 2 codes). Whether the codes could directly address the research questions was not a consideration at this point. However, at
the next stage of theme formation, the method became more deductive. In deciding which codes to retain and how to group them together, I went back to the eight core research topics and discarded those codes that did not fit into the overall picture. Interestingly, most of the categories were preserved and corresponded well with the pre-defined research questions, and only 3 out of 24 categories were eliminated in the end. It should be made clear that themes were derived at a semantic level, meaning that “the themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data…” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Although what parents said might not represent their true thoughts and feelings accurately, I have chosen to treat their words as facts to be studied. This is because it would be difficult to find out whether parents were under the impression to say certain things or if they were in-tune with their emotions and ideas. Therefore, while acknowledging these possibilities, I did not attempt to read beyond the surface meaning of the data to avoid adding personal meaning to them inadvertently. I adopted a critical realist theoretical framework, meaning that I believe it is possible to acquire knowledge about parents’ thinking, but at the same time I believe that our perception is a function of our mind. However, through critical reflection, triangulation with the quantitative data, and a broadened understanding of the Hong Kong context, I believe that valuable observations and meaning can be made.

There were six sections in the interview, some of which covered areas that were not included in the survey (namely the role of kindergarten education and reactions toward a Reggio project). In the following analysis, the findings are first reported by section and then re-organized under the identified themes. The rationale for this is because not all the data gathered in the interviews fit under a theme, and yet they carry important messages. At the same time, linking the results to themes gives rise to a more integrated and holistic picture of the findings. Therefore, although some points are mentioned more than once, the meaning is slightly different when looking at them from different angles.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, a deductive approach was taken to identify themes from the rich interview data. As will be seen, the seven themes are not central ideas in and of themselves (e.g., Theme 1 is “About kindergarten education”). This is slightly different from the usual nature of themes, where each theme “represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Here, the themes were formed by clustering related categories, and it is within the categories that patterned response could be found. Therefore, looking at the title of the themes would only give readers a general sense of what types of ideas were raised. In order to know the specific
content, one has to look at the categories. A detailed list of the themes, categories, and codes is provided in Table 16. The number preceding the codes indicates the section in which the codes were found (“S2” refers to Section 2).

4.2.3 Section 1: Expectations of child development. In this section, parents were asked if they felt their child’s school had been supporting the two developmental skills that they rated as most important for 3- to 5-year old children, and to explain how the school met those needs. Among the nine parents, language skill was the most commonly chosen category (six out of nine parents chose this among their top two ranks), followed by motor and self-assessment skills ($n = 3$ respectively). Overall, parents felt that their child’s developmental needs were being met at school, although only a few parents could cite concrete examples as to how this was achieved. A few of the examples provided were: establishing hygienic habits and getting children to put on their own shoes as a way to develop self-sufficiency skills, and having group activities to foster social skills with peers. One of the three parents who spoke about motor skills felt that there was minimal support for this area “because in Hong Kong there is a lack of space for them [children] to play in. They do have recess time and they have something called ‘sports class’, so they do offer some activities for them to do, but it is not a lot.”

Regarding language development, parents talked about various classroom activities such as singing, story-telling, and show-and-tell, and a few parents said that their child’s school really encouraged children to speak up. Many parents cited having native speakers to teach Mandarin and English classes as another example of how schools supported students’ language development. It should be noted that language skills were initially defined as “child learns to express his or her thoughts and feelings verbally in a clear and appropriate manner.” However, parents might have understood “language skills” as the ability to master different languages, since they often made references to their child’s competence in English or Mandarin. From this vantage point, most parents were pleased with the schools’ bilingual or trilingual environment, especially when there were native teachers. Three out of nine parents mentioned that having a foreign teacher was one of the two things they appreciated the most about their child’s school. Two parents pointed out that zero-to-six is a critical time for language learning, and therefore they put a lot of emphasis on providing a good bilingual environment for their child.

4.2.4 Section 2: Ideal child characteristics. Here, parents were asked to describe the kind of learning environment that would help children nurture the ideal qualities that they valued the most. Parents reviewed the top two choices that they made in the survey and were asked to talk about them separately. Out of nine interviewees, six chose “I want my child to be
happy and feel secure”; four chose “I want my child to be curious, to explore and question things”; and four chose “I want my child to feel respected, valued, and appreciated” as one of their top two choices.

Most parents talked about the importance of having loving, caring, patient, and trustworthy teachers in order to create a happy and secure learning environment for children. One parent said that having caring teachers helped her child feel happy and secure: “The teachers need to be caring; if the children are scared of the teachers, then this [feeling happy and secure] would be difficult. The teachers are very important; in my child’s school, the teachers smile from their hearts! They are so gentle when they speak that it gives me goose-bumps!” Another parent also felt that teachers played a crucial part in creating a happy learning environment for her child. “Going to school is very happy for her; she has never said that she does not want to go to school….She always mentions the teachers’ names, so I believe it is only when she feels happy that she would always talk about these things.”

In terms of cultivating curiosity, parents often mentioned the significance of having fun and engaging activities to arouse children’s interests: “The teachers should give them some activities that would give them a sense of novelty, this way they would think it is fun and thus be engaged fully.” Furthermore, a number of parents pointed out the importance of letting children explore and seek answers on their own, all of which require support from sensitive teachers. “Of course the teachers need to be able to provide an environment for them [children] that is not about spoon-feeding. Rather, children need to trouble-shoot on their own and have opportunities to do that.” In order for children to feel respected and valued, one parent said that the learning environment “has to be very positive…. For instance, when they are doing their homework, they shouldn’t always tell them to erase it. If they made a mistake, simply ask them to write it again…. His school only does assessments [instead of giving grades on exams], so the children won’t be under as much pressure.” Other parents talked about praising and rewarding children when they do well, and letting children have opportunities to share about themselves at school.

4.2.5 Section 3: Appreciation for art in education. Many interviewees felt that artistic activities could benefit children’s personal development. For instance, one parent said, “I think drawing will make her more placid or calm, maybe she will be able to sit still more.” A few parents said that there were indirect benefits to academic learning as well because artistic activities could stimulate thinking and train children’s motor skills. “I think it helps with their math skills because if their brains are more nimble or active, then they can do math faster…. I
believe it should certainly help their writing skills, because they need to hold [the tools]...because if they need to draw on such a big area, they need a lot of movement.” When asked if they would like their child to spend more time engaging in artistic activities within regular school hours, all but one parent said yes, each citing different reasons and concerns. The concerns mainly surrounded the age-appropriateness of the activities and the amount of time devoted to these activities. As one parent explained, “I think these activities should start in primary school. Because the children are too young...sometimes when they are done drawing they may not even be able to clean up after themselves, and then they start touching things everywhere, which isn’t too good. So it is better to start with simpler things.” Lastly, concerning the amount of time that could be devoted to artistic activities: “If you want to let them do this, you should let them be engaged fully; you cannot have restrictions—let them play for a while and then you tell them to tidy up—it cannot be like that... In contrast, if they can hire an expert, let’s say, to do an activity like this once in a while, I think it’s quite fun! But if it is treated as part of the regular curriculum, with one of these artistic classes that lasts for half an hour to an hour, then I would rather them not do it at all.”

4.2.6 Section 4: The role of ECE. In this section, parents were asked what they wanted the most for their child to get out of kindergarten, and whether they thought pre-primary education plays a unique role in children’s development compared to primary and secondary education. The results in this section are discussed at greater length under Theme 1, but in essence, parents mostly wanted their child to have some social life outside of home and to learn to get along with others. As a first step into the education system, parents highlighted the unique role of pre-primary education in introducing children to what school is about and in developing children’s learning interest. Kindergarten education was also seen as critical in developing children’s language skills, and a small number of parents hoped that the current kindergarten would give their child a better chance at getting into a good primary school in the future.

4.2.7 Section 5: Parents’ current experience. Parents were asked a number of questions in this section: whether their child’s current school was their first choice, what factors they considered when they were looking for a kindergarten, what were two of the things they appreciated most about the school, and lastly the two areas that they thought could be improved. Four parents said that the current school was not their first choice; three said that it was; and two said that it could be regarded as one of their first choices. Among the parents who said that the school was not their first choice, two actually wanted a school that could be nearer
to home; one wished to have a more affordable school; and another originally wanted a program that was easier or more relaxed. Having said that, these parents were content with the final decision because their child appeared to be happy and getting on well in the current school. One of the parents who was initially hesitant to switch her child from a traditional school to the current school said that “the difference between the current school and the one before is I think my son is happier now.” Also, the parents indicated that the current school offered things that other schools might not be able to provide. Therefore, after some initial struggles and hard decisions, they were satisfied with the outcome. Some of the factors that parents paid attention to when selecting a kindergarten for their child included: location, school reputation, curriculum (whether it was balanced), teaching approach (whether activity-approach is used), religious affiliations, and prospects of getting into good primary schools.

Many parents mentioned the language environment as one of the things they liked the most about their child’s kindergarten; in particular, they were pleased that there were native speakers teaching Mandarin and English lessons. The attitude of the teachers and other staff was also something the parents appreciated; one parent talked about how dedicated and down-to-earth her child’s principal was. “The principal, if she sees a piece of garbage on the floor, she will personally sweep it up! That’s how they are like; I have never seen this before!” A number of parents talked about the physical aspects of the campus, and there were compliments as well as complaints about school facilities. Some were happy with a spacious campus that was bright, safe, and had separate spaces for different activities, while others wished there could be more outdoor space.

4.2.8 Section 6: Reactions toward a Reggio project. A fuller analysis is provided under Theme 3, but to highlight a few of the key points, a lot of parents were impressed by the in-depth investigation that the children carried out on such an ordinary topic. They believed that children sharpened their observation skills and learned to think from different angles: “When they [children] place something closer or farther, they could see that something is different. So by paying attention to these things and by using their thinking skills, they can draw out and express what they saw. So even with something very simple like a puddle, they can discover so many things on their own.” When asked if the activity facilitated specific areas of academic learning, seven out of nine parents said that children learned science knowledge, whereas four parents felt that children learned art skills and general knowledge as well. Most parents did not think that the activity had much relevance to language development unless there was a teacher illustrating the events on the side or leading a group discussion afterward. As one of the parents
explained: “Because the vocabulary that children use is limited.... If you want to enrich their language, the first requirement is that they cannot be on their own. You need someone to be by their side to describe repeatedly what they are doing to them.... If the teacher is able to do something like this in the process, then it [the activity] would tap into language skills.”

Parents’ reactions to the activity were very positive, with many commenting on how “fun” the “concrete” or “practical activity” was, and “I like that they get to step in the puddles outside.” A lot of parents said that there was nothing that they did not like about the approach: “I don’t think there is any [concerns], it is a very ideal way of learning.” Having said that, a few parents did raise concerns regarding how safe it was for young children to do hand-stands on mirrors, but even the parent who thought that the activity had potential danger was supportive of trying this out in Hong Kong. When I asked her to explain what it was that she liked about the approach, her response was: “It is not so rigid, you don’t have to sit in the classroom all day. They [the teachers] can let them [the children] realize things on their own....They [the children] can use their intuition and feelings to learn about things; they don’t need the teachers to tell them or teach them. They can learn ‘this is how it works’ and experience things on their own.”

After reflecting on the activity, parents were asked if they would send their child to a school in Hong Kong that adopted an approach to learning similar to what they saw in the excerpt. To be more specific, the school was described as giving plenty of time and space for children to explore on their own as well as with others, and the teachers would be there to provide guidance and support. It was emphasized that the teachers would not instruct or teach the children directly following a set curriculum, and that learning opportunities would be based on children’s emerging interests. While all parents liked the idea of this approach, only two parents said “yes” without any hesitation. Four parents said “it depends,” and their concerns mainly surrounded academic needs and how this would impact the child’s future transition to primary school. Parents also questioned the feasibility of running this kind of program in Hong Kong: “Hong Kong is limited by space and there isn’t a lot of nature, but if there is [such a program], I would let him try.” Teacher qualification and training was also of concern to some parents. “Another thing is I am still doubtful of the teacher’s qualifications in Hong Kong. I think the teacher must know, other than Psychology...she needs to know enough about Physics in order to be able to explain this [the reflections] to the children.... And after all, Hong Kong parents pay for these schools.... In order to please the parents because they are the clients, the schools may have a very tight curriculum. So it is definitely not easy to do this.”
When responding to this question, one parent talked about her two children’s different temperaments and how this would affect her decision. She said that she would send her son to such a school “because my son has a lot of questions…he asks about everything, and he likes drawing, so I think I will let him go for it.” However, she felt that her “strong-willed” daughter would not be suitable for this approach. Instead, she would need a program that had more structure and was “stricter.” Similarly, when asked if their decision would change if their child was of the opposite gender, a number of parents said “no” because the child’s personality would matter more than gender. “I actually think it depends on individuals, not on gender.” “I think my daughter is actually rather boyish! My son is rather shy; he is not as cheerful and sociable as my daughter. So if there is an opportunity, I will try my best to let them try [regardless of gender].” While parents believed that boys and girls have different learning needs, all except for one felt that the approach was suitable for both genders. One parent said that “their [developmental] pace is different…especially when they are that young…. I think this learning style, for this age group, girls might do better. But boys need this even more.” As for the parent who was unsure if her decision would change: “If it’s a girl, you would want to protect her more. You let boys go out there, fall a few times…I am not sure I would say that my decision would be the same [if it were a girl]. I have some reservations.”

Seven themes were identified, including (a) thoughts on kindergarten education, (b) perceptions of children’s nature and what learning should be like, (c) thoughts on Reggio and its application in Hong Kong, (d) parents’ impression of education in Hong Kong, (e) transition into primary school, (f) the relationship between parents, children, and schools, and (g) attentiveness to children’s temperament and traits.

4.2.9 Theme 1: Thoughts on kindergarten education. Most parents believed that learning in kindergarten should be play- or activity-based, and some even spoke about the activity approach. For instance, when a parent was asked if she would send her child to a program that used projects as its main teaching model, her response was: “Yes I will, that’s essentially activity approach right? Activity approach means using ordinary things in daily life or things around you to teach children. It doesn’t emphasize on homework or writing.” In another question, when discussing the role of ECE, a parent said that “ECE should be about playing.” It should be noted, however, that one parent specifically pointed out that she did not prefer a program that predominantly implements the activity approach. “To a certain extent, my husband and I don’t want it [the school] to adopt the activity approach…. I know the traditional methods or spoon-feeding has its problems but it doesn’t mean that a person will
lose curiosity or the ability to solve problems. So I think there can be a balance between the two [traditional and activity approach], it doesn’t have to be mutually exclusive….”

Regarding what parents ultimately want their children to get out of kindergarten, the most commonly mentioned aspect was social development. As one parent put it: “Maybe because he’s an only child now, I hope he can have some social life, learn through play, [learn] how to share with others, and how to care about others….” One of the interviewed parents talked about how school activities promoted sociability: “They once had a fashion show and had to make their own clothes, and afterwards they let others try them on. That way they can get along better as a group; the children become more gregarious. I think this is pretty good.” Another parent explained why her child took the school bus: “I want her to be gregarious; I don’t know why since she was little, she would not play with others unless the other children were older than her…. This is also why I let her take the school bus, because I want her to be more sociable.”

An interesting category that came up under this theme was what parents thought could and could not be taught at home. Quoting from one of the parents: “Another reason that I think academics is not that important is because for my child, I have already taught him a lot of [academic] things. But I can’t teach him…um…there are limitations after all, things that are related to the social realm. There are limitations in self-care abilities because the domestic helper looks after him, so I cannot take care of that aspect.” Another parent talked about the importance of developing young children’s sense of self and confidence by going to school “so that he feels that he is fine and he can communicate with others…. These are not things I can teach him, I won’t be able to follow him to school.”

One of the core research questions concerns parents’ perception of the role of ECE. In the interview, parents were asked to compare the role of kindergarten to primary education in children’s learning and development. All interviewed parents believed that kindergarten was and should be different from primary school. While primary school was seen to be about formal learning and solidifying knowledge, parents saw kindergarten as a first step into formal schooling. Moreover, kindergartens should increase children’s learning interest and help children transition into primary school. “Kindergarten is pre-primary, so it’s an organization that prepares for entrance into primary school. It should help…adjustment, help them adapt to school life.” “I expect the school to expose the children to more things; this is the role of the kindergarten—to build up their interest in learning.” One parent talked about how traditional kindergartens ease transition by having an early focus on writing: “In that school [a traditional
school], you start writing and have dictations when you are very young; you do a lot of the things that primary schools do at an early age. So for those kindergartens, they play a bridging role that helps children have a more comfortable transition into local schools.”

4.2.10 Theme 2: Perceptions of children’s nature and what learning should be like. In the sections where parents looked at images and descriptions of Reggio-relevant activities, many commented on the importance of letting children experience things on their own. “I think when children are able to manipulate something with their own hands, what they gain out of it may not be visible to an adult, but they will...maybe they will get something, or they can make associations that will be beneficial for them in the future.” “I think if you let them see and play with the actual object, it must be more memorable than if you just let them read about it.” Many parents also brought up the idea of enhanced thinking, or more “brain use” when describing the value of art in children’s everyday learning. “She is using her brain...her brain is thinking in more diverse ways, won’t be so rigid. I don’t know how to explain...but she won’t just do things straight-forwardly, so maybe her brain is more developed when she has seen more things.”

Regarding parents’ images of children, many interviewees believed that children are naturally curious and can find simple ordinary things to be new and fascinating. “Because children are naturally very curious, they find a lot of things to be novel, and they don’t know a lot. So for a child, if he doesn’t know that much and you provide them with something sensitive to stimulate them, they will naturally explore their interests and they will experiment.” “So it’s something very simple— a puddle— and they can discover so many things on their own.” Another parent pointed out the uniqueness of children’s thinking which is different from how adults see things: “Sometimes they ask questions that I don’t know how to answer. Their thinking is very unusual.... So I think children have their own thoughts, and as adults we may not think of these things.”

4.2.11 Theme 3: Thoughts on Reggio and its application in Hong Kong. After reading the excerpts from the puddle project, parents were impressed by how this hands-on activity stimulated thinking and observation, and created a memorable learning experience for the children. “Yes [they learned something], they learned to observe...they learned to do things with others...I think this is very good, it’s a very ideal learning approach.” “I think what they can absorb and realize from a practical activity would be deeper, unlike reading which is not concrete, and this seems to be quite a lot of fun; they can look at the puddle, and they’ll...it’s better to have the actual object, it would be more memorable.” Almost all parents believed that
children learned science knowledge from this activity, and many thought that the experience was beneficial for children’s general knowledge and artistic nurturance. Similarly, parents’ thoughts on the artistic activities were also quite positive, with some commenting on how art can stimulate thinking and leave room for imagination. “There is more space to imagine; it’s not so much about right or wrong because these things do not have right or wrong. It’s about expression, let him think more.”

While almost all parents liked the Reggio activities— some even said that there was nothing that they did not like about the puddle project— many had concerns about implementing such an approach in regular Hong Kong preschools. Other than safety concerns and practical challenges such as not having enough time in half-day programs and the relatively large class sizes, parents were worried about how such an approach would support children in their transition to local primary schools. When asked if she would put her child in a school that adopted a flexible child-originated curriculum, one parent said that she would if they lived abroad but not if it were in Hong Kong. “When you get to Grade 1, you need to at least know a number of vocabularies, or you need to know basic additions and subtractions. If you want to study in Hong Kong’s primary schools, you must follow a certain mode…. So sometimes I don’t want to push her so hard, but if you study in Hong Kong, you don’t have a choice.” Another parent expressed a similar concern over the incoherent models of instruction between a Reggio program and the local primary schools. “Like I said, the prospects of getting into a good [primary] school are also important, so what schools should these children get into? In the future, the primary schools are going to lock you in [sit and have formal lessons], so what are you going to do? Are you going to choose an international school? Not everyone can afford that, so will my child feel very sad? If he is so happy all the time now, will he be very unhappy in the future? I am worried that he will feel very miserable [later on].” Indeed, a few parents said that if more concrete academic elements could be incorporated into the Reggio activities, then it would fulfill the best of both worlds. “My only concern is whether they will be able to catch up with the other children academically. That’s my only concern; otherwise I do buy this…. Yes, if they can infuse academic into it then it would be perfect!”

4.2.12 Theme 4. Parents’ impression of education in Hong Kong. First, parents felt that local primary schools (especially when compared to international schools) were harsh, emphasized rote learning and spoon-feeding, and had too much homework. “When it comes to education in primary school, I think it is very harsh. Because it is very rushed and tight, and there are too many exams.” “Those [international school] students are very happy, they are
happy while they are learning, but local traditional schools are not like that. They spoon-feed…last time I read this online—primary grade students have 10 assignments! They work till 11-12 midnight, so do you think the children would be happy? They may be able to learn something through this spoon-feeding, but can they absorb everything? So…I don’t know…it’s just sad and pathetic.” Second, although parents did not want to pressurize their children, they felt that they had no choice but to do what it takes to help their child get into an ideal primary school. “In Hong Kong, a lot of people think that kindergarten is like a stepping stone: the smarter you are the better primary school you can get into. So it is that step: if you get into a good kindergarten, you will get into a good primary school, and then you’ll get into a good secondary school. As a result, people apply to those prestigious schools even before the child was born, have you heard of that? It’s already like that in kindergarten, that’s very scary!” “I don’t want to force a lot of things on her right from the beginning. Hong Kong children are very pitiful, they start reading even when they’re 2 years old! When will this end? They have to keep studying for so many years thereafter…Hong Kong children have no childhood; they have to start tutoring at a young age, how miserable. But you have to go with the trend because you want her to get into a good school.” Lastly, parents felt that Reggio would work better in international schools and in other countries. In their view, other countries are more flexible, have fewer rules, and are freer. “Other countries are…they are more flexible, how do I put it…they won’t be so rigid, it seems freer. In the classroom you can do whatever you like, isn’t it? So you won’t be punished all the time…unlike Hong Kong.”

4.2.13 Theme 5: Transition into primary school. A recurrent theme was about children’s smooth transition to primary school. When looking for a kindergarten, a number of parents mentioned that it was important to find a program that would help their child get into a good primary school and adjust well to the next stage of their education. “This school [kindergarten] said that they don’t want the children to have problems adjusting to traditional [primary] school. I know a lot of [children]…they played for 3-4 years, they have been very happy, but once they get into primary school, then things get miserable…. Because we do want him to go into a traditional primary school, I think I need to help him be better prepared for that. I think this school has quite a lot of homework…they have a bit of everything…these are the things that I like [about this school].” One parent admitted that the school that her child is attending was not her first choice but she chose it in the end because she thought it would be better for her child’s later adjustment. “At that time, I wanted to choose some [programs] that were more relaxed, but I don’t want her transition into primary school to be so tough, so…it
took quite a while to decide, I struggled for over a year….” A number of parents felt that traditional kindergarten programs would make transition easier for their children even at the expense of some fallbacks. “In the previous traditional school, they don’t let children touch anything, even things in the classroom, and I think that school [operates] more like a primary school. The space there is more restricted; they don’t let you do anything that’s beyond their boundaries. But I know that if my child studied at that school, he would easily adjust to the subsidized primary schools in the future.” “[the child’s current school] is a more traditional school, the lessons are harder, and when they get to P.1 they don’t need to study that much because they already know the stuff.”

4.2.14 Theme 6: The relationship between parents, children, and schools. Parents’ involvement in children’s education was found to be fairly active and multi-levelled. Parents did parent-child bonding homework with their child, and a number of parents took on the responsibility of teaching their children academic skills at home. Informal ways of parent education were welcomed by a few parents, such as having workshops or seminars. Parents also appreciated it when teachers offered advice or made suggestions on how to deal with certain situations at home. Also, parents felt that both teachers and parents had a responsibility for children’s development: “They [the teachers] only offer the education, but as parents you need to observe and see what his interests are and then nurture him accordingly.” Another point worth highlighting is that six out of the nine interviewed parents wished for more communication with the school. “If there can be a bit more communication then that would be better. Often times you just depend on the circular. I don’t know how it is with other schools, but I don’t really know what the school wants to do, because there are only the circulars.” Another parent shared a similar feeling: “I think if the communication can be improved then it is ok [satisfactory]. Because now I don’t think it is enough, sometimes I don’t really know how my child is developing…. I hope there could be more teacher-parent meetings or other avenues for me to communicate with them.”

4.2.15 Theme 7: Attentiveness to children’s temperament and traits. A number of parents often talked about their child’s personality or characteristics, whether it was about the suitability of a particular learning approach for their child, or as a factor they considered when choosing a program for their child. For instance, one parent felt that her child was “relatively dependent” and “weak” in the aspect of self-care, which is why she was particularly satisfied that her child’s school focused on training self-sufficiency skills. Another parent said, “My
daughter is more suited for the activity approach and not the traditional kind because she cannot sit still…. Activity approach may not be for everyone, but it is suitable for her.”

4.3 Links between the Survey and Interview Data

4.3.1 Image of the child and learner. According to what parents shared in the interviews, children are naturally curious and tend to find the simplest everyday things fascinating and novel. Parents believed that young children learn the most when they can have concrete hands-on experience and when they are allowed to explore on their own. These beliefs were shared by many of the survey participants as reflected in the high ratings given to “young children are naturally curious and eager to learn” and “young children are active learners who naturally try to make sense of their experience”. Although the rating for “young children should be allowed to have plenty of time to play in their preschool program” was slightly lower in comparison, parents in the follow-up interviews recognized the importance of play as the basis for early learning and thought that preschool programs should be activity-based. Furthermore, survey participants agreed quite strongly that it was necessary for children to seek answers by themselves and to be interested in the learning material in order to learn effectively. Indeed, the interviewees often emphasized the value of letting children try things out for themselves which would make learning more fun and memorable. In line with the view that children learn better when they are engaged, interviewed parents also asserted that kindergarten education should raise children’s interest in learning. Additionally, the importance attributed to homework was not high in the survey, although the interviewed parents thought that there should be a small amount of homework at the kindergarten level. However, when it comes to the heavy workload that primary school students faced, interviewed parents felt that it was unreasonable and dreadful.

4.3.2 Expectations of child’s education and development. The importance that parents placed on language and social skills with peers in the survey was echoed in the interviews. Parents often commented on the bilingual language environment that the school provided, and they greatly appreciated having a native teacher for English and Mandarin lessons. Two parents pointed out that the early years were a critical period for language learning, which is why they chose language as the most important developmental skill for 3- to 5-year-old children. Social skills with peers were another area that parents deemed as important both in the survey and in the interview. Almost all parents mentioned that they wanted their child to
learn how to get along with others, and a majority of parents “strongly agreed” that it was necessary for children to interact and work with their classmates in order to learn well.

4.3.3 Communication between parents and schools. The survey results show that while some parents had close communication with their child’s school, the majority of parents thought that the level of communication was only average and a small number of respondents even reported that there was no communication at all. The hope for greater transparency and more communication was also evident from the interview data, where six out of nine interviewees felt that there could be more communication between parents and schools. Although parents were eager to know how their child was doing at school, what parents wanted was not necessarily detailed daily reports of what their child did at school everyday. As one parent said: “Some schools have a different emphasis; for example, communication with the parents. They write a lot of handbooks and report to the parents about their children’s situation, or they treat the child like a baby and pamper them…. But I don’t necessarily agree with that kind of care; they always write so many reports, but I feel that if there is nothing special then they don’t need to write so much. They [the teachers] are so busy already! I think this type [of program or approach] is very protective…. ” Furthermore, what parents hoped to have was an open and honest form of communication that would help them have a better understanding of their child’s development. One of the interviewed parents felt that the monthly reports she received from the school were rather generic: “The comments are all quite positive, but I wonder if that is really the case. I hope there could be more teacher-parent meetings or other avenues for parents to communicate with them [the school].” In essence, what parents look for is more two-way communication. Moreover, it was the usefulness of information that parents cared about, not the frequency or sheer quantity.

4.3.4 Inconsistent results: recognition of play. While the preceding few points showed coherence between the survey and interview data, an inconsistency was also found. Many parents asserted that kindergarten should be play-based and yet the mean rating for “Young children should be allowed to have plenty of time to play in their preschool program” was 3.82 on a 5-point scale. An interpretation of this finding is proposed in the Discussion chapter under section 5.2.1 Children’s learning interest.
Table 2

*Number of Participants in Each Income Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Household Income</th>
<th>Frequency (n=71)</th>
<th>Income group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HK$5000-10,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK$10,001-20,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK$20,001-30,000</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK$30,001-50,000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK$50,001-80,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than HK$80,000</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 3

*Other Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years lived in Hong Kong</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20 years</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20 years</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived in Hong Kong all their lives</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of hours child spend in school (per week)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 15 hrs</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-25 hrs</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35 hrs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 35 hrs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of hours child spend in extra curricular activities (per week)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3 hrs</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6 hrs</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 hrs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 hrs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average amount of time that respondents spend with child (per day)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 hr</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 hrs</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 hrs</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 hrs</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 hrs</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average amount of time that respondents’ spouses spend with child (per day)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 hr</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 hrs</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 hrs</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 hrs</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 hrs</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>
Table 4

*Highest Level of Education Attained by Parents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest level of education attained</th>
<th>Frequency (Mother)</th>
<th>Frequency (Father)</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HKCEE Certificate or under</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate or Higher Certificate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma or Higher Diploma</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD or Postdoctoral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) is a public exam that takes place in Grade 11.
Table 5

*Types of Education Parents Received Abroad*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education received overseas</th>
<th>Frequency (Mother)</th>
<th>Frequency (Father)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never studied abroad</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school or kindergarten</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highschool</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD or Postdoctoral</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>One participant went on a 1-year exchange program and the other studied an English program.
Table 6

Results for Image of the Child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compatible items</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Frequency for &quot;Strongly disagree&quot;</th>
<th>Frequency for &quot;Strongly agree&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young children's thoughts and feelings deserve to be listened to and respected.</td>
<td>4.62 (.59)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children are naturally curious and eager to learn.</td>
<td>4.55 (.55)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children have a lot of potential and simply require others to help realize that potential.</td>
<td>4.44 (.65)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children are active learners who naturally try to make sense of their experience.</td>
<td>4.34 (.82)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children come with different talents and learn in different ways.</td>
<td>4.3 (.74)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children can construct knowledge on their own when given the proper support and guidance.</td>
<td>4.2 (.90)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children should have time to think, daydream, and even loaf sometimes.</td>
<td>3.99 (.88)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children should be allowed to have plenty of time to play in their preschool program.</td>
<td>3.82 (1.0)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ^n = 73
Table 6

Results for Image of the Child (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incompatible Items</th>
<th>$M$ (SD)</th>
<th>Frequency for &quot;Strongly disagree&quot;</th>
<th>Frequency for &quot;Strongly agree&quot;</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young children always need adults to teach them the right way to do things.</td>
<td>4.08 (.93)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children need to be disciplined and controlled.</td>
<td>3.84 (.97)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children do not know what is best for them and therefore need adults to make decisions for them.</td>
<td>3.41 (.90)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children should be protected from failures and disappointments.</td>
<td>2.69 (1.24)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children are innocent, naive, and do not know anything.</td>
<td>2.27 (1.1)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children have a low level of understanding and therefore do not need to be explained to too much.</td>
<td>1.8 (.89)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. a$n = 73$
Table 7

Results for Image of the Learner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compatible Items</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Frequency for &quot;Strongly disagree&quot;</th>
<th>Frequency for &quot;Strongly agree&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary for them to interact and work with their classmates.</td>
<td>4.45 (.50)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary for them to be able to ask questions about the material that they are learning.</td>
<td>4.42 (.62)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary for them to seek answers and make meaning by themselves.</td>
<td>4.31 (.64)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary for them to be interested in the subject that they are learning.</td>
<td>4.26 (.64)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incompatible Items</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Frequency for &quot;Strongly disagree&quot;</th>
<th>Frequency for &quot;Strongly agree&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary for them to do homework.</td>
<td>3.65 (1.0)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary for them to concentrate and work on their own in class.</td>
<td>3.5 (.89)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary for them to be quiet and obey everything the teacher says.</td>
<td>3.38 (1.14)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary for them to commit the learning material to memory.</td>
<td>3.12 (1.0)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 8

*Significant Differences between Incompatible and Compatible Item Ratings Regarding Image of the Learner*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Z-Values</th>
<th>Incompatible Items</th>
<th>Compatible Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is necessary for them to do homework.</td>
<td>It is necessary for them to interact and work with their classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-5.15</td>
<td>-5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is necessary for them to concentrate and work on their own in class.</td>
<td>It is necessary for them to be able to ask questions about the material that they are learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-6.11</td>
<td>-5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is necessary for them to be quiet and obey everything the teacher says.</td>
<td>It is necessary for them to seek answers and make meaning by themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-5.74</td>
<td>-5.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is necessary for them to commit the learning material to memory.</td>
<td>It is necessary for them to be interested in the subject that they are learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-6.58</td>
<td>-4.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. All z-values are based on positive ranks. After Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, all $p < 0.001$, two-tailed.*
Table 9

*Ranking of Developmental Skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Pre-academic</th>
<th>Motor/Physical</th>
<th>Self-Expression</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Social Skills (Peers)</th>
<th>Social Skills (Adults)</th>
<th>Self-Sufficiency</th>
<th>Self-Assessment</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rank 1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom 3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Each cell represents the number of parents (frequency) choosing each skill in that rank.
Table 10

Parents’ Ranking of Ideal Child Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideal child characteristics</th>
<th>Percentage of participants choosing this in the top five ranks (N=74)</th>
<th>Number of participants putting this as top choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I want my child to be happy and feel secure.</td>
<td>77.03%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my child to be able to solve problems independently.</td>
<td>70.27%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my child to be curious, to explore and question things.</td>
<td>60.81%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my child to be able to express his or her opinion and feelings to others.</td>
<td>55.41%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my child to respect and get along with others who have different ideas or values.</td>
<td>54.05%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my child to feel respected, valued, and appreciated.</td>
<td>54.05%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my child to agree with others so that he or she can be accepted into the peer group.</td>
<td>52.70%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my child to be talented in many things and excel in a number of different areas.</td>
<td>28.38%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my child to be creative.</td>
<td>24.32%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my child to be competitive among his or her peers.</td>
<td>14.86%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my child’s academic standing to be in the top 5% in school.</td>
<td>12.16%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my child to understand the reasons behind events and actions.</td>
<td>5.41%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my child to win a lot of prizes and awards.</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11

*Parents’ Communication with School and Participation in School Events*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main channels of communication</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent teacher meetings</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer opportunities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent committees</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open days</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone calls</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emails</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters/Notices</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations with the teacher or principal during drop-off/ pick up my child</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School activities that parents took part in before</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped out in the classroom</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended school trips or other school activities</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped in other school events (e.g., Open Day, Fundraising)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended school meetings (regarding school administration)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended teacher-parent meetings (regarding child’s performance)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4(^a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* \(^a\)The others were: attended school's Open Day, attended seminars at the school, served as a parent volunteer, and joined a play-group class at school.
Table 12

Importance Attributed to Learning Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Importance Scale</th>
<th>$M (SD)$</th>
<th>Number of parents rating skill at 5</th>
<th>z-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learn pre-academic skills (e.g. learn how to read, write, and count)$^a$</td>
<td>3.93 (.93)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learn how to get along with other children$^a$</td>
<td>4.6 (.52)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>-4.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Learn how to express his or her thoughts and feelings</td>
<td>4.66 (.50)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-5.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Learn how to be independent</td>
<td>4.35 (.65)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Be happy and enjoy the overall learning experience</td>
<td>4.69 (.52)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>-4.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Develop self-confidence</td>
<td>4.72 (.63)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>-4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Be able to develop his or her own ideas and interests</td>
<td>4.43 (.55)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>-3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Enjoy a supportive environment that fosters creativity</td>
<td>4.35 (.54)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Learn how to handle conflicts and solve problems independently$^b$</td>
<td>4.23 (.79)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-2.31$^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Be able to play with and learn from other children</td>
<td>4.51 (.53)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-4.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Items were rated on a 5-point scale. $^aN = 73$. $^b$Except for item 9, all other z-values were significant, $p < 0.006$ (two-tailed).
Table 13

*Parents' Satisfaction with Learning Outcomes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Satisfaction Scale</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learn pre-academic skills (e.g. learn how to read, write, and count)</td>
<td>3.97 (.78)</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learn how to get along with other children</td>
<td>3.95 (.66)</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Learn how to express his or her thoughts and feelings</td>
<td>3.82 (.82)</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Learn how to be independent</td>
<td>3.79 (.81)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Be happy and enjoy the overall learning experience</td>
<td>4.26 (.67)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Develop self-confidence</td>
<td>3.83 (.82)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Be able to develop his or her own ideas and interests</td>
<td>3.58 (.87)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Enjoy a supportive environment that fosters creativity</td>
<td>3.8 (.84)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Learn how to handle conflicts and solve problems independently</td>
<td>3.46 (.86)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Be able to play with and learn from other children</td>
<td>4.03 (.65)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Items were rated on a 5-point scale.
Table 14

Effects of Education, Income, and Previous Location of Residence on Mean Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Image of the Child&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>p value for Kruskal-Wallis Test</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>Previous Location of Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young children should be protected from failures and disappointments&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children are active learners who naturally try to make sense of their experience.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children come with different talents and learn in different ways.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children should have time to think, daydream, and even loaf sometimes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children should be allowed to have plenty of time to play in their preschool program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Image of the Learner&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>p value for Kruskal-Wallis Test</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>Previous Location of Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary for them to be quiet and obey everything the teacher says.&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Other items in these sections were not included because the p-values were non-significant. Bonferroni correction was made to determine the critical p-values. <sup>a</sup>Critical p < .004. <sup>b</sup>Critical p < .006. <sup>c</sup>Critical p < .01. <sup>d</sup>Critical p < .006. <sup>e</sup>Incompatible items.
Table 14

Effects of Education, Income, and Previous Location of Residence on Mean Ratings
(Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appreciation for Art and Beauty in Education&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>Previous Location of Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourage children to express their thoughts and feelings through different forms, e.g. music, dance, painting etc.</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use different methods to evaluate children's learning (e.g. keep track of how children's drawings become more sophisticated) rather than giving a final grade at the end of the year.</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a pleasing physical environment that develops children's sensitivity and appreciation for beauty and nature.</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of Learning Outcomes&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>Previous Location of Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be happy and enjoy the overall learning experience.</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop self-confidence.</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn how to handle conflicts and solve problems independently.</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn how to express his or her thoughts and feelings.</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy a supportive environment that fosters creativity.</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Other items in these sections were not included because the p-values were non-significant. Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons was made to determine the critical p-values. <sup>a</sup>Critical p < .004. <sup>b</sup>Critical p < .006. <sup>c</sup>Critical p < .01. <sup>d</sup>Critical p < .006. <sup>e</sup>Incompatible items.
Table 15

Effects of Education, Income, and Previous Location of Residence on Parents' Ranking of Pre-academic Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Factors</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rank 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (n = 32)</td>
<td>$8_a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (n = 10)</td>
<td>$5_a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (n = 29)</td>
<td>$2_b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (n = 21)</td>
<td>$6_a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (n = 27)</td>
<td>$7_a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (n = 23)</td>
<td>$4_b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous location of residence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong only (n =33)</td>
<td>$8_a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China (n = 17)</td>
<td>$5_a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America or Europe (n = 16)</td>
<td>$1_b$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Numbers with subscript $a$ are larger than numbers with subscript $b$, which show a consistent trend within and across the demographic factors.
### Table 16

**Themes, Categories, and Codes for the Interview Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) About Kindergarten Education</td>
<td>It should be play- or activity-based</td>
<td>S2 Provide activities/games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S2 Use the &quot;Activity Approach&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S2 More time/space to play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Learn through play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 It should be about play/activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S5 Want/look (or not) for activity-based programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It has a unique role compared to primary school education</td>
<td>S4 It has a bridging role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Show what primary school is like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Help get into a good primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Increase language abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Primary school is about solidifying knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 In primary school, it really is about studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What parents fundamentally want children to get out of kindergarten</td>
<td>S1 Develop certain habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Increase interest in learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Experience school life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Have a happy school life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Have some social life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Become more sociable/ gregarious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Learn to get along with/ care for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Gain basic knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S5 Have self-care skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What parents think can and cannot be taught by the parents or at home</td>
<td>S1 There are limitations to what can be taught by parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S1 Child may have poorer self-care skills because of having a domestic helper at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Children may listen to/obey the teacher more than the mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Parents can teach academic skills at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Children can learn things by observing and being in a school setting that the home cannot provide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Categories</td>
<td>Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| (1) About Kindergarten Education | What parents look for when choosing a kindergarten | S5 Location: close to home  
S5 Programs are activity-based  
S5 The school's reputation  
S5 Religious background  
S5 They embrace good values  
S5 The curriculum/ approach is well-balanced  
S5 Prospects of getting into good primary schools upon graduation  
S5 Whether it can help child transition to primary school easier |
| | What parents like most about their child's current school | S5 The school's language environment  
S5 Having foreign/native teachers  
S5 Teacher/principal/staff's attitude  
S5 Teaching methods/ approach  
S5 School's physical environment and facilities  
S5 Suitable amount of homework |
Table 16 (continued)

 Themes, Categories, and Codes for the Interview Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2) How parents perceive children's nature</td>
<td>Want children to explore and experience on their</td>
<td>S2 They should use their own hands to experience/explore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and what they think learning should be like</td>
<td>own/ for themselves</td>
<td>S3 They can gain something by manipulating with own hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 Should have direct experience, see with their own eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 Explore on his or her own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 Children can realize/discover something on their own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 Some things need to be experienced, cannot be taught directly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 Children should/ need to try new things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Want children to think by themselves</td>
<td>S2 Have the ability to think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S2 Let children seek answers/ solutions by themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S3 Helps/stimulates thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S3 Use their brain more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S3 Thinking becomes more diverse/not rigid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appreciate learning from nature/ actual objects</td>
<td>S6 Like that the activity is concrete/actual/ practical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 Like that kids are allowed to play in the puddle/ water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 It is good to learn from nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S2 When forced to learn, children actually do not and cannot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fully absorb/ understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image of children and how they learn</td>
<td>S2 They are naturally curious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S2 They find a lot of things very novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S3 Their thoughts are very unique/special</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S3 Their ideas can be very creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S3 Their thoughts are different from adults'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S3 They have their own ideas/thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S3 What children gained may not be immediate visible, but there may</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>be future benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 They can learn from very simple/everyday things</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16 (continued)

**Themes, Categories, and Codes for the Interview Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(3) Thoughts on Reggio and its application in Hong Kong What parents think children gained from the puddle project</td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 They learned to think&lt;br&gt;S6 The learned to observe/pay attention to things&lt;br&gt;S6 They learned to cooperate with others&lt;br&gt;S6 It inspired their imagination&lt;br&gt;S6 It aroused their curiosity and got them to ask questions&lt;br&gt;S6 Their learning/understanding/realization would be deeper/more memorable with this approach&lt;br&gt;S6 They will be better able to apply what they learned in the future with this approach&lt;br&gt;S6 They learned Science knowledge&lt;br&gt;S6 They learned General knowledge&lt;br&gt;S6 They gained Math-related concepts (e.g., Distance)&lt;br&gt;S6 It helped develop their motor skills&lt;br&gt;S6 It is beneficial to their art/drawing skills&lt;br&gt;S6 It is a very &quot;ideal&quot; learning approach&lt;br&gt;S6 Children will have a different kind of discovery/learning from this type of approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | What parents think of the artistic activities | S3 It can stimulate/increase thinking<br>S3 Their brains are used more<br>S3 Their thinking becomes more diverse, less rigid<br>S3 Children are "enriched"
S3 There is more space for imagination/enhances imagination<br>S3 It is fun; children will feel happy<br>S3 It can increase creativity<br>S3 It can develop their character<br>S3 It can help children discover/develop an interest<br>S3 The finished products can give children a sense of accomplishment; they will feel more confident<br>S3 Art is about expression, let children express themselves<br>S3 There is group learning, they learn to cooperate<br>S3 It should be regarded as an extra-curricular activity |
Table 16 (continued)

*Themes, Categories, and Codes for the Interview Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(3) Thoughts on Reggio and its application in Hong Kong (continued)</td>
<td>Caveats/concerns over using Reggio projects as the primary method of teaching and learning</td>
<td>S6 Need to incorporate more academic elements to it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 Need teachers to explain during/after the activity to maximize learning experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 It requires a lot of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 Concerns over transition to primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concerns over children's safety in outdoor activities</td>
<td>S6 Many HK parents worry too much about their children getting dirty or hurt when playing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 Some parents are over-protective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 There may be potential danger in the use of certain tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges to incorporating more artistic activities in regular kindergarten programs</td>
<td></td>
<td>S2 The class size is big</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S3 It is hard to have such artistic activities in Hong Kong kindergartens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S3 There is not enough time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 There are limitations in resources and the curriculum is tight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 This type of activity is hard to implement in HK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S6 It cannot be like this (playing/having activities) all the time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16 (continued)

*Themes, Categories, and Codes for the Interview Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| (4) Parents' impression of education in Hong Kong | Parents general feelings/beliefs about education in Hong Kong | S2 There is a lot of spoon-feeding  
S2 There is a lot of rote-learning  
S2 When forced to learn, children actually do not and cannot fully absorb/understand  
S4 HK children are very miserable because of school  
S4 Parents do not want to pressure their young child  
S4 Parents do not want to put their children in prestigious kindergartens because they are too academically-driven  
S4 Parents feel helpless because they feel forced to comply/follow the trend  
S4 Primary school education is harsh and miserable  
S6 There is too much homework in primary school  
S6 Hong Kong emphasizes academics  
S6 The purpose of studying is exam-oriented |
| Parents specific feelings/beliefs about local traditional schools | S2 They do not foster creativity  
S2 They emphasize obedience and discipline over creativity  
S2 They are all about writing and doing math  
S2 They do not necessarily compromise children's curiosity or their ability to solve problems  
S2 They emphasize rote learning and memorization |
| Hong Kong is different from "elsewhere" (Western countries) | S6 HK schools are very rigid  
S6 Schools in Western countries are freer  
S6 Schools in Western countries are more flexible/less rigid  
S6 Children elsewhere have a happier learning experience |
Table 16 (continued)

*Themes, Categories, and Codes for the Interview Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(5) Transition into primary school</strong></td>
<td>S2 By studying in a traditional kindergarten, the child will adjust to primary school easier in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S5 When choosing kindergartens, the prospects of getting into an ideal primary school matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S5 Care about kindergartens' track records: which primary schools did the graduates go on to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S5 Hope to make the transition into primary school easier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S6 Coherence: how will children adjust to the mode of local primary schools if they are used to an activity- or play-based approach in kindergarten?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(6) The relationship between parents, children, and the schools</strong></td>
<td>S1 Schools and parents need to cooperate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S2 Parent Education: Schools can/need to educate parents too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S3 There are parent-child bonding assignments/ homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S4 Parents don't think they should rely solely on the school for their child's development, they have responsibilities for their children's education too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S4 It is common for parents teach their children academic skills/ knowledge at home even before the start school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S2 Lack of transparency: parents have no idea what goes on at school, but they want to know more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S5 Would like to have more communication (participants gave examples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(7) Attentiveness to children's temperament.</strong></td>
<td>S1 School's style/approach is suitable for child's personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S1 Believes/ hopes school can address child's weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S1 Child is naturally good at something (e.g., language skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S6 Whether parent would send child to a program depends on whether there is a good match between the school and child's personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S6 Children's character matters more than gender in terms of learning needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 1.** Comparing Parents’ Importance and Satisfaction Ratings on Learning Outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play with &amp; learn from other children</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handle conflicts &amp; solve problems independently</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have environment that supports creativity</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop own ideas &amp; interests</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop self-confidence</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be happy &amp; enjoy learning</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to be independent</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be able to express thoughts &amp; feelings</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to get along with other children</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn pre-academic skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean Rating

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82
Figure 2. Effects of Parents’ Education Level on Ratings.

- Children need to be protected from failures & disappointment
- Children are active learners
- Children come with different talents & learn in different ways
- Children should have time to think & daydream
- Children should have plenty of time to play at school
- It is important for children to express themselves through different forms
- It is important to have a pleasing school environment to develop children's appreciation for beauty
- It is important to use different methods of evaluation
- It is important for children to be happy & enjoy the learning experience
- It is important for children to develop self-confidence
- It is important for children to learn to express thoughts & feelings
Figure 3. Effects of Parents’ Household Income Level on Ratings.

- Children come with different talents & learn in different ways
- Children should have time to think & daydream
- Children should have plenty of time to play at school
- Children should be quiet & obey the teacher
- It is important for children to express themselves in different forms
- It is important to use different methods of evaluation
- It is important for children to be happy & enjoy the learning experience
- It is important for children to develop self
Figure 4. Effects of Parents’ Previous Location of Residence on Ratings.

- **It is important to have an environment that fosters creativity**
- **Children come with different talents & learn in different ways**
- **Children should have time to think & daydream**
- **Children need to be quiet & obey teacher**
- **It is important for children to express themselves in different forms**

Parents’ Previous Location of Residence

Kruskal-Wallis Mean Ranks
Some of the findings gleaned from the current study converge with previous research while others differ from or even contradict the extant literature. Here, connections with the literature are made, followed by discussions of other key findings. Finally, future research directions, the place for Reggio in Hong Kong, and suggestions for adaptation are examined.

5.1 On Pre-academic Skills

5.1.1 Ranking vis-à-vis other developmental skills. Lam (1999) administered a short survey to 14,328 kindergarten parents in Hong Kong and found that learning reading, writing, and arithmetic skills was not the most important learning outcome rated by parents. Instead, enhancing children’s overall development, helping children establish a positive attitude toward learning, cultivating self-care and interpersonal skills and building up children’s confidence were valued more (Lam). This is consistent with the current findings, where language skills and social skills with peers were considered more important than pre-academic skills for 3- to 5-year old children to learn at school. A plausible explanation could be that parents tend to take on considerable responsibility when it comes to their child’s academic development. Indeed, a number of parents in the interviews shared that they taught academic skills to their child at home, whether it was through reading or providing additional exercises for them. This explanation is consistent with the results from the Pre-primary project done by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), which showed that Hong Kong parents see children’s academic development as more of the parents’ responsibility than the teachers’ (Ojala, 1998). Having said so, parents do expect kindergartens to address children’s scholastic needs. What this means is that parents do care about children’s academic readiness, but there are other domains that parents think are equally important in children’s early learning and development.

5.1.2 Effects of education, income, and previous location of residence. When participants’ demographic information was examined in relation to their views on pre-academic skills, some consistent trends emerged (see Table 14). It appears that parents from the highest income group, those who had received the most education, and those who had lived in North America or Europe tend to place less importance on pre-academic skills for 3- to 5-year-old children. In contrast, parents from the low and medium income groups, those who had
moderate education, and those who had never lived outside of Hong Kong were more likely to prioritize pre-academic skills. Family socio-economic-status (SES) has been found to have effects on parents’ educational values as well as student achievement. Jacob and Lefgren (2007) found that parents from high-income schools expected more than academic achievement in their grade-school children. While these parents highly valued teachers’ ability to create a happy learning experience for the children, this mattered little to parents in low-income schools whose focus was primarily on student achievement (Jacob & Lefgren). A study that looked at parents of Asian American kindergarteners found that parental education and family income was a significant factor in predicting Asian American kindergarteners’ school achievement (Moon & Lee, 2009). Academic success is often seen as the key to future success, and in a competitive society like Hong Kong, this belief could be particularly strong. Could it be that parents from the lower income groups see education as a means to improve the standard of living, and therefore place more emphasis on their child’s academic achievements? It is worthwhile to understand the values and beliefs of Hong Kong parents from different SES backgrounds since this is relevant to how well received different educational approaches would be in various populations.

5.1.3 Parents’ dilemma. Hong Kong parents have been held responsible for the pressure that preschools face in preparing young students for entrance into elite primary schools (e.g., Chan & Chan, 2003). While parents in the current study do hope that their children would get into an ideal primary school, they also expressed feelings of helplessness in the dilemma that they face. They believe that learning at the pre-primary stage should be fun and enjoyable, and they do not want their child to be under so much pressure. But at the same time, in order for their child to get into the desired primary schools and be able to catch up with the syllabus, parents feel that they need to start preparing their children for this transition early on. In future studies, it is worth delving into the reasons why parents want their children to get into elite primary schools. Is it for their personal pride or is it because getting into a good primary school is a stepping stone for getting into a better secondary school, and eventually a better university in the future? Perhaps both play a part in this matter, but the latter reason raises an important question of whether the current education system is serving students and families well. According to one of the parents in the interview: “In Hong Kong a lot of people see kindergarten as a stepping stone—the smarter you are [in kindergarten], the better primary school you can get into. So it’s that step: if you get into a good kindergarten, you will get into a good primary school, and then you will get into a good secondary school. As a result, people
apply to those prestigious preschools even before the child was born.... It is already like that in kindergarten, how scary! When they are so young, they should be happy. I don’t want to scare them and make them feel that going to school is intimidating. They are always doing homework...it is never-ending.” In a context where “the hidden curriculum is [the] keen competition” (Fok, 2001, p. 7), are parents to blame for focusing on their child’s academic readiness in preschool? Currently, the school-based curriculum ordained by the Curriculum Development Council encourages schools (including kindergartens) to adapt the Central Curriculum to suit their unique contexts (Education Bureau, 2009a). Under this policy, certain preschools have been able to find a suitable balance between professional values of learning through play and parental expectations of academic preparation for primary education (Ho, 2008). However, given the privatized nature of the ECE field in Hong Kong, it is inevitable that some preschools would have to succumb to parents’ pressure, which I believe is partly induced by the competitive and high-stakes education environment. As found in the study, whether parents would send their children to a Reggio-like preschool often depends on whether they think the program can help their child be promoted and transition to a good primary school. Indeed, the issue of transition is paramount and would continue to be a problem in any ECE reform without appropriate system-wide changes.

5.1.4 The pressure of transition. It should also be noted that parents’ emphasis on children’s pre-academic abilities is not merely for entrance into a decent primary school. The interview data allude to a more complicated story, and concern over children’s adjustment to primary school is an equally potent contributor to parents’ attention to academic readiness. At this point, it is important to understand how the primary one admission (POA; Education Bureau, 2009b) system works in Hong Kong. The POA applies only to the government or aided primary schools, which constitute the majority of schools in Hong Kong, some of which are the “popular primary schools”. Under the POA, students do not have to sit for examinations or attend interviews for admission, and individual accomplishments have little to do with what schools students get into. This is because the POA allocates places according to other criteria such as catchment area, whether applicants have siblings at the applied-for school, whether the applicants’ parent was a graduate of the applied school, and so forth (Education Bureau). There is also a myriad of schools that are not under the POA, and these include private schools, international schools, and schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (Education Bureau). Many of these schools are well-known for their academic standing, and competition for admission is keen. Prospective students have to go through interviews, and their academic abilities, among
other things, are weighty. Also, the nine years of free universal education offered by the government does not apply to these schools.

Since most of the interviewed parents said that they plan to apply to public schools where admission is not dependent on academic performance, their emphasis on early academic learning is likely driven by other concerns. Indeed, one of the parents said she was worried that their child would have difficulty adjusting to primary education if he or she went to a more “relaxed” kindergarten. Meanwhile, another parent whose child attends a traditional school feels quite confident about her child’s future transition: “It [the child’s current school] is a more traditional school, the lessons are harder, and when they get to P.1 they don’t need to study that much because they already know the stuff.” Furthermore, because parents feel that one of the roles of kindergarten education is to prepare children for primary school, it is not surprising that they expect children to start reading and writing in preschool when these skills are required in grade one. Unless primary schools adjust their Grade 1 syllabus and give students more time to become acclimated, the “backwash effect” (Ho, 2008, p. 228) in pre-primary education will continue to take a toll on preschools, parents, and not to mention the young children.

5.2 Other Things that Parents Value

5.2.1 Children’s learning interest. The emphasis that parents place on learning interest and motivation is a finding that echoes Ho’s (2008) results. The parents whom Ho interviewed believed that a good early childhood program should arouse children’s motivation to learn and create an enjoyable learning experience (Ho, 2008). Similarly, parents in this study also referred to this point in the follow-up interviews; one parent contrasted her child’s attitude toward learning before and after switching to the current school. “Before, he might have learned something, but he didn’t appear to be eager or enthusiastic, like…there was no passion. There were instances where my child disliked going to school….But now he rarely says that he doesn’t want to go to school anymore.” Another parent said: “Because my husband and I really like to learn — we would often attend seminars whenever possible — that is the type of people we are. So I think it is important for the school to increase children’s interest in learning… it should let them feel that learning is fun.”

As mentioned near the end of Chapter 4, inconsistencies were found surrounding parents’ views on play in the survey and interview data. Specifically, interviewed parents asserted that kindergarten should be play-based, and yet the mean rating for “Young children
should be allowed to have plenty of time to play in their preschool program” was 3.82 on a 5-point scale. In explaining how inconsistent or contradictory data found in the process of triangulation should be handled, Mathison (1988) said that “we attempt to make sense of what we find and that often requires embedding the empirical data at hand with a holistic understanding of the specific situation and general background knowledge about this class of social phenomena” (p. 17). Here I would like to make two speculative explanations. First, while parents may genuinely believe that children should learn through play, the time constraints of a half-day program might not allow children to play more. The majority of programs offered by kindergartens are half-day and the schedules are usually very tight. In this case, parents might not want to allocate more time for playing because this would unavoidably compromise more structured learning time. Second, it is possible that parents were tapping into different kinds of play. In the interviews when parents talked about “learning through play”, they could be referring to epistemic play where children learn knowledge and information through the activities (Hutt, 1981). In contrast, the kind of play put forward in the survey item could have resembled ludic play more, where children have fun and explore their imaginations but are not learning (Hutt, 1981). It could be that parents are in support of epistemic play and not ludic play, which explains the apparent contradiction in findings.

5.2.2 Curiosity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Chak (2007) found that Hong Kong parents of preschool-age children generally held positive views of curiosity and exploration, while Lam, Lim, Chen, and Adams (2003) found that Hong Kong parents recognized the importance of thinking skills in kindergarten children. Parents in the current study also highly regarded curiosity and thinking skills among other attributes. In the survey, “I want my child to be curious, to explore and question things” and “I want my child to be able to solve problems independently” were ranked among the top five ideal child characteristic by 60.81% and 70.27% of parents respectively. The interview data also revealed that parents want children to use their brains and think more; they believed that letting children manipulate things and explore on their own will facilitate thinking and make learning more memorable. To be sure, “thinking skills” is a broad term and there are certain types of thinking skills that were less valued. For instance, “I want my child to understand the reasons behind events and actions” was only ranked by four parents as one of the top five qualities they valued most.

5.2.3 Competence in English. Both the survey and interview data make it clear that children’s language ability is a priority for Hong Kong parents. Interestingly, what “language” refers to is not only children’s mother-tongue, Cantonese, but includes English or even
Mandarin as well. This is because as a former British colony, the majority of secondary schools and universities in Hong Kong use English as the medium of instruction, and having a better mastery of English would enhance one’s chances of succeeding in this international hub (Fok, 2001). In primary school, children have English Language Education as one of the Key Learning Areas, and it is suggested the 17-21% of teaching time be allocated to this subject (Curriculum Development Council, 2002). This percentage is the second highest among all subjects, preceded only by Chinese Language Education which is recommended to take up 25-30% of total lesson time (Curriculum Development Council). It is unclear how many primary schools devote more than these suggested lesson times to teaching English. But given the importance of English in higher education and eventually in the workplace, it is not surprising if primary schools (especially the elite ones) start pushing their students right from the beginning. For this reason, the pressure of learning English spreads to preschool children because they need to be competent in English in order to meet the primary schools’ elevated standard. In addition, parents’ knowledge of the early years as a critical period for language development could potentially exacerbate the issue. It is one thing for parents to look for kindergartens that could provide a rich language environment for their child. But when parents hire private language tutors for their preschool-age children— which one of the interviewed parents mentioned doing— their good intentions could potentially add stress on their young ones. Furthermore, while parents ranked language skills higher than pre-academic skills, it should be noted that the two are closely related at the preschool level. This is because a lot of the pre-academic skills practiced in preschool are related to reading and writing in addition to simple math concepts. Therefore, parents’ strong focus on learning English could still put pressure on children even though they may not emphasize other pre-academic skills as much.

As Fok (2001) pointed out, the language issue is a fundamental problem in Hong Kong, and children have to learn three or even four languages (spoken Cantonese, written Chinese, English, and Mandarin) early on. When there is such a strong focus on acquiring a second language in the pre-primary years, it presents practical challenges to curriculum planning. How does the education agenda become shaped by a bilingual or trilingual society like Hong Kong? Also, the traditional Chinese writing system which represents words with a single symbol requires learners to memorize the whole symbol for each new word they learn to read (Wren, 2001). How does the type of language that children learn at school affect how classes are conducted? These questions are beyond the scope of this study but are certainly relevant when considering the practical aspects of implementing a program like Reggio in Hong Kong.
5.2.4 Reggio values. It was speculated that present-day Hong Kong parents’ education level would be higher compared to previous generations, and that more parents would have lived or studied abroad. More importantly, it was predicted that these two factors would influence parents’ thinking. The results do in fact support the idea that education and overseas exposure have an influence on parents’ values and beliefs. Specifically, exposure to Western cultures and higher levels of education and income are positively linked to parents’ views on Reggio-compatible ideas (e.g., that it is important for children to enjoy a supportive environment that fosters creativity) and negatively linked to Reggio-incompatible ideas (e.g., that children should be quiet and obey everything the teacher says). It is possible that parents who had lived in North America or Europe had taken in many of the European-American values, and therefore found the Reggio-compatible items closer to their views. Interestingly, for a number of items where parents’ previous location of residence had an effect on parents’ response, the significant difference was between those who had lived in China and those who had lived in North America or Europe. Parents who had always lived in Hong Kong stood somewhere in between, which could be taken as evidence of a blend between Eastern and Western values. Luk-Fong (2005) found that the way parents portrayed their actual and desired parent-child relationship reflected a “hybrid” (p. 131) of traditional Chinese and western values. Apparently this fusion of values and beliefs applies to how present-day Hong Kong parents see children and their education as well.

5.2.5 Co-existing Chinese values. It should be noted that there are Reggio-incompatible items that were rated fairly highly by parents, and some traditional Chinese values still stand strong in parents’ minds. The first is the image that “Young children do not know what is best for them and therefore need adults to make decisions for them”, which received a mean rating of 4.05 on a 5-point scale. The Chinese tradition of adult-directed behavior was believed to be why some Hong Kong parents feel a need to control what was worthwhile for children to explore (Chak, 2007), and this could be the case here as well. It is interesting how parents did not think that children are innocent or that they have a low level of understanding, and yet they rated this particular item highly. While this may seem contradictory, it is possible to reconcile the disparate views. Although young children may not be seen as ignorant, parents might feel that children are inept at making sound decisions because they do not have the cognitive or social-emotional skills yet. In order to understand why parents hold certain beliefs, it is worthwhile for future research to revisit these concepts using qualitative methods to tease apart these complexities.
The second Reggio-incompatible item valued by parents is the ideal child characteristic “I want my child to agree with others so that he or she might be accepted into the peer group.” This item was chosen by 52.7% of parents as one of the top five qualities they value. According to the “ideal person” in Confucian thought, one should strive to control his or her feelings and maintain harmonious relationships with others (Tang, 1992). While Reggio embraces differences, uncertainties, constructive debates, and negotiations (Rinaldi, 2006), Hong Kong parents may prioritize harmony and unity more. In the future, it would be worthwhile to see what preschool teachers think on this matter, since the social-emotional climate in the classroom and how conflicts are dealt with could be drastically different with contrasting values.

5.2.6 Other developmental skills. There are interesting differences between how parents ranked the eight developmental skills in the current study and in the IEA Pre-primary project. First, the Pre-primary project found that pre-academic skills was the most popular choice that parents chose for Rank 1 (Weikart, 1999), while in this study, language skills \( (n = 48) \) and social skills with peers \( (n = 44) \) were much more commonly ranked in the top three positions than pre-academic skills \( (n = 27) \). Second, self-sufficiency skills stood in number three in the Pre-primary project rankings (Weikart), but it was found to be one of the least valued categories in the current study. Because the two samples are not matched in any way, it is difficult to conjecture reasons for these discrepancies. It is possible that present-day Hong Kong parents’ thinking is different from their counterparts 10 years ago, but it could also be that the two samples had different demographic backgrounds.

Lastly, self-assessment and self-expression skills received low ranks in both studies. This is an interesting result because self-confidence, which was cited as an example of self-assessment skill, received the highest mean rating as an important learning outcome in the current study. In the survey, self-assessment skills were defined as “child learns to assess his or her own abilities and behaviors, begins to take pride in his or her accomplishments, and develops a sense of self-confidence.” It is possible that parents did not value the other cited examples and therefore gave a low rank to this skill. Indeed, not all the sub-skills within a skill category are valued equally (Onibokun, 1999), and it is possible that the overall value of the skill was diminished by the less favored sub-skills. As for self-expression skills, there were two kinds of expressiveness covered in the survey that should be distinguished. Under expectations of child’s education and development, the definition “Child learns to express him or herself creatively through arts and crafts, music, dance, and/or imaginative play” was borrowed from
the IEA Pre-primary study (Weikart, 1999), and this skill category received a relatively low rank in the survey. However, parents do value children’s expressivity because the ratings for “I want my child to be able to express his or her opinion and feelings to others” and “It is important for my child to learn how to express his or her thoughts and feelings” were high. This suggests that parents recognize the importance of expressivity, but how children channel their thoughts and emotions is another question.

5.3 Parents’ Westernized Views on Learning

Li (2005) contended that the Chinese image of learners is quite different from the European-American image. Specifically, the Chinese hold a high regard for diligence, perseverance, and concentration, and learners are expected to contemplate on their own and respect teaching authority (Li). Meanwhile, the European-American view holds that learners should aspire to question the known and discover the new, and creative problem-solving skills are emphasized (Li). The current results suggest that Hong Kong parents’ conception of learning orients more toward the European-American perspective. Parents’ level of agreement with “It is necessary for children to concentrate and work on their own in class” and “It is necessary for children to commit learning material to memory”, which lean more toward the Chinese view, were considerably low. In contrast, parents agreed more strongly with items such as “It is necessary for children to interact and work with their classmates” and “It is necessary for children to seek answers and make meaning by themselves.” In fact, the mean ratings for each of the Chinese images were significantly lower than all the European-American images, and the number of parents “strongly agreeing” with the Chinese images was drastically lower than for the European-American images.

Interestingly, the number of participants who chose rating 3 (neither agree nor disagree) was much higher for the Chinese images (i.e., the Incompatible items) than the European-American images (i.e., the Compatible items). Close to 30% of respondents rated 3 on two of the Chinese images, namely “It is necessary for children to commit the learning material to memory” (29.7%), and “It is necessary for children to concentrate and work on their own in class” (28.4%). It is plausible that parents do not have an opinion on these items, feel neutral toward the statements, or are unsure of their stance. Whatever the case may be, this result shows that present-day Hong Kong parents do not embrace the Chinese view of learners that strongly.
Taking a closer look at the breakdown of responses on the Chinese images reveals some interesting patterns. Sixteen out of 33 parents who had never lived outside of Hong Kong and 10 out of 17 respondents who had previously resided in China rated 4 (somewhat agree) on the statement “It is necessary for them to be quiet and obey everything the teacher says”. This finding is consistent with the literature—respect for teaching authority is highly valued in the Chinese tradition, and Kennedy (2002) affirmed that Hong Kong emphasizes respect for teachers whose authority should not be questioned. However, this item was most frequently rated 2 (somewhat disagree) among those who had lived in North America or Europe before (6 out of 16). A plausible explanation could be that parents’ views had been influenced by their exposure to individualistic Western cultures where social hierarchy is less prominent. A second interesting observation is that, while the differences are not statistically significant, the majority of parents who had lived in China and those who lived in North America or Europe rated the importance of memorization in learning at 4. Meanwhile, those who had always lived in Hong Kong most frequently rated this item at 2. Could it be that parents in the latter group had personally experienced an education that heavily relies on rote-learning, and therefore had come to question its utility in effective learning? Lastly, the value of homework was held in lower regard by parents who had previously lived in North America or Europe than by those who had never lived abroad or had once lived in China. Having said so, only 16.2% of total respondents “strongly agreed” that it is necessary for children to do homework in order to learn effectively. This result stands in contrast to the preconception that Hong Kong parents like to push for more exercises and homework for their children. It is worthwhile for future studies to explore whether parents viewed certain kinds of homework as being more conducive to learning, what function they think homework serves, and what constitutes a reasonable amount of homework for young children.

While parents strongly agree that children need to interact with their classmates in order to learn well, this study did not ask why parents thought so. Based on the interview data, most parents saw peer interaction as beneficial to children’s social skills, but rarely did parents mention whether children learned other skills or knowledge from peers. A parent suggested that children should have more space to play because “maybe something can be realized when children play with each other that I don’t know of”. But it is unclear what can be gained through those interactions. The idea of group learning is fundamental in Reggio because knowledge is seen to be socially constructed and children are protagonists for themselves and others (Krechevsky & Mardell, 2001). As children formulate hypotheses on a phenomenon,
give each other feedback, reflect on their own ideas, and eventually revise their thinking, the
learning experience of the whole group becomes greater than the sum of its parts (Krechevsky
& Mardell). The current study did not explore this topic in detail, but it would be interesting to
see if Hong Kong parents see other benefits in young children’s interactions in addition to
developing interpersonal skills.

5.4 Parents’ Involvement in Schools

Hong Kong parents’ lukewarm interest in taking part in school affairs was seen as
another challenge to the implementation of Reggio programs (Li & Wong, 2001). Unlike the
culture in Reggio Emilia where parents and schools work closely together, it was believed that
it would be difficult to garner Hong Kong parents’ involvement. However, the current study
suggests that the situation may not be so discouraging. First, 31% of the survey respondents
chose a preschool program that involved high parental involvement as the practice that they are
most comfortable with, while 63.5% preferred a program with a medium level of involvement.
Only one respondent wanted a program that rarely engaged parents in school affairs. Second,
52 respondents had been on a school trip or attended other school activities in the past, and a
small number of parents had helped out in school events. Some had attended meetings
regarding administrative matters as well. Last, a small number of respondents were willing to
be more involved, and many parents in the interview expressed that they would like to have
more communication with their child’s school.

It should be emphasized that while parents want to communicate more with the school,
their involvement does not necessarily mean that they are willing to be more involved. The kind of parental
participation seen in Reggio involves more active contribution, whether it is through offering
time, effort, or expertise, and usually someone other than the parent and child benefits from the
contribution. An example would be having a parent speak to the class on a special topic that
the children are interested in. When Hong Kong parents put in a lot of time working on
assignments with their child or they want the school to tell them more about their child’s
performance, it can only be said that Hong Kong parents care about their child’s education
greatly. But inferences cannot be made about how willing parents would be in participating
more if their contribution does not have direct implications for their child. This points to one of
the limitations of the current study: although the survey has gathered preliminary information
on parents’ current level of participation and how involved they would like to be, the
interviews did not follow up on this topic in greater detail. More research is needed to
understand this construct more—parents’ attitude toward parental participation in school—as well as factors that influence participation. Are parents willing to participate only if it has direct relevance to their own child? Do parents have time to be more involved even if they wanted to? What about the schools? Do they provide enough opportunities for parents to contribute? According to the survey results, only 26% of the participants felt that the school offered ample opportunities for parents to be involved; 62% felt that the opportunities were “somewhat ample”, and 8% did not think there were enough opportunities at all. If parent participation is an area of importance in Hong Kong, then further investigation is needed to understand this phenomenon better.

5.5 Parents’ Views on Art and Beauty in Education

The lack of appreciation for art and beauty was considered an obstacle to the implementation of Reggio in Hong Kong, and it was believed that parents cared little about aesthetics in schools but were much more concerned about children’s school performance (Li & Wong, 2001). However, the high survey ratings given to art and beauty in education and the gains that parents saw in letting children have more artistic activities put forward a different picture. Moreover, parents often mentioned campus-related attributes when they talked about what they liked (or did not like) about the schools. In fact, a number of parents expressed a wish for more natural and outdoor spaces for children to explore. A parent said that she liked her child’s school as soon as she visited the campus because “there was a lot of sunshine.” Another parents said: “I prefer to have an outdoor playground; I think children should be able to see the sun.” Although aesthetics and art may not be parents’ first and foremost concern, they do pay attention to the schools’ environment and realize the value in artistic endeavors. Therefore, the significance of artistic activities and an amiable environment is neither neglected nor depreciated as was previously conceived.

5.6 Other Findings

There are two other findings that point to areas worthy of attention. They are (a) parents’ use of the internet, and (b) parents’ moderate level of satisfaction with learning outcomes.

5.6.1 Parents’ use of the internet. Ho (2008) made an important observation regarding how ill-informed Hong Kong parents could be when choosing a kindergarten for their children. She said that because the majority of preschools have not been inspected, parents’ decisions are
mainly based on the schools’ reputation or their own perception of how good the programs are (Ho). As a matter of fact, schools’ reputation and proven track record did play a part in many of the interviewed parents’ choices. But an encouraging finding is that many parents also browsed schools’ websites to find out more about their programs. Present-day parents are more computer-savvy, and they do make use of the internet for resources. They also go on parenting forums to discuss various issues, where a lot of information and opinion on schools is exchanged. Hopefully as information on schools becomes more transparent and accessible through the internet, parents will be in a better position to make the best choices for their children.

5.6.2 Moderate level of satisfaction with learning outcomes. While parents’ ratings on the importance of the 8 learning outcomes were fairly high (all other mean ratings were higher than 4.23 except for learning pre-academic skills where $M = 3.93$), the satisfaction scales were considerably low (most mean ratings were below 4). Some of the lowest rated items include: “Learn how to handle conflicts and solve problems independently” ($M = 3.46$), “Be able to develop his or her own ideas and interests” ($M = 3.58$), “Learn how to be independent” ($M = 3.79$), and “Enjoy a supportive environment that fosters creativity” ($M = 3.8$). And yet, Table 12 shows that parents do value these outcomes. Moreover, these qualities were also mentioned by the interviewed parents either as things they hope their child would gain from kindergarten, or as things they admire in the hands-on Reggio artistic activities and puddle project. Taken together, these findings point to gaps between what parents hope to see and what they think their children are getting from school. This necessitates that educators and decision-makers think about what the implications are. Do they believe that the learning outcomes valued by parents are important for young children as well? If that is the case, is there a need to look into how the schools could better support children in these areas of development?
6.1 Is There Room for Reggio to Make a Contribution in Hong Kong?

Based on parents’ images of children and learners as well as their attitude toward art in education, the study suggests that present-day Hong Kong parents would be receptive to a Reggio approach to preschool education. To be certain, this is not to say that Hong Kong should adopt Reggio or that Reggio is the only framework that can satisfy parents. In fact, parents could be equally open to other pedagogies as long as they align with their values and can fulfill their expectations. But what this study shows is that Hong Kong parents’ views on children and their education are compatible with Reggio values, and there are more commonalities than differences between the two. In spite of some standing issues that ought to be addressed, this study suggests that if Hong Kong were to adopt Reggio practices, parents’ response could be welcoming and positive.

6.2 How Can Hong Kong Benefit from Reggio-Inspired Practices?

In the midst of local and world-wide changes, inadequacies in Hong Kong’s education system were recognized and a new vision for the role and function of education was proposed (Education Commission, 2000). Some of the issues identified by the Education Commission include: learning that is examination-driven, lack of comprehensive learning experiences, and the lack of room to think, explore, and create. Meanwhile, qualities such as adaptability, creativity and abilities for communication, self-learning and cooperation are now seen as prerequisites for success, and a person’s character, emotional qualities, horizons and learning are regarded as important factors in achieving excellence (Education Commission). A new culture in learning and teaching has been called for, with seven directions targeted: (a) Shifting from transmission of knowledge to learning how to learn, (b) Shifting from over-emphasizing academic studies to focusing on whole-person development, (c) Shifting from compartmentalized subjects to integrated learning, (d) Shifting the focus from textbooks to diversified learning and teaching materials, (e) Support from the community and learning beyond the confines of the classroom, (f) From traditional time-tabling to an integrated and flexible arrangement of learning time, and (g) Abolishing premature streaming and providing more opportunities for students to explore their aptitudes and potentials (Education
Considering the goals of this radical reform agenda, does Reggio have something to offer?

As the interview parents noted, the Reggio projects embed learning opportunities in ordinary things that are part of children’s everyday experience. Parents saw the value of Reggio activities in letting children realize things by themselves; instead of having teachers transmit information or knowledge to students, children get to “manipulate things with their hands” and “seek out solutions by themselves”. Space for creativity and imagination is abundant, and children get to experiment with different materials in their artistic endeavours. Learning was seen to be fun, memorable, and applicable in the future, and parents saw how an integrated activity was able to touch on academic as well as non-academic aspects of learning. All in all, the merits of Reggio that parents identified actually fulfill many of the reform goals put forward by the Education Commission. Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore how Reggio might help Hong Kong educators achieve this paramount mission.

To be sure, significant adaptations would be necessary to make Reggio work in the Hong Kong context. But this should be expected because the Reggio approach was never meant to be exported as a set curriculum; it is not a recipe to be followed in order to produce a predefined result. Analogous to the art of cooking, sometimes we do not have all the ingredients in the recipe or we may want to adapt the dish to suit our taste better. So we need to improvise, work with what we have, and make appropriate substitutions. Similarly, in making Reggio relevant and serviceable in the Hong Kong context, the outcome might be a hybrid of different approaches that borrows some but not all of the Reggio elements. Indeed, there are no quick-fixes or be-all-and-end-all solutions in education, and it would be a mistake to expect otherwise. Ultimately, if Hong Kong educators are ready and willing, the question boils down to how to make Reggio work in Hong Kong.

6.3 Adapting Reggio in Hong Kong

When examining the applicability of Reggio in Hong Kong, Li and Wong (2001) pointed out several primary questions that educators should look at. First, what characteristics of Reggio are beneficial and achievable in the Hong Kong environment? Second, how can the approach be adapted so that it will be sustainable in the long-run? Third, how can we be inspired by Reggio and create a culture in the educare field that is suitable for Hong Kong? It is beyond the reach of the current study to provide comprehensive answers to these inquiries. But
I would like to end this paper by looking at what possible adaptations can be made given what this study has found.

6.3.1 *Incorporate more academic learning.* As much as parents were impressed by the educational value of the puddle project, they were still concerned that the academic rigor might not be sufficient to meet the demands in Grade 1. The issue of transition is not unique to Hong Kong, but the realities that Hong Kong students face may be particularly challenging because of the prevalent and long-standing academic focus in the education system. While Hong Kong is striving to promote a new set of values, it will take a while until a new culture can be fully embraced. Therefore, to help children reap valuable gains from Reggio without increasing the risk of a difficult transition later on, one of the adaptations could be to incorporate more structured academic learning in the approach. Academic learning does not conflict with the fundamental principles of Reggio; in fact, children learn a broad range of skills and knowledge even though they do not have conventional lessons. Although the long-term effects of Reggio practices have yet to be measured, this pedagogy would not receive international acclamation if it neglected children’s intellectual needs and resulted in ill-adjusted students. Indeed, the beauty of Reggio is that learning is integrated instead of being compartmentalized, just as the Education Commission envisioned. However, if the situation in Hong Kong requires a greater degree of scholastic rigor, a happy medium can still be found by supplementing Reggio with more academic elements.

6.3.2 *Start with full-day childcares.* One of the practical challenges identified by the interviewed parents is the time constraints in half-day kindergarten programs. As parents noted, if the artistic endeavours and elaborate projects are to be taken seriously, it would require a lot of time. British Columbia aims to implement full-day kindergarten across the province by September 2011, with one of the benefits being additional time for children to play and explore (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.). In Hong Kong, full-day programs are provided mostly by childcares and only some kindergartens offer full-day classes. But because the pre-primary sector in Hong Kong is privatized, whether a school offers full-day programs is inevitably guided by business considerations. Therefore, if Hong Kong were to move forward in bringing Reggio practices to its preschools, starting with full-day childcares would be a viable first step.

6.3.3 *Train reflective practitioners.* Among the various complementary measures and adaptations, teacher training is perhaps the most pressing and essential of all. In one of the interviews, a parent voiced her doubts about the capabilities of preschool teachers in managing
an emergent curriculum. Indeed, without hard and fast guidelines, quality learning relies much more on the teachers’ acuity, knowledge, sensitivity, and insights. This is why the type of training I am referring to must entail more than basic knowledge about child development or classroom management skills. This is because while these skills and knowledge are necessary, they are insufficient in helping teachers become provocateurs or children’s partners in learning, which is what Reggio teachers are expected to be (Edwards, 1998). It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss at length what type of teacher training would be appropriate. But training reflective and intellectually curious teachers is not only relevant in Reggio practices, but the advantages are applicable in other settings as well. What classroom would not benefit from teachers who can scaffold learning in a spirit of playfulness, and inspire children intellectually by building on their questions and guiding them to seek the answers? Who would not want teachers who are adamant about listening to children and insist on taking children’s work seriously? How can the quality of teaching not improve when teachers are dedicated to testing, evaluating, and refining their work continually?

Regarding the lack of *atelieristi* and *pedagogisti* in Hong Kong, I think this problem has more to do with limited resources rather than the shortage of competent candidates. Strictly speaking, someone who has a background in visual art and education can become an atelierista, and some schools have school governors who are in some ways performing the role of the pedagogista. It may take a while for the “job description” of these new roles to be defined, but it should not be forgotten that the duties of the pedagogisti and atelieristi in Italy were not set in stone in the very beginning either; it has taken a long time for the Reggio professionals to be where they are at today (Filippini, 1998). But a more urgent problem in Hong Kong is that most schools do not have the resources to hire their own atelierista and pedagogista, which is seen as an obstacle to adopting Reggio practices. However, it is viable to appoint a group of well-trained professionals at the ministry level to support a network of schools; in Reggio Emilia, a group of pedagogisti is appointed at the municipal level to ensure that Reggio philosophies are implemented consistently throughout the system, and each pedagogista is in charge of a number of schools (Filippini, 1998). Therefore, this issue is not insurmountable, but the more critical question is: how many resources are policy-makers willing to invest in training and hiring these professionals? One parent pinpointed the crux of the matter near the end of our interview:

After all, I am still doubtful of the teachers’ qualifications and whether Hong Kong is capable of running these things (referring to Reggio programs). It
comes back to how much the society values ECE. If the society values ECE, then naturally there will be qualified people serving in the field. But if the society does not value ECE, then we won’t get past the stage of only having people who like children (to teach in kindergartens), or have people who marginally pass their high school certificate to get a teaching diploma just because they want a job.

6.4 Final Words

Woodhead (1998) argued that “perspectives on [educare] quality depend on a framework of knowledge, beliefs, and values about childhood and child development, especially the goals and functions of early childhood programmes” (p. 5). This study has taken a step in understanding Hong Kong parents’ beliefs and values about young children’s education and development. But regardless of what we know about parents’ expectations or what counts as “quality education”, wide-spread change is unrealizable if the society does not recognize the value of ECE. So how much does Hong Kong value early childhood education?

Challenges are inevitable in the implementation of a new paradigm, whether it is about Reggio or any other exemplary practice. But if there is goodness in the new and we value it enough, then it is a matter of how we overcome the challenges. Quoting from Alan Cohen (as cited in Bernath, 2010):

“It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power.” (p. 1)
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Appendix A
Survey (English Version)

[Please note: All the rating questions were presented in the form of a matrix table, participants clicked onto a radial box in the table to indicate their choice.]

Thank you for providing us with your demographic information in the previous section. Now we will move into the questionnaire. Please continue to base your answers according to the same child whom you were referring to in the previous demographics section.

(A) YOUR VIEWS ABOUT CHILDREN
In the following section, “young children” refer to children between the ages of 3 and 5.
Please indicate how much you agree with each sentence.
(Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree)
1. Young children are naturally curious and eager to learn.
2. Young children are innocent, naïve, and do not know anything.
3. Young children should be protected from failures and disappointments.
4. Young children’s thoughts and feelings deserve to be listened to and respected.
5. Young children always need adults to teach them the right way to do things.
6. Young children are active learners who naturally try to make sense of their experience.
7. Young children have a low level of understanding and therefore do not need to be explained to too much.
8. Young children come with different talents and learn in different ways.
9. Young children can construct knowledge on their own when given the proper support and guidance.
10. Young children need to be disciplined and controlled.
11. Young children have a lot of potential and simply require others to help realize that potential.
12. Young children do not know what is best for them and therefore need adults to make decisions for them.
13. Young children should have time to think, daydream, and even loaf sometimes.
14. Young children should be allowed to have plenty of time to play in their preschool program.
Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.
(Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree)

For young children to learn well and effectively...
1. It is necessary for them to be quiet and obey everything the teacher says.
2. It is necessary for them to be interested in the subject that they are learning.
3. It is necessary for them to concentrate and work on their own in class.
4. It is necessary for them to be able to ask questions about the material that they are learning.
5. It is necessary for them to commit the learning material to memory.
6. It is necessary for them to interact and work with their classmates.
7. It is necessary for them to seek answers and make meaning by themselves.
8. It is necessary for them to do homework.

(B) YOUR VIEWS ABOUT CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Below are 8 types of skills that children should learn at school between the ages of 3 and 5. Which do you think are the 3 most important and 3 least important skills that children should learn at school? Please rank them accordingly (please choose only one skill for each rank). Note: “Least important” does not mean they are unimportant. We just want to know which skills you attribute more or less importance to, comparatively speaking.

a. Pre-academic skills--Child learns basic concepts (e.g. days of the week) and begins to master skills necessary for reading, writing, and arithmetic.

b. Motor/physical skills--Child improves his or her coordination, balance and agility through large muscle activities.

c. Self-expression skills--Child learns to express him or herself creatively through arts and crafts, music, dance, and/or imaginative play.

d. Language skills--Child learns to express his or her thoughts and feelings verbally in a clear and appropriate manner.

e. Social skills with peers--Child learns to share and cooperate with other children, to respect them and to understand their feelings.

f. Social skills with adults--Child learns to listen to, cooperate with, and respect adults.

g. Self-sufficiency skills--Child learns to be independent and to care for him or herself and his or her belongings in a responsible manner.
h. Self-assessment skills--Child learns to assess his or her own abilities and behaviors, begins to take pride in his or her accomplishments, and develops a sense of self-confidence.

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<th>Most important</th>
<th>Least important</th>
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<td>Rank 1</td>
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Please enter the appropriate letter in the box. You do NOT have to worry about Rank 4 and 5.

Rank 1 (Most important): ____
Rank 2: ____
Rank 3: ____
Rank 6: ____
Rank 7: ____
Rank 8 (Least important): ____

(C) YOUR HOPES FOR CHILDREN
The following are some statements about how parents may want their children to be now or when they grow up.

a. I want my child to be competitive among his or her peers.
b. I want my child to agree with others so that he or she can be accepted into the peer group.
c. I want my child’s academic standing to be in the top 5% in school.
d. I want my child to be able to express his or her opinion and feelings to others.
e. I want my child to respect and get along with others who have different ideas or values.
f. I want my child to be able to solve problems independently.
g. I want my child to be talented in many things and excel in a number of different areas.
h. I want my child to be curious, to explore and question things.
i. I want my child to feel respected, valued, and appreciated.
j. I want my child to understand the reasons behind events and actions.
k. I want my child to be creative
l. I want my child to be happy and feel secure.
m. I want my child to win a lot of prizes and awards.
Please choose the top 5 qualities that you want in your child and rank them below by entering the appropriate letter.

Top Choice:____
2\textsuperscript{nd} Choice:____
3\textsuperscript{rd} Choice:____
4\textsuperscript{th} Choice:____
5\textsuperscript{th} Choice:____

(D) YOUR VIEWS ABOUT ART IN EDUCATION

Below are some ways that artistic and aesthetic experiences may be incorporated into children’s learning at school. Please indicate how important you think the following characteristics are important in a good early childhood education program.

(Not important at all, Not very important, No opinion, Quite important, Very important)

*How important is it for a good early childhood education program to...*
1. Have an aesthetically rich and diversified environment for children to explore with different art media and symbols.
2. Encourage children to express their thoughts and feelings through different forms, e.g. music, dance, painting etc.
3. Have a pleasing physical environment that develops children’s sensitivity and appreciation for beauty and nature.
4. Use different art material (e.g. clay, recycle material) for children’s experimentation and learning.
5. Use different methods to evaluate children’s learning (e.g. keep track of how children’s drawings become more sophisticated) rather than giving a final grade at the end of the year.

(E) YOUR VIEWS ABOUT PARENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLS

1) How would you qualify the level of communication between you and your child’s school?

☐ Not much at all ☐ Average ☐ We have close communication
2) What are the main communication channels between you and your child’s school? (Check all that applies)
a. □ Parent teacher meetings  b. □ Volunteer opportunities  c. □ Parent committees
d. □ Open days  e. □ Phone calls  f. □ Emails
g. □ Newsletters/ Notices
h. □ Conversations with the teacher/principal when I drop off/ pick up my child

3) Do you feel that the school provides ample opportunities for parents to be involved in their children’s schooling?
□ Not at all  □ Somewhat  □ Very much

4) Do you feel parents’ voices are heard and respected by the school?
□ Not at all  □ Somewhat  □ Very much

5) What activities have you taken part in at your child’s school?
□ Helped out in the classroom
□ Attended school trips or other school activities
□ Helped in other school events (e.g., Open Day, Fundraising)
□ Attended school meetings (regarding school administration)
□ Attended teacher-parent meetings (regarding my child’s performance)
□ Other:_____________________

6) Would you like to participate more in your child’s school? In what ways?


7) Here are 3 early childhood program styles. Please choose the one that you prefer the most and enter the corresponding letter, a, b, or c in the box.

(a) A program that often invites parents to take part in school affairs and events (e.g. providing assistance in class), has monthly parent-teacher meetings, and organizes plenty of open-days annually.

(b) A program that invites parent participation in school events once in a while, and has several parent-teacher meetings and open-days each year.

(c) A program that rarely invites parents to participate in school affairs, and has very few parent-teacher meetings and open days annually.

The style or practice I am most comfortable is: (Please enter the appropriate letter) ____

(F) YOUR VIEWS ABOUT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1) Please rate how important it is for your child to achieve the following through his or her current education: (Not important at all, Not very important, No opinion, Quite important, Very important)

   a. Learn pre-academic skills (e.g. learn how to read, write, and count)
   b. Learn how to get along with other children
   c. Learn how to express his or her thoughts and feelings
   d. Learn how to be independent
   e. Be happy and enjoy the overall learning experience
   f. Develop self-confidence
   g. Be able to develop his or her own ideas and interests
   h. Enjoy a supportive environment that fosters creativity
   i. Learn how to handle conflicts and solve problems independently
   j. Be able to play with and learn from other children
2) Now, please rate **how satisfied** you are with what your child is getting out of his or her school in terms of: (Not satisfied at all, A little satisfied, No opinion, Quite satisfied, Very satisfied)

a. Learning pre-academic skills (e.g. how to read, write, and count)

b. Learning how to get along with other children

c. Learning how to express his or her thoughts and feelings

d. Learning how to be independent

e. Being happy and enjoying the overall learning experience

f. Developing self-confidence

g. Being able to develop his or her own ideas and interests

h. Being given a supportive environment that fosters creativity

i. Learning how to handle conflicts and solve problems independently

j. Being able to play with and learn from other children

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**Final Section: Follow-up Interview and Survey Results**

**Follow-up Interview**

In addition to gathering parents’ views through the online surveys in the first phase of the study, we hope to have a deeper and richer understanding of parents’ thoughts through one-on-one interviews. This gives parents an opportunity to share their views with us more extensively. The interviews will be 45-min long, and participants will receive HK$100 in cash at the end of the session.

You are *not* required to take part in the interview even if you fill out the survey. Participation in the interview is voluntary, and you do not need to take part in the interview if you do not want to.

Would you like to be contacted for the follow-up interview? □ Yes

**Study Results**

Would you like to receive a summary of the study results when it becomes available in the summer of 2010?

□ Yes, I would like an English copy

□ Yes, I would like a Chinese copy

□ No, thank you.
Appendix B
Interview Questions

*Expectations on Child Development*

“In your survey, you ranked (a) ________________ and (b) as 2 of the most important skills for 3- to 5-year-old children to develop in school. Do you think your child’s school is supporting his or her development in these areas? If yes, how does the school help your child develop these skills?

*Ideal Child Characteristics*

(Focus on the top 2 qualities chosen)

“You said that you want your child to be ____. What kind of learning environment do you think will help your child nurture this quality?”

*Appreciation for beauty and art in education*

[Show images of artistic activities in Reggio schools]

Here are some examples of what artistic activities kindergarten children may engage in at school—

* Creating collages with different material, e.g. buttons, scraps of cloth, stones
* Building sculptures with clay
* Drawing and painting on large canvases
* Playing with shadows on the wall by putting different shapes on a projector

1) Do you think these activities have any benefit or value in children’s everyday learning at school (e.g., language, math, science, general studies)? Why or why not?
2) Do you want your child to spend more of their time at school doing these things? Why or why not?

*Conception of the role of Early Childhood Education*

1) What do you want your child to gain from his or her early childhood education?
2) Do you think ECE has a unique role compared to primary and secondary education? Please explain.
Parents’ current experience

1) Is your child’s school your first choice for him/her? How did you come to choose this school? What factors do you consider when you were looking for a school?
2) What do you like most about your child’s school? Please list 2 aspects and explain.
3) Do you think your child’s schooling can improve further? Please list 2 areas of improvement and explain.

Reactions to a Reggio Project

Here is a set of photos that depicts a project that 5- and 6-year-old children did at school. Please take your time to read through it, and then I would like to ask for your thoughts afterward. [Show “Puddle” images]

1) What skills, knowledge, or experience do you think the children gained from this activity? Do you think they learned anything about language, math, science, general studies?
2) What are some of the things you (a) like and (b) dislike about how the children learned about and experimented with reflections?
3) Let us go back to the skills and qualities that you hope your child will have. Do you think this schedule supports the development of (insert skills/qualities)? How so or why not?

Imagine that activities like this are the main ways that children learn in a certain kindergarten. They are given plenty of time and space to experiment on their own and with other children, on a variety of topics. Teachers are there to assist and support children’s learning by providing them with the resources they need (e.g. the mirror and the flashlight). Instead of directly teaching or instructing children what to do, they build learning opportunities around children’s questions and interests.

1) Do you want your child to attend this school? Why or why not?
2) Would your answers to this question be different if you child was a (opposite option: girl/boy) instead of a (actual gender: girl/boy)? Why or why not?
3) Do you have any concerns about this teaching method? Please explain.

Other Questions

Is there anything else you would like to add?
Is there anything you would like to ask me about?
Appendix C

Study Background Information Sheet

(Parts of this has been retained in the online consent page of survey)

Consent for Participation in Online Survey

Principal Investigator (Thesis Supervisor): Dr. Marion Porath

Co-Investigator (M.A. Thesis Student): Miss Angela Lee

Study Title:

“Inside Present-Day Hong Kong Parents’ Minds—What Values, Beliefs, Attitudes, and Expectations Do They Hold Regarding Young Children’s Development and Education?”

Introduction

Hong Kong is internationally recognized as a fast-paced city that is constantly evolving, and this can be seen in its education reforms as well. In the field of Early Childhood Education, recent efforts have gone into enhancing the overall quality of pre-primary services. As new approaches and measures are being introduced, it would be helpful to understand the views of different stakeholders, in particular, the users of educare. In the current study, Dr. Marion Porath and Masters of Arts student Angela Lee from the University of British Columbia hope to understand what present-day Hong Kong parents think about early child development and education. The results of this study will provide an up-to-date profile of Hong Kong parents’ views that can be used by educators and administrators for future planning.

You have been invited to participate in the study because you fulfill both of the following criteria--

(a) By the end of 2009, your oldest child will be 5 years old or younger, AND
(b) You have a child who is currently enrolled in a kindergarten or child care in Hong Kong.
Online Survey Purpose
To take a snapshot of present-day Hong Kong parents’ values, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations surrounding early childhood education and development.

Procedures
This survey takes about 20 min to complete. The survey, available both in Chinese and English according to your preference, begins with a demographics section that collects basic information such as income bracket and education background. It is followed by the questionnaire section that asks for your views on young children’s development and education. The survey is divided into smaller parts with specific instructions provided at the beginning of each part. You can decide when you would like to start the survey and you have 1 week to submit the completed survey. However, because the survey tool cannot save partial responses, we ask that you complete the survey in one sitting.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You do not need to respond to questions that they are not comfortable with. You can simply skip those questions and still be eligible for the draw. You can withdraw from the study at any stage without personal consequences.

Confidentiality and Anonymity
The online survey will be launched through my3q.com, which is a secure website that provides survey tools for research purposes. Data collected are subject to the Privacy Policy of my3q.com and the results will not be made public. My3q.com will not sell or rent personally identifiable information to anyone unless consent is given. Participants will access their own survey by direct invitation (through email) and will not be asked to provide their names or the name of their child in the survey. A participant ID will be assigned for the purpose of organizing data, and will not be linked to identifying information (including email addresses) once data collection is complete. Only the researchers involved in the study have access to the data collected through the website and the interview audio recordings. For possible auditing purposes, all research data are required to be stored in a locked container at the University of British Columbia for 5 years following the completion of the study, and will be destroyed afterwards.
None of the information you provide will be attached to your name or any other identifying information when reporting the results. The names of parents, children, and other parties involved will not be used unless specific permission is sought in advance. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to participants (e.g. Parent A) in order to keep responses anonymous.

Risks and Benefits
There are no known risks to participation in the study. This study does not involve any interventions and you are only asked to provide information that you are comfortable with. Participants who complete the online survey will be entered into a lucky draw for five gift cards (worth HK$100 each). Also, a summary of the findings can be made available to parents in the following summer upon request. The lucky draw prizes will be announced in December.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or would like to receive more information about the study at any time, please email Angela Lee at angelalee.ubc@gmail.com or Professor Marion Porath at mporath@interchange.ubc.ca. Angela Lee will be in Hong Kong after 7 Oct 2009 and can be reached by phone thereafter at 2516-7942.
If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Consent to Participation
By submitting a survey, you are consenting to your participation in this study. Your information will only be used for the purpose of this research study. Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.
Dear (Insert Parent’s Name),

Hi, this is Angela Lee, the Master’s student from University of British Columbia who will be implementing this study. Thank you for expressing interest in taking part in this research project.

This welcome email contains several important pieces of information:
1) Brief description of what will happen from now till November, 2009
2) A detailed Research Study Background Information Sheet *Important to read*
3) Study Requirements
4) How to indicate your language preference for the survey *Please respond*
5) What to do if you wish to withdraw from the study now

**What will be happening—**

In mid-October, you will receive an email invitation to the online survey. Access to the survey is by invitation only; you will be able to access your own survey by clicking onto the link and you can submit only one completed survey. The survey takes about 30-40 min. to complete and you will have 1 week to complete the survey. Specific instructions will be given on the survey.

Once the surveys have all been submitted, follow-up interviews will be set up with 10 selected participants in November. You are *not* required to take part in the interview even if you fill out the survey. However, if you are willing to be in the interviews, I will contact you in late October to arrange for a time and location that is convenient for us to meet.

Parents who take part in the 45-min long interviews will receive a gift of HK$100 (in cash) at the end of the interview. The Lucky Draw results for the online survey participants (five HK$100 gift cards) will be announced in December. For those who are interested, a summary of the research findings can be made available in the summer of 2010 upon request.

[All this information can be found in the Research Study Background Information Sheet]
Research Study Background Information Sheet—

It is important that you read this attachment which provides detailed information about the procedures and confidentiality issues. Please review this in detail. Parts of it regarding your rights as a participant will be reiterated in the beginning of the online survey.

Study Requirements—
You are eligible for this study if you answer “yes” to BOTH questions below:
(a) By the end of 2009, is your oldest child going to be 5 years old or younger?
(b) Do you have a child who is currently enrolled in a kindergarten or child care in Hong Kong?
If you do not fulfill both conditions, please email me and let me know.

How to indicate your language preference for the survey—
The online survey is available in both English and traditional Chinese. Please let us know which version you would like by copy and pasting one of the following options in your email reply:
To receive the English survey: Please send me the English survey and correspond to me in English.
To receive the Chinese survey: Please send me the Chinese survey and correspond to me in Chinese.

How to withdraw—
Participation is entirely voluntary and there are no consequences if you do not wish to be in the study. If at this point you would like to withdraw from the study, please respond to this email and copy and paste the following message: “Please remove me from the mailing list, I do not wish to be in the study”.

Thank you very much for your time and interest in the study. Please feel free to email me at angelalee.ubc@gmail.com if you have any questions. I will be in Hong Kong in October and will provide you with a contact number later on. You may also contact my supervisor at the University of British Columbia, Dr. Marion Porath, at mporath@interchange.ubc.ca if you have any questions.
Appendix E
Demographics Section in Survey

Section I—Demographics

If you have more than one child, please base your answers consistently on one of your children who is (a) 5 years old or younger AND (b) is currently enrolled in a kindergarten, preschool, or child care in Hong Kong.

1) You are the child’s □ Mother □ Father

2) What is your age? □ Less than 20 years old □ 20-25 years old □ 25-30 years old
□ 30-35 years old □ 35-40 years old □ 40-45 years old
□ More than 45 years old

3) What nationalities do you belong to? Please list all of them in the space provided. E.g. Chinese, British, Canadian etc.

4) How long have you lived in Hong Kong for?
□ Less than 1 year □ 1-3 years □ 3-5 years □ 5-10 years
□ 10-20 years □ I have lived in Hong Kong all my life.

5) How old is your child?
□ 0-18 months □ 18-36 months □ 36-48 months □ 48-60 months

6) Gender of your child: □ Male □ Female

7) Your child currently has: (Choose all that apply)
□ No siblings □ Older brother(s) □ Older sister(s)
□ Younger brother(s) □ Younger sister(s)
8) On average, how many hours per week does your child spend time in a regular childcare, preschool, or kindergarten program?

☐ Under 15 hours/week  ☐ 15-25 hours/week  ☐ 25-35 hours/week  ☐ Over 35 hours/week

9) On average, how many hours per week does your child spend time in other learning programs in addition to regular school (e.g., play groups, English programs, music lessons)?

☐ 0-3 hours/week  ☐ 3-6 hours/week  ☐ 6-10 hours/week  ☐ Over 10 hours/week

10) On average, how much time do you get to spend with your child per day (e.g., having meals together, playing together)?

☐ Less than 1 hour/day  ☐ 1-2 hours/day  ☐ 2-3 hours/day  ☐ 3-5 hours/day  ☐ More than 5 hours/day

11) On average, how much time does your spouse get to spend with your child per day (e.g., having meals together, playing together)?

☐ Less than 1 hour/day  ☐ 1-2 hours/day  ☐ 2-3 hours/day  ☐ 3-5 hours/day  ☐ More than 5 hours/day

12) What is your family’s total monthly income?

☐ Less than HK$5000  ☐ HK$5000- $10000  ☐ HK$10001- $20000  ☐ HK$20001- $30000  ☐ HK$30001- $50000  ☐ HK$50001- $80000  ☐ More than HK $80000

Note: Questions 13-16 refer to child’s FATHER:

Check here if this section does not apply ☐ (Please skip to Question 17)
13) Highest level of education attained:

☐ HKCEE Certificate or under

☐ Certificate

☐ Associate Degree or Diplomas

☐ Bachelor Degree

☐ Master’s Degree

☐ Ph.D or Postdoctoral

☐ Professional Degree (e.g., Law, Medicine, Architecture)

☐ Other: __________

14) Has the child’s father ever studied abroad? If yes, please specify type of education received.

☐ No, he has never studied abroad. (Please skip to next question)

☐ Elementary/Primary School and/or Kindergarten

☐ High school/ Secondary School

☐ College Diploma ☐

☐ Undergraduate Program

☐ Master’s Program

☐ Ph.D Program

☐ Professional School (e.g. Medicine, Law)

☐ Other: Please specify________________

15) Has the child’s father ever lived abroad (i.e. outside of Hong Kong)?  Yes ☐ No ☐

*If your answer is “no”, please skip to Question 17.*
16) If your answer was "yes", please type out where the child’s father has lived (city and country) and how long he was there for in total. *E.g., Toronto, Canada, 3 years; Sydney, Australia, 6 months.*

![Box for Father's Residence]

**Note: Questions 17-20 refer to child’s MOTHER:**

Check here if this section does not apply □ (Please skip to the next section of the survey)

17) Highest level of education attained:

- □ HKCEE Certificate or under
- □ Certificate
- □ Associate Degree or Diplomas
- □ Bachelor Degree
- □ Master’s Degree
- □ Ph.D or Postdoctoral
- □ Professional Degree (e.g., Law, Medicine, Architecture)
- □ Other: ______________

18) Has the child’s mother ever studied abroad? If yes, please specify type of education received.

- □ No, she has never studied abroad. (Please skip to next question)
- □ Elementary/Primary School and/or Kindergarten
- □ High school/ Secondary School
- □ College Diploma
☐ Undergraduate Program

☐ Master’s Program

☐ Ph.D Program

☐ Professional School (e.g. Medicine, Law)

☐ Other: Please specify________________

19) Has the child’s mother ever lived abroad (i.e. outside of Hong Kong)? Yes ☐ No ☐

If your answer is “no”, please skip to next section.

20) If your answer was "yes", please type out where the child’s mother has lived (city and country) and how long he was there for in total. E.g., Toronto, Canada, 3 years; Sydney, Australia, 6 months.
Dear Parent,

You are invited to take part in the second phase of the study that consists of a 35-minute one-on-one interview with the researcher. Details of this study were provided to you earlier in September, but please review the information again (attached at the back) to ensure that you understand the purpose of the study as well as your rights as a participant.

The researcher will ask you some questions regarding your views on your child and his or her education. To minimize distraction, the researcher will not be taking notes while you speak; however, the interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder so that the researcher can analyze the data later on. If there are questions that you are not comfortable with, please let the researcher know that you would like to skip to the next question. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you have the right to end the interview at any time. There are no consequences to discontinuing the interview and you will be compensated for your time.

To ensure that your responses will remain anonymous, we will not use your name or your child’s name in the interview. We will refer to your child as “your son” or “your daughter”. All the recordings will be stored digitally in a password-protected external hard-drive at UBC; the university requires all data files to be stored for 5 years whereupon the files will be deleted.

Please read the following points and indicate if you agree to take part in this interview:

✔ I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and I may withdraw from the interview at any point if I want to without any consequences.

✔ I understand that I do not have to answer questions that I am not comfortable with.

✔ I understand that all the views expressed in the interview will be strictly confidential and used for research purposes only. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the recordings, and my data will be locked securely at the University of British Columbia.

✔ I understand that my name and my child’s name will NOT be attached to any of the information I provide. When reporting the results, no identifying information will be attached to the findings.
☐ YES, I AGREE to take part in the interview and permit the researcher to use my information under the above conditions.

Name: ______________________________  Date: __________________________

Signature: __________________________

**Please retain a copy of this consent for your record**

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Angela Lee at angelalee.ubc@gmail.com or Professor Marion Porath at mporath@interchange.ubc.

Regards,
Marion Porath, Ph.D.                        Angela Lee
Principal Investigator                     Co-Investigator
Professor                                  Masters of Arts Student
Department of Educational                  Early Childhood Education
and Counseling Psychology, Special Education University of British Columbia
University of British Columbia             Vancouver, Canada
Vancouver, Canada

132
Appendix G
Copy of the UBC Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK AMENDMENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Marion J. Porath

DEPARTMENT: UBC/Education/Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education

UBC BREB NUMBER: H09-01931

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:

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Other locations where the research will be conducted:
Over the Internet (online survey), public spaces in Hong Kong (e.g., libraries, universities, community centres)

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):
Angela Lee

SPONSORING AGENCIES:
N/A

PROJECT TITLE:
Inside Present-day Hong Kong Parents’ Minds: What Values, Beliefs, Attitudes, and Expectations Do They Hold Regarding Young Children’s Development and Education?

Expiry Date - Approval of an amendment does not change the expiry date on the current UBC BREB approval of this study. An application for renewal is required on or before: September 10, 2010

AMENDMENT(S):

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The amendment(s) and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.
Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:

Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair
Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair