Achieving goals of Curriculum Reform: The Flower Shop
達到課程改革的目標：花店參觀

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Abstract
This paper analyses an excursion by a kindergarten to a local flower shop owned by one of the children’s grandmother. It aims to help teachers understand the type of curriculum that matches the recommendations in the Education and Manpower Bureau’s recent Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (2006). It highlights certain key principles in the Guide and illustrates them with the curriculum experiences in the Flower Shop visit. It concludes that the Guide is a practical document that can be used to support effective practices and help teachers work towards the goals of curriculum reform.

摘要
本文文章分析了幼稚園的一次校外遊覽活動，是次活動參觀了一間由學生家長開辦的花店，藉以協助教師們對教育統籌局近年推行的《學前教育課程指引》(2006)中的建議課程加深了解。這花店遊覽活動展示了指引中數項重要的原則，作者從而指出這指引能有效地作出實際的支援，幫助教師達到課程改革的目標。

Introduction
Education reform often leaves teachers feeling confused as they struggle to understand new ideas and different approaches to their daily work. Teachers may feel overwhelmed at the thought of changing the way they think and act. Many find it difficult to give up what they have done for years and may ignore the challenge in the hope that it will all go away. This paper looks at a current reform that may present a challenge for teachers, which is the Education and Manpower Bureau’s (EMB’s) recent Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (2006).

Background
There have been many debates in early childhood about what counts as ‘effective’ curriculum. In the past, curriculum in Hong Kong was described as being based on the ‘academic model’, where teachers expected young children to learn through early academic instruction. This model has been described as the ‘push-down curriculum’, which is suited to primary grades rather than early childhood. Critics claim that “too formal, too soon” does little to foster intellectual development.

The aim of this paper is to help teachers understand more about the type of curriculum experiences outlined in the EMB’s Guide. This paper suggests that the EMB’s (2006) Guide is a practical document that can help teachers to construct curriculum that is suitable for their own context and meets the goals of reform. In fact, some teachers will be reassured to find that their practices need only minor changes or they reflect the recommendations in the EMB’s Guide.

The EMB’s (2006) Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (referred to here as the ‘Guide’) provides guidance concerning new approaches to curriculum. The academic model has been set aside, and the Guide emphasises that the curriculum must focus on the child’s “all round development” and should stimulate children’s interest in learning (EMB, 2006, p.17).

A key principle of the Guide is that the
curriculum should be ‘child-centred’ and appropriate (see, for example, Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992). The Guide emphasises the need for ‘whole person development’, and refers to both teacher organised experiences (intentional teaching) and child initiated experiences in curriculum planning. The Guide places importance on active learning and the integration of different learning areas. It stresses that all-round development will occur when children take part in pleasurable and effective learning experiences. In addition, family participation is seen as an essential in the learning process (EMB, 2006, p.9).

A Planned Curriculum Experience: Intentional Teaching

The following section analyses a curriculum experience that was undertaken by one kindergarten when it was participating in a two-year development project (the ‘Performance Indicators Project2) to improve teaching and learning. This is an example of curriculum that includes intentional teaching and a whole-group experience. The experiences included sensory, first-hand life experiences and in addition, teachers were able to respond in a flexible way to the children’s ideas and interests and extend the plan accordingly.

Data were gathered through extensive video-recording of the days in the classroom before the visit, travelling to the visit, the flower shop visit, returning to the classroom and activities in the days following the visit. Video analysis was informed by Pascal and Bertram’s (2001) strategies for evaluating and improving quality in early childhood settings. Further analysis examined the goodness of fit between the curriculum and the goals of the Guide, which supports claims that this is an example of effective curriculum practice. Most importantly, the analysis shows how the Guide can be used to support effective practices.

Rationale for Curriculum Design

As part of their work on the ‘Performance Indicators’ project, the staff showed their commitment to designing a child-centred curriculum that encouraged children to be active learners. The curriculum matched the principles emphasised in the Guide in many ways. For example, the curriculum plan aimed to:

- Foster opportunities for children to attain all-round development in physical, cognitive and language, affective (emotional) and social, and aesthetic development.
- Provide opportunities to learn through the integration of several learning areas;
- Nurture children’s development through first-hand life experiences and sensory experiences;
- Build on children’s personal experiences in ways that sustain long-term interest;
- Stimulate children’s interest in learning and cultivated positive learning attitudes by participating in pleasurable and interesting experiences.

Visiting the Flower Shop

Staff had noted children’s interest in the growth of plants in the kindergarten and they knew that one child’s grandmother owned a flower shop nearby. It was decided to engage the children in a study of flowers, organise a visit to the flower shop, introduce children to money concepts and encourage children to buy a flower of their choice. Staff decided to focus on the flower shop visit as they saw it as a perfect opportunity to involve the child’s family and so “gain support and appropriate cooperation” (Guide, 2006, p.39) for this active and interactive approach to learning. The decision to visit the flower shop fits with the Guide’s recommendation that “The institution should make good use of community resources and facilities in the vicinity as much as possible, such as different types of shops…” (Guide, 2006, p.98).

Each part of the excursion was carefully planned by the staff to ensure children had every opportunity to learn as well as enjoy themselves. The detailed planning matches the Guide’s recommendation that “Teachers should make good preparations, such as planning the activity content…” (Guide, 2006, p.98).

Staff understood the importance of “learning
by doing” (Guide, 2006, p.12) and that “interest is the driving force for learning” (Guide, 2006, p.12), therefore they designed the curriculum to maximise children’s activity, interest and enjoyment. In addition, staff knew that young children learn most powerfully when they are able to have first-hand experiences that incorporate using all their senses (Guide, 2006, p.18).

The staff built on children’s interest in the topic by bringing different flowers into the classroom for discussion. Children compared sizes, shapes, colours and names of flowers. They matched pictures of flowers and actual flowers. They handled different types of seeds and seed packets, and they touched the flowers, looked closely at parts of the flower, smelt the flowers and used language to describe the flowers. The children’s experiences with the real-life objects provided them with many opportunities to use their senses. For example, they had repeated opportunities to see, smell and touch the flowers.

In addition, staff introduced the concepts associated with buying flowers, such as handling money, the value of money and getting change. On the day of the excursion, children were given real money to take to the shop for their purchase. Finally, politeness conventions involved in shopping were discussed, as well as safety rules for the excursion, which involved a bus trip and then walking with a partner to the shop.

A segment on the video CD that can be found in the Guide to using the Pre-primary Performance Indicators in Learning and Teaching (2003), shows the children’s excitement and interest as they took part in the event. They chatted about the excursion to one another on the bus and greeted the shopkeeper warmly. They spent time observing the flowers carefully, comparing different types, checking the prices, talking to one another, and asking questions to the adults. Finally they made their decisions and asked the shop-keeper for their chosen flower and paid their money. They thanked the shop-keeper and smiling proudly took their flowers back to the classroom. The children remained on-task and engaged in the learning experience.

Once back in the classroom, time was spent discussing the excursion, showing their purchase to others, comparing the collection of flowers and writing and drawing pictures to recall the excursion. The children asked the staff if they could grow plants at the kindergarten. The staff responded to the children’s request quickly and made space for a kindergarten garden. Soon tomatoes, corn and flowers were growing in the classroom.

Links to the Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (2006)

This rich and enjoyable learning experience fits well with the principles in the Guide (2006). The following section shows how the integrated learning experience encouraged children to work towards several goals and objectives of the curriculum. The relevant sections of the Guide are shown in italics. The Developmental Objectives are shown in bold italics, with relevant numbers from the Guide. The Learning Areas are shown in italics, with relevant numbers from the Guide, and each section is followed by an explanation making links to the flower shop experience.

Physical Development - Developmental Objectives

2.3.1 i) To develop children’s sensory perception and abilities of concentration and observation.

2.5.1 Learning Area: Physical Fitness and Health Sensory Development Learning Objectives:

Children are enabled to –

b. concentrate, observe and co-ordinate their sensory functions in enhancing their sensitivity to the environment; and

c. use their sensory ability to explore and appreciate their environment

The flower shop provided many opportunities for children to co-ordinate sensory functions and refine sensory perception, by stimulating olfactory, visual and tactile senses. Children used their observation skills as they compared a range of flowers, and they explored and developed an appreciation for their environment;
2.3.1 ii) To cultivate in children good habits, self-care ability and a healthy lifestyle
2.5.1 Learning Area: Physical Fitness and Health Knowledge of Health: Children are enabled to -
b. Develop self-care ability;
d. Know how to protect themselves by understanding basic health and safety issues

Participating in the excursion meant caring for themselves and protecting themselves by following safety rules, cooperating with adults and their partner, listening to instructions and responding appropriately.

Cognitive and Language - Developmental Objectives
2.3.2 i) to arouse and fulfill the curiosity of children, and to cultivate in them an inquisitive and proactive attitude towards things and people around them;
2.5.4 Learning Area: Science and Technology Learning Objectives: Children are enabled to –
a. develop curiosity about the environment;
b. gain interest in exploring the physical world;
c. master basic exploration techniques such as observation and questioning;
f. care for plants;

The Flower Shop visit and follow-up activities involved in growing plants enabled children to have opportunities to develop important science concepts. Children showed great interest and curiosity in the flowers as part of their physical world. They observed closely and asked questions. They observed similarities and differences in colours, shapes, sizes and varieties. They developed new understanding about plant needs as they observed them grow in their setting;

The Flower Shop experience introduced children to a range of new vocabulary, which they used to express their ideas and observations, for example, learning about flowers meant understanding and using terms such as “stem” “petal” “leaves” and “roots”. Money vocabulary involved recognising and understanding terms for different coins and notes. Children needed to speak politely and clearly to the shop-keeper as they asked questions about the flowers and made their selection, pay their money and thank the shop-keeper. Later in the classroom they shared their experiences with others and communicated their knowledge and recollections of the visit with pictures and words.

2.3.2 ii) to develop children’s simple logical concept in mathematical literacy, so as to help them in analysis, reasoning, judgement and problem-solving.
2.5.3 Learning Area: Early Mathematics
a. develop interest in mathematics and cognitive ability through a variety of activities including play and experiment with objects, as well as everyday life experiences;
b. learn to identify the properties of objects such as their colour, size and shape;
d. develop thinking and problem-solving abilities through activities and observation, analysis and discussion;

2.5.2 Learning Area: Language Listening and Speaking
Learning Objectives: Children are enabled to -
b. use the vocabulary and short phrases they have learnt in order to express their ideas and needs;
c. speak politely, clearly and fluently in dialogue

e. share with others what they experience and encounter in everyday life
2.5.2 Learning Area Writing Learning Objectives: Children are enabled to –
a. communicate with others using paper and pencils/pens by expressing what they see, hear and feel in the form of pictures or words;

The Flower Shop visit was a real-life experience that involved handling coins of different values and there was much discussion about the price of different flowers and whether the children could afford their selection. The experience engaged children in observing and comparing the properties of different types of flowers, such as size, colour, and grouping those belonging to a particular class e.g. certain pink, white and orange
flowers belong to a class called ‘Lillies’.

2.3.3. Affective and Social Development
   iii) to enrich children’s life experiences and strengthen their interpersonal and communication skills

2.5.5. Learning Area Self and Society
   b. build up self-confidence and a sense of responsibility; d. develop communication and interaction abilities and enjoy the pleasure of social life through cultivating proper attitudes towards people and the physical world.

The Flower Shop experience required children to act responsibly and to carry out a set task in an unfamiliar setting successfully. They had opportunities to interact with others and to expand their knowledge and appreciation of the physical world. Staff further developed children’s self-confidence by acting on their suggestions for a classroom garden, and thus showed respect for the children’s ideas.

Commentary

Several principles central to the success of this experience fit well with the recommendations in the Guide. In assessing whether or not the curriculum is appropriate, teachers must ask questions concerning the degree to which it is child-centred and comprehensive and well-balanced (Guide, 2006, p.40).

3.3 Designing the Curriculum
   3.3.1 Be child-centred
   i. Meet children’s developmental needs and abilities
   ii. Relate to children’s experiences and interests

The Flower Shop visit provided a link between one child’s family and the kindergarten setting. It provided a first-hand sensory experience for the children. A thoughtful and thorough approach prepared the children for the visit, so that they had good background knowledge to draw on during the visit. Instructions were clear and time was allowed to encourage children to engage fully by observing closely, discussing what they saw, and finally selecting their purchase. The children’s enthusiasm to learn and level of engagement indicates that this experience did meet their developmental needs and abilities.

3.3.2 (The curriculum should) be comprehensive and well-balanced
   i. Cater for children’s holistic development in cognitive, language, physical, affective, social and aesthetic aspects;
   ii. Foster children’s knowledge, skills and attitudes in different learning areas

Analysis has shown that the curriculum experience provided opportunities for growth in several aspects of children’s development and that it fostered growth of knowledge, skills and attitudes in several integrated learning areas.

The Guide (2006, p.41) notes that changes may occur that results in teachers needing to alter the curriculum plan. One strength of the Flower Shop experience was the ability of staff to listen to the children and respond to their interests and suggestions, for example, growing a garden in their classroom. This flexible and responsive approach demonstrates the teachers’ commitment to the principle of being ‘child centred’, which is emphasised in the Guide.

Staff extended their curriculum plan and worked hard to provide space, materials and equipment for the successful growing of plants because they understood that building on children’s ideas enhances their self-confidence and “encourages them to be more proactive and self-motivated in learning” (Guide, 2006, p.19). When staff encourage and respond to children’s ideas they make important contributions to their development by stimulating “interest in learning and cultivate in them positive learning attitudes, in order to lay the foundation for their future learning” (Guide, 2006, p.18).

Conclusion

This paper has shown how curriculum that
fits with the recommendations in the EMB’s (2006) Guide can make a valuable contribution to children’s development. The Guide (2006) is a practical document that can be used as a reference point for pre-primary settings as they construct their curriculum. Teachers who are willing to think about their curriculum practices and change as necessary will contribute to the EMB’s goals of educational reform for young children in valuable ways.

1 The author of this paper was the project leader of a two-year Quality Education Fund and Hong Kong Institute of Education School of Early Childhood’s project entitled “A Self-Assessment and Self-Improvement Model for Quality Teaching in Preschools”, which resulted in the production of the “Guide to using the Pre-Primary Performance Indicators in Learning and Teaching”.

2 My grateful thanks to the staff of one of the participating kindergartens in the Self-Assessment and Self Improvement Model Project who designed the Flower Shop experience. The video CD showing an excerpt of the Flower Shop experience can be found in the package “Guide to using the Pre-Primary Performance Indicators in Learning and Teaching”, which was distributed to every early childhood setting in Hong Kong in 2003.

References


Quality Education Fund & The Hong Kong Institute of Education (2003). Guide to Using the Pre-primary Performance Indicators in Learning and Teaching. Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Institute of Education.
To teach or not to teach: Controversy surrounding constructivism in early childhood education
教還是不教：關於建構主義幼兒教育的爭議

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Abstract
Constructivism is one of the most influential education theories in the 20th century. It promotes that knowledge is socially constructed and the child is an active participant in meaning making. The central controversy surrounding the constructivism in early childhood education is whether the teacher should teach children knowledge or leave them to discover on their own. The current paper analyzed theoretical and empirical evidence from evolutionary developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, and theory of mind, and concluded that the teacher’s purposeful teaching is vital to preschoolers’ learning; closely scaffolded instructions may work better for young children; and the teacher should make explicit to children the teaching intention and the knowledge change. Implication to early childhood education reform is discussed.

摘要
建構主義是20世紀最有影響的教育理論之一。它提倡知識是社會建構的產物，而兒童是意義建構的積極參與者。圍繞建構主義在早期教育中的中心議題是教師是否應該教給兒童知識、還是應該讓兒童自己去探索發現。本文通過分析來自進化發展心理學、認知心理學、以及心理理論領域的理論與實證資料，認為教師的有目的的教學對兒童學習至關重要；環環緊扣的導師教學對幼兒可能更加有效；以及教師應該向兒童明確指出教學意向以及知識的轉變。文中還討論了教還是不教的問題對幼教變革的意義。

Constructivist learning theory
The very idea of constructivism is not a particular pedagogy itself. Influenced by Piaget’s genetic epistemology and Vygotsky’s social cultural developmental theory, it is rather an epistemological theory describing how learning happens. Coincidently or not, some of the ideas of constructivism reflect the values of progressive education that was already popular during the mid 20th century, including authentic learning, collaboration, and child centeredness in curriculum and assessment, which might explain why educators, including early childhood educators, embraced constructivism with great enthusiasm and made it the most popular education theory in the late 20th century (Sjoberg, 2007).

Constructivist learning theory suggests that knowledge is socially constructed and the child is an active participant in meaning making (Wood, 1998). The theoretical underpinnings of such could be briefly summarized as the following:

1. Children construct their own knowledge
Instead of being at the passive receiving end of the teaching and learning exchange, children construct their own knowledge. Constructivist emphasizes that learners are actively involved in the learning process through accommodating and
assimilating new information into their existing knowledge structure. They construct theory-like understandings about the world by looking for regularities and meanings in the limited information available to them. Their understandings evolve over time through conceptual change (Carey, 1985; Von Glaserfeld, 1989).

2. Learning is an active process
Constructivist learning emphasizes the learning process over the product. Learning is a process in which learners discover principles, concepts and facts for themselves, during which the learners’ active mental involvement plays an important role. A successful learning episode requires the learner to be able to identify the goal of learning, planning the strategy, monitoring the process, and reflecting on the results. Multiple forms of constructivist learning, including discovery learning (Anthony, 1973; Bruner, 1961), inquiry-based learning (Papert, 1980; Rutherford, 1964), active learning (Harmin & Toth, 2006; Simons, 1997), and self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 1990), all stress the self-directedness and metacognitive processing of learners in learning.

3. The teacher’s role is to facilitate knowledge construction
Arguing strongly against the knowledge transferring teaching mode, constructivist learning theory advocates the idea that the teacher’s role is to provide students with opportunities and incentives to construct knowledge (von Glasersfeld, 1996). In fact, the very terms of teacher and teaching become so sensitive that teacher in a constructivist classroom has been called instead as a guide (Mayer, 1996), a coordinator, a facilitator, a resource advisor, a tutor, a coach (Gergen, 1995), or a “midwife” in the birth of knowledge (von Glasersfeld, 1995).

4. Children learn through social interaction
The pedagogical emphasis of constructivism focuses on children’s social interaction with teacher and peers through discussion, collaboration, and negotiation. Vygotsky’s most influential concept in education is the idea of zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), which is the distance between the learner’s understanding without help and that with help. To maximize the child’s understanding, more competent social members provide help that is similar to “scaffolding” (Wood, Brunner, & Ross, 1976), that is, giving support when the child needs it and withdraw support when the child’s knowledge structure is built up.

5. Learning happens in authentic context
Only knowledge derived from authentic context facilitates problem solving in real situations (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). Therefore, effective learning happens when the context is similar to the applied setting (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Based on this belief, intellectual teaching and learning has been compared to apprenticeship in crafts and coaching in sports. For instance, situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1990; Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1990) suggests that academic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics are crafts that needed to be learned though apprenticeship.

Constructivism in early childhood education
Among the curricula and pedagogics designed based on constructivist learning theory, there are some that are oriented toward children, such as the High/Scope’s Plan-Do-Review learning model (Epstein, 2003; Vogel, 2001), and the what we Know-what we Want to know-what we’ve Learned model, a.k.a., the K-W-L model (Ogle, 1986), both of which focus on children’s reflection (Copple, 2003). It remains a question though whether the level of metacognitive demands of those child-centered, self-regulated learning models is suitable for preschool children (Frye & Wang, 2008).

For instance, the K-W-L model is being introduced to early childhood education as low as preK (see Bender & Larkin, 2003; Korstelnik, et al., 1999; Sampson, 2002). It highlights three cognitive steps in self-regulated learning: accessing what I Know, determining what I Want to learn, and recalling what I did Learn, hence K-W-L. Now the K-W-L model is one of the most popular teaching
models in early childhood education. To reach the goals of self-regulated learning such as the K-W-L model, however, learners are expected to be able to self-guide their learning process with highly organized metacognitive skills. Learners need to be aware of their own ignorance and knowledge state change; be able to identify the knowledge source; anticipate, plan, and monitor the learning; and be competent enough to keep track of when, where, and how their own knowledge has changed. It has been argued that until they understand people as mental agents with thoughts and beliefs, children could not develop internal private dialogues and self-regulating speeches that are essential to metacognitive strategies (Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner, 1993). Yet the application of K-W-L in early childhood education seems to ignore the developmental constrains of this age period. Other than simply keeping children busy behaviorally, it is highly suspicious how effective learning models like such are in terms of mentally engaging children.

Children’s metacognitive processing ability is just one of the many aspects that are raising concern about the effectiveness of constructivist learning in early childhood education. As fashionable as it is in early childhood education nowadays, constructivist learning theory is vulnerable to both theoretical and empirical disputes.

**Controversy from different perspectives**

1. **An evolutionary developmental psychology perspective: primary vs. secondary knowledge learning**

   From an evolutionary developmental psychology perspective, Geary (1996) initiated a distinction between biological primary knowledge and biological secondary knowledge. According to Geary, the natural selection process leaves human infants with a cognitive skill set that prepares them for the universal surviving demands. Building on the biological primary abilities, the culturally specific experiences shape the biological secondary abilities through years of rigorous education that is uniquely human. For example, early number sense (Spelke, 2000; Wynn, 1992) and oral language (Pinker, 1997) provide the core foundations for cognitive development, but it is the secondary abilities like arithmetic and reading that hold the stake for surviving in the modern human society.

   The primary abilities are arguably “hardwired” and come natural to babies; on the contract, the secondary abilities are “painstakingly bolted on” (Pinker, 1997, p. ix). Comparing to the evolutionary history, the modern schooling system is relatively young. It only emerged when modeling and imitation became not sufficient enough in transferring knowledge. Human children have to be put into work to master the intellectual skills during an extended period of time. That is why learning school contents is different from those biological primary skills such as walking and talking. Learning in school is hard work, and young children know about that (Thorpe et al., 2004).

   Constructivist learning theory tends to compare school work with children's own effortless learning. The very idea of learning by doing and cognitive apprenticeship is to borrow the observing and imitative learning style in more natural settings other than school. However, since the school work deals with much more cognitively challenging skill sets, it is disputable whether such an approach would still work. In fact, there is empirical evidence arguing against the so claimed effectiveness of minimal guided discovery learning (Mayer, 2004; Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006), which will be discussed in the next section. If at least part of the purpose of schooling is to prepare children with biological secondary abilities that they would not otherwise learn in their natural environment, such as mathematics and literacy, more efficient methods must be developed other than mere observation and imitation.

2. **A cognitive psychology perspective: novice vs. expert learners**

   Two recent reviews provided comprehensive argument against the pedagogy of pure discovery (Mayer, 2004; Kirschner et al., 2006). Mayer (2004) suggested that empirical data from the last fifty years do not support the constructivist teaching and learning technique of pure discovery. He argued the hands-on activities in pure discovery are
good at keeping students busy but not necessarily engaging them cognitively. He is not against constructivist learning in general though. Instead of pure discovery, he promoted guided discovery, a mixture of direct instruction and hands-on activity.

Similarly, Kirschner et al.’s review does not argue against constructivist learning in general either. Instead, they argue that unlike experts, learners with little or no prior knowledge, the so-called novices, do not possess the underlying mental models necessary for learning by doing. Based on cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988, 1999), structured learning activities using well-designed, well-structured learning environments such as worked example work best for the novices.

Preschool curricula are filled with new tasks that most of the young children are facing for the first time of their lives. It would be quite a challenge for them to possess experts’ mental models in those tasks. Properly structured, closely scaffolded tasks would be much suitable for young children’s learning.

3. A theory of mind perspective: the mindful learner

Constructivist learning promotes learning by doing; but doing does not necessarily leads to learning. If one could put three blocks together that looks just like the word “DOG”, does it mean she knows how to spell “DOG”? The answer depends on whether the person had a mental representation of the word when she did it. The learner needs to realize her own mental processing, that is, her knowledge state has changed. In this example, the person might not know how to spell the word at all, just so happened coincidentally, which is not learning.

Mental state understanding is important for children’s learning. However, it takes almost all their preschool years to finally realize learning is a mental process. It is argued that infants have an innate understanding of people as goal-directed agents (Gergely, 2001; Premack, 1990), which enables them to interpret and imitate other people’s actions through projecting their own goals (Meltzoff, 2005, 2007, Meltzoff & Moore, 1983, 1997). At the end of the first year of life, infants begin to engage in object-directed interactions with people such as shared-attention and social referencing, indicating that they now can share a psychological relation to an object with others (see Moore, 1996). By 18 to 24 months, toddlers acquire the understanding of the so-called motivational mental states, such as desires and intention (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Meltzoff, 1995). The newly acquired skills enable them to learn new words from other people’s speech using their desire, eye-gaze attention, and communicative intention as clues (Akhtar & Tomasello, 2000; Baldwin, 1995; Bloom & Tinker, 2001; Diesendruck, Markson, & Bloom, 2003; Hollich, Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2000; Saylor & Troseth, 2006; Tomasello & Farrar, 1986).

More complicated mind reading abilities represented by false belief understanding emerge between 3 and 5 years of age. During this age, children begin to comprehend that people have a mental representation of the reality, which might or might not match up with the reality (Wellman, 1990). The appreciation of the so-called epistemic mental states such as beliefs and knowledge (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Moses & Flavell, 1990) benefits children’s learning in multiple ways. For example, 4-year-olds, but not 3-year-olds tended to learn words from knowledgeable speakers instead of ignorant and hesitative speakers (Sabbagh & Baldwin, 2001); 4- and 5-year-olds showed sensitivity to the speakers’ knowledge when they were learning an individual’s name (Birch & Bloom, 2002); and 4-year-olds showed advanced discrimination over 3-year-olds between the trustworthy informant and the untrustworthy informant while seeking information, they also endorsed information from the trustworthy informant more (Clement, Koenig, & Harris, 2004; Corriveau, Pasquin, & Harris, 2005; Harris, 2007; Koenig, Clement, & Harris, 2004; Koenig & Harris, 2005). The differentiated preference to teachers who have more accurate information indicates an awareness of knowledge as a mental representation, and that different people have different knowledge. This is the initial step in becoming a “mindful learner” (Wang, working paper).
Around the same age, children begin to realize that teaching is intentional activity (Frye & Ziv, 2005). Teaching is "an intentional activity to increase the knowledge (or understanding) of another, thereby reducing the knowledge difference between teacher and learner" (Ziv & Frye, 2004, p. 458). Frye and Ziv (2005) examined 3- and 5-year-olds' understanding of intention in teaching. They told children stories about either a teaching event, or an event where the teacher was not aware of the presence of the learner, hence an imitation event. They found that 3-year-olds tended to say the teacher tried to teach even without knowing the learner was there. Only 5-year-olds could distinguish the teaching intention from the learning intention in the imitation. They also found 3-year-old children had trouble detecting a teaching intention embedded in a game. It seems at least in the case of teaching, young children found it difficult to understand intention that is not explicitly stated, or in conflict with the outcome.

Theory of mind is the foundation of metacognitive self-regulation (Flavell, 1987; Kuhn, 2000). Without such, it is hard to imagine children engaging in self-directed active knowledge construction, or following teacher’s teaching intention. The prolonged theory of mind development during preschool years is a major obstacle in the way of implementing constructivist learning pedagogies in early childhood education. Children need to become mindful learners first before they understand why the teacher is playing that which-number-is-the-largest game with us again, who I should turn to when I want to learn about that new computer game, or the person who accidentally put three blocks together that looks just like the word “DOG” did not in reality learn how to spell that word.

To teach or not to teach, and how?
Should the teacher teach children knowledge or just leave them to explore and discover on their own? This has been the central controversy surrounding constructivist learning theory in early childhood education. From an evolutionary developmental psychology perspective, modern schooling only exists because pure discovery and imitation are no longer sufficient in transferring knowledge from generation to generation. Young children are in school to learn things they would not learn otherwise following their biological timetable of maturation. Furthermore, humans are programmed to learn from each other (Harris, 2007; Bloom, 2000), as well as to teach (Strauss, Ziv, & Stein, 2002). The profession of teaching has the word “teach” embedded in. So the short answer to that question is: the teacher should always teach.

A more sophisticated question follows: how to teach then? From a cognitive psychology perspective, being novices in a lot of aspects, children need well structured instructions with sufficient support from teachers. Constructivist curriculum in early childhood education is teacher guided and child centered, or as Reggio Emilia proposed, child originated and teacher framed (Forman & Fyfe, 1998). In addition to emphasizing children’s active role in learning, constructivist teaching and learning still needs to put teacher in the central position. Comparing with those in direct instructions, teachers in closely scaffolded constructivist classrooms play a more vital role in children’s learning. They need to be resourceful planners of curriculum, skilled facilitators in problem solving and collaboration, as well as keen observers of children’s learning, and reflective practitioners to know when to help and when to step out.

By advocating children actively construct their own knowledge, constructivism promotes epistemic autonomy and creativity. However, from the perspective of mental state understanding, preschoolers are still on their way to comprehending what knowledge is, what learning is, and how learning intention works. The limitation of their metacognitive knowledge and strategy calls for special attention when implementing constructivist learning in preschool classrooms. For example, because of children’s premature understanding of teaching intention, play based learning has the risk of turning into mere play with no learning. Explicitly stated teaching intention from the teacher’s part will help draw children’s attention to the learning aspect and engage them mentally.
Implication to the development of early childhood education

Progressive education and constructivist learning in the US were challenged after the Soviet's launch of Sputnik satellite in the late 1950's (Nouriot, 2008). People realized the American schools were not doing a very good job in teaching children academic contents. U.S. educational psychologists looked around and discovered that Asian kids were doing much better in school than American kids (Stevenson, Chen, & Lee, 1993; Stevenson, Lee, & Stigler, 1986). Stevenson and colleagues argued that the attitudes and beliefs about academic learning and the effort teachers, children, and families put into it were responsible for the achievement gap. In other words, the U.S. schools teach too little; and Asian schools maybe teach too much.

Early childhood education reforms in different corners of the world are arguably going to two different directions. On the one hand, in the wakening of public education's insufficiency, American educators and policy makers are pushing high-stake standardized testing and school accountability. In early childhood education, the states legislated No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) emphasizing academic skills such as early literacy and arithmetic to make sure children go to school ready to learn.

On the other hand, Asian early childhood educators are reflecting on their own practice (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). Take Hong Kong as an example, back in 1997, the then newly established HKSAR government introduced a school quality assurance framework (Education Commission, 1997). The government then legislated two central measures of quality assurance including school self-evaluation and external school review (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003). Heavily influenced by constructivist paradigm, the quality assurance framework downplays the examination oriented, drilling for academic proficiency teaching, and promotes generic skills and low-stake, criterion-referenced assessment (Mak, 2007). For early childhood education, according to the list of quality assurance dos and don’ts on Education Bureau’s website (Education Bureau), the preschools should:

- Adopt different teaching approaches and organize various child-centered learning activities;
- Enable children to learn happily through play and activities;
- Make good use of learning corners and playing materials in the classroom.

However,

- Don’t concentrate on imparting knowledge and ignoring the importance of cultivating attitudes and developing skills;
- Don’t ask children in Nursery Class to write;
- Don’t adopt a one-way, lecturing form of teaching;
- Don’t ask children to do mechanical copying exercises;
- Don’t ask children to do excessive drills on calculation.

As for the assessment in early childhood education,

- Assessment should be based on continuous observations; children’s performance and the progress made in various aspects should be recorded;
- Don’t assess children by means of dictation, tests or examinations.

Comparing the U.S. early childhood reform with that in Hong Kong, it seems even though both governments emphasize the accountability issue, the goals of the reforms are considerably different. Borrowing early childhood researcher Joseph Tobin’s metaphor (personal communication, 2007), the situation is like two trains facing opposite directions in the dark, passing through each other, each pursuing what the other party has left behind. The issue here is still the question of to teach or not to teach. One could not help but wondering: Is there a possibility that the two trains could meet somewhere in the middle?
Note: The author would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their constructive critics.

References


(Eds.), Metacognition, motivation and understanding (pp. 21-29). Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
《香港幼兒學報》每冊均會介紹一所幼稚園或幼兒中心。如您希望向本學報提出有關建議，歡迎與編委會聯絡。

編者言：梁玉心校長為資深的聖公會屬校校長，曾歷任於兩所屬會學校之管理階層。梁校長積極於研究及推進香港的學前教育，近年籌辦之「貧富宴」，更為人津津樂道，實為愛的教育之優質典範。

聖公會幼稚園(畢拉山)：貧富宴

梁玉心

聖公會幼稚園 (畢拉山)

學校簡介

六十年代初期，香港島畢拉山居住了一群開採礦石的工人家庭，由於交通不便，很礦工子弟需要長途跋涉上學，為免幼兒失去接受教育的機會，聖公會港九教區（現為香港聖公會）本著「非以役人，乃役於人」的基督精神，於1965年在金文泰道地段（現今校舍）興建聖腓力小學，提供全人的基督教教育。隨著香港經濟迅速發展，石礦場開闢，畢拉山的社區蓬勃發展，樓房的興建，新家庭的遷入，對幼稚園學位需求倍增，1975年聖公會幼稚園在聖腓力小學校舍開辦分校，成為今日的聖公會幼稚園（畢拉山），延續愛與關懷的教育。

學校文化

兩所幼稚園開辦超過數十載，保留了很多學校傳統文化。學校沒有傳統校服，幼兒可以自由穿著便服上課；課堂活動簡單有序，讓幼兒從容學習；重視品格教育，培養幼兒謙恭有禮的態度。在現今凡事講求效率，成效必須量化、形象要鮮明的社會風氣下，本園的傳統文化顯得格格不入，但這些傳統正是我們的辦學根基，讓幼兒擁有自由、空閒和紀律的成長要素。

教學特色

在聖公會幼稚園，全人教育就是基督教教育，亦是愛的教育。讓愛超越幼兒的自我，將人與社會、環境及宇宙等關係互動起來，成為幼兒的生活學習元素，建立和諧的價值觀，從內心出發關懷身邊的人、事、物，感受別人的需要，在傳授知識的過程中協助幼兒建立良好的品格。二零零八年二月本園接受教育局學前機構質素評核，在報告書中評核員認同學校設計「貧富宴」的理念，欣賞幼兒的參與態度，發揮助人的精神。

「貧富宴」的發展

正如佛洛姆 (Fromm) 認為人若能主動付出愛，就會呈現「責任」、「尊敬」和「諒解」的行為 (漢菊德，1998)。因此，我們透過大自然環境培養幼兒有感恩的心，在自由探索空間懂得欣賞；從團體的互動去感覺他人對自己，以及自己對他人的關懷。

階段一：環境教學

校園矗立在畢拉山與金文泰道的山谷位置，環境清幽、山間流水淙淙，幼兒置身其中體驗四季的變化：三月春暖開花有如仙境、七月夏雨滋潤花草樹木、十月秋風吹亂遍地黃葉、十一寒冬剩下乾枯樹枝。為了珍惜校園擁有的大自然活力，我們透過活動鼓勵幼兒，在欣賞畫後繪畫一幅「疊查查」的圖畫；幼兒可以在雨天穿上雨衣，打著雨傘漫步草地；他們可以拾起片片黃葉布置課室，更可以在冷空氣中吹出一口暖氣，看看有可變化。這些小玩意讓幼兒從生活中觀察及探索自然的奧秘，培養感恩態度。
終於有第一次收成了，我們決定在新年前進行收割，幼兒將田裡的蔬菜拔起，交給高班同學負責清洗，然後放入鍋內煮熟，大家一起品賞自己預備的「雜菜」鍋。幼兒歡天喜地地收割，大哥哥、大姐姐則一臉認真地洗菜，他們還告訴父母自己種出特別香甜的蔬菜。

在反思討論中大家認同花王的專長是種花，種菜還是由專業農夫負責，其次是沒有因應氣候選擇適合種植的菜苗。如若果將這次經驗引申到教學工作，首要在教學選材上必需配合幼兒實際需要，此外應按照幼兒的專長給予適當的發揮機會。種植活動讓幼兒經歷成功和失敗，培養耐心等待，建立屢敗屢戰的精神，老師同樣上了寶貴的一課。

階段三：情景教學

本園學生多來自社經地位較理想的家庭，擁有充裕的物質生活，為使幼兒從生活中體驗「珍惜」和「憐憫」，學習實踐助人的態度，學校於每年農曆新年後均參與一些志願團體的籌款活動，鼓勵幼兒捐出一封「利是」幫助有需要的人，透過活動討論「金錢」的價值和意義。老師特別安排「貧富宴」，讓幼兒親身經歷擁有豐富物質時應有的態度，同時感受飢餓時的不快。

去年有一位男孩在抽籤決定扮演的角色時，極之不願意扮演「貧窮人」，於是他手地表示「我會去偷食物」。到舉行活動時，他望著食物發呆，老師提出誰來幫忙工作便有食物，他也不為所動，後來發覺完成任務的同學開心地獲得食物，他決定加入工作，並體會工作賺取食物比較快樂。另一位男孩看著別人進食時不禁哭起來，其他同學安慰他說「佢地會請我地食，唔好食」，傷心的同學回應「佢地唔會要」；活動進行時，當然富裕的同學主動將食物分給貧窮同學，傷心的同學非常開心，在過程中幼兒體驗自力更新的快樂，過有失望時要有盼望和保持對人的信心。同樣進食前有富裕同學提出太多食物，不如分一些給貧窮的人；活動在結束時前桌上仍有很多食物，幼兒感到很浪費，主動建議用盒子把食物留起來。透過實情實境，幼兒容易受同儕及學習環境氣氛所影響，從而產生不同的反應，並隨著自己的感受表達出來。
今年幼兒從新聞報導中知道發生「金融海嘯」，引發他們積極討論貧窮的原因，提出不同方法回應怎樣改善生活；幼兒提出「打工賺錢」的概念，他們認真地列出每項工作可以用來賺取的金錢，例如掃地工資一元、抹檯工資七角、植樹葉工資三元。在進行「貧富宴」時，沒有幼兒因為貧窮而哭泣，因為他們知道只要努力，願意工作便有食物。情景教學讓幼兒在有限制的學習空間中，發揮創意解難能力，直接從經驗中發現人與人的關係，從而從中培養自己的正面情緒，建立個人品德的價值觀。

同學生提出可以賺錢的工作

同學努力工作換取食物

參考資料

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