University of Roehampton

DOCTORAL THESIS

A comparative ethnographic case study of the early years curriculum in Chinese and English settings

Tang, Fengling

Award date:
2008

A comparative ethnographic case study of the early years curriculum in Chinese and English settings

by
Fengling Tang

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of PhD

School of Education

Roehampton University

2008

Contents

The macro-level analysis

Section III Conclusion

Bibliography   230-254

List of figures and photographs

Appendix

Abstract

This study aims to explore how similarities and differences in early years curriculum practice are constructed in selected Chinese and English settings and how this can be identified from the perspectives of the research participants. The aim of the study made an ethnographic approach the most suitable. Data collection methods used were participant observations, open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and informal conversations. A case study of one Chinese kindergarten and one English nursery school was conducted between August 2005 and July 2006.

The major findings have been located in three levels of analysis – the micro, meso, and macro. The micro level reveals the prevalence of direct teaching in the process of language, mathematics and arts activities in the Chinese setting whilst the English setting shows a tendency that the children play a major part in their learning process. Children's free-flow play activities in both the settings share much more similarities than differences in that children's dynamics, concentration, curiosity, imagination, and creativity are fully evidenced. The meso level mainly looks into the research participants' perspectives on issues underpinning the early years curriculum such as the relationship between the curriculum, teaching and play, views of childhood and the ways for children's learning. For example, contested childhood is strongly voiced among parents in the Chinese and English settings and is represented in their romantic idea of 'a happy childhood' with an emphasis on children's play, well-being, and positive interactions with others and in their anxiety about childhood pressure with regard to children's learning. The macro level explains that the curriculum practice in the Chinese setting is closely associated with Basil Bernstein's concept of visible pedagogy whilst the English setting shows a strong link to his notion of invisible pedagogy. Visible pedagogy is characterised as strong classification and framing, which is identified by direct teaching, the low status of play, and a one-way direction of teacher-child interactions in the Chinese setting. Indirect teaching, the dominance of play, a two-way direction of practitioner-child interactions, and the dynamic of child-child interactions in the English setting are indicators for invisible pedagogy centring around weak classification and framing.

Section I Research background

Section I containing two chapters introduces the research background to the study in order to clarify the theoretical underpinnings and methodological issues. Chapter one is a literature review looking into policy development in early years education and care and the research involved in the early years curriculum in Chinese and English contexts. Chapter two first illustrates my research position which is underpinned by qualitative interpretivism and symbolic interactionism. It then brings in my research questions and justification of a comparative ethnographic case study. The research procedure including research methods and aspects of data analysis is then illustrated. The ethical issues are discussed in the final part of chapter two.

Chapter One

Literature review

This chapter acts as a theoretical framework for the conduct of my research project, especially for the formulation of initial research questions and aspects of developing the empirical investigations into the early years curriculum. The first part is a review of the historical and current development of the early years policies in Chinese and English contexts. It opens a window for us to have a general idea of the values and principles underpinning early years education and care in the two contexts. The chapter then examines a variety of research related to the early years curriculum in the two contexts, in which the gap between the importance of the early years curriculum for children's development and learning and the ambiguity of understandings of the early years curriculum is detected. Understandings of the 'curriculum' and the 'early years curriculum' are explored in the final part of the chapter in order to bring in a working definition of 'the early years curriculum' for this current study.

1.1 Setting the scene: policy review

1.11 The Chinese context

1.111 The historical development of early years education and care

Policy review here is used as part of rather than isolated from literature review for the purpose of thesis structure organisation. Kindergarten, whose equivalent pronunciation in Chinese is 'you er yuan', is a term used to refer to organisations or institutions which educate children from the age of three to six outside home settings in contemporary China (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 1999: 42). The adoption of the term 'you er yuan' was influenced by the kindergarten movement led by the German educationalist and philosopher Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) in the 19th century (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 2003).

Chinese early years education and care has been developing since the establishment of the first government-run kindergarten in Hubei Province in 1903 and the enactment of the first Chinese early years policy *Mengyang Yuan Regulations and*

Family Education Law Regulations in 1904 (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 2003). 'Meng yang yuan' is a term used prior to the use of 'you er yuan' to refer to organisations or institutions for young children from three year olds to six year olds in the early 19th century (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 2003: 8). Chinese early years education and care has adopted a system of 'uniform guidance under the government, local responsibility, hierarchical management and distributed responsibility located to respective sections' since 1949, the year when the People's Republic of China was founded (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 2003: 33). Kindergarten education is the most crucial part of early years education and care for young children, especially those between 3 years old and 6 years old (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 1999; China Pre-school Education Research Association, 2003).

The period since the mid-1970s has seen a steady expansion of kindergarten development across cities to the countryside ranging from full time daily kindergartens, boarding kindergartens, pre-schools, and mixed kindergarten classes either government-run or privately-funded. This expansion is considered to be a result of the government restoration of confidence in education including early years education and care after the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976) (China Pre-school Research Association, 2003). For instance, the *City Kindergarten Work Regulations* (Draft) (1979) together with the *On the Development of Countryside Early Years Education and Care* (1983) acted as the catalyst for the steady development of kindergartens across China. Consequently, there has been steady growth in the number of children enrolled in kindergartens from 2.45 million in the year of 1973 to 22.44 million in the year of 2000 (see Figure 1.1). However, the period 1958-1962 saw a sudden expansion of kindergartens and an abruptly increasing number of children enrolled in kindergartens as a result of the second Five-Year-Plan (1958-1962) set up by the Chinese government by boosting industry, agriculture, transportation, commerce, and cultural awareness to fulfil the needs of socialist economic and cultural development (China Preschool Education Association, 2003). For example, the number of children enrolled in kindergartens was 10.88 million in 1957 whilst 29.50 million children were enrolled in kindergartens in 1958.
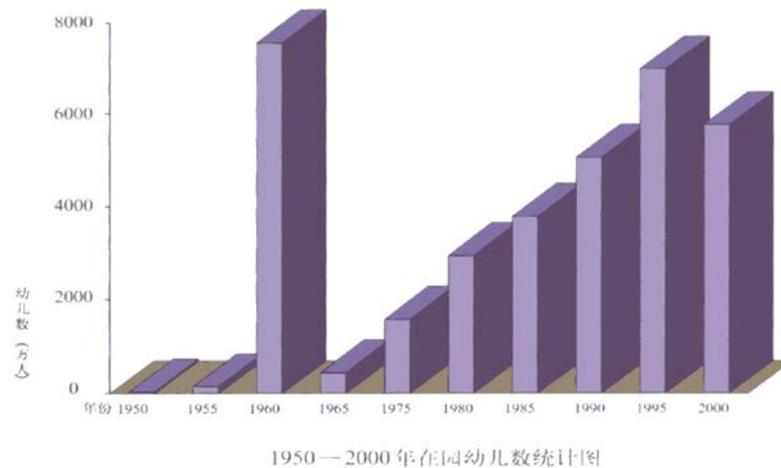
Figure 1.1: Chinese children enrolled in kindergartens 1950-2000

(China Pre-school Education Research Association, 2003: 32)

Parents are required to pay for their kindergarten children's education and care fees although kindergarten education is regarded as 'important part of elementary education' and 'foundational stage of school system and life-long education' (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001: 4). The headteacher is responsible for the administrative, personnel and professional management of kindergartens according to Chinese early years policies (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001; Chinese Pre-school Education Research Association, 2003). Qualifications of kindergarten headteachers and teachers have undergone steady growth since the 1980s in terms of degree education, certificate education and professional training. For example, 17,700 kindergarten teachers were awarded their first degrees in education through 3- or 4-year college or university training in 1991 whilst more than 90,000 kindergarten teachers got their first degrees in education in 2000 (see Figure 1.2). (The five categories from the bottom to the top listed in Figure 1.2 are defined as: 1) three- or four-year education degree training in teachers college or normal university; 2) four- year preschool education specialised training in normal school; 3) three-year preschool education training in vocational school; 4) students graduated from senior middle schools without preschool education specialised training; 5) students graduated from junior middle schools without preschool education specialised training)

非师范专业
毕业 初中毕
业以下

非师范专业毕
业 高中毕业以
下

职业高中幼教
专业毕业

中师毕业

师范院校本专
科毕业

九十年代幼儿园教师学历情况图：（单位：万人）
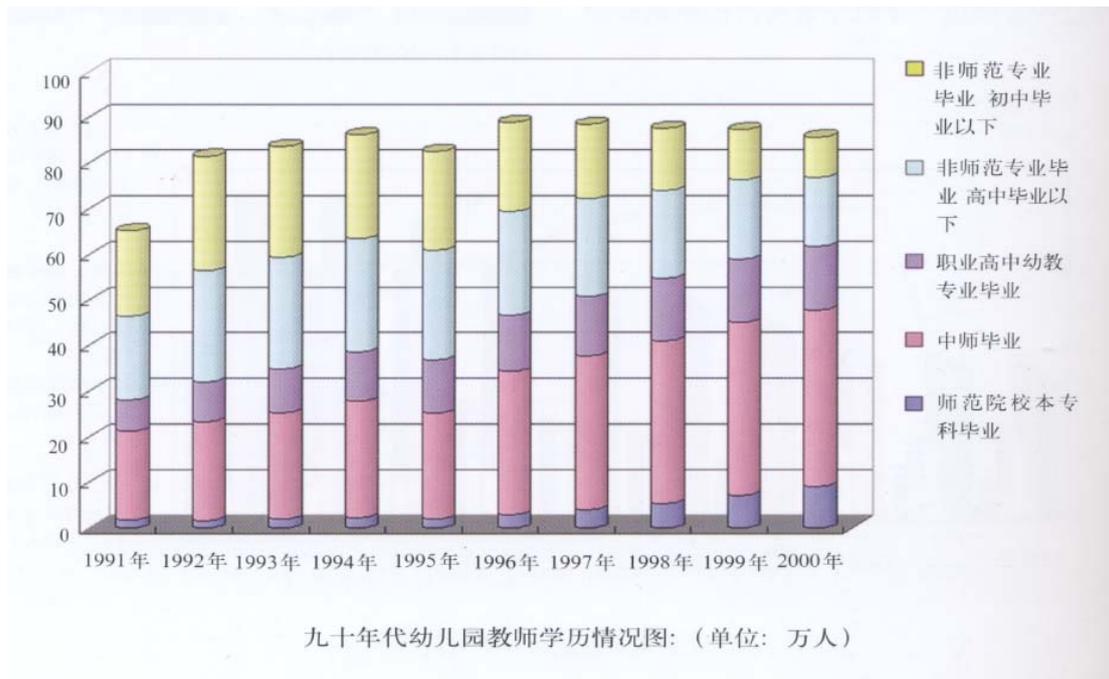
Figure 1.2: Chinese kindergarten teachers' qualifications in the 1990s

(China Pre-school Education Research Association, 2003: 132)

The curriculum adopted in contemporary Chinese kindergartens has been under the guidance of the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001) whilst there has been common recognition of the importance of the localized curriculum among researchers and professionals in the field of Chinese early years (Yao and Fang, 2002; Zhu, J.Y., 2003; Shanghai Education Committee Educational Research Cluster, 2004; Wu, 2004).

1.112 The promotion of children's harmonious development

This part reviews the values and principles underpinning Chinese kindergarten education. It first reveals that the primary goal of kindergarten practice is to promote the overall harmonious development of young children both physically and spiritually. For instance, the educational goals in the *Kindergarten Curriculum Criteria* (1932) were prescribed as to 'promote children's physical and spiritual health; help children to pursuit happiness; cultivate good life habits; help families to educate children to improve family education' (cited in China Pre-school Education Research Association 2003: 145). The *City Kindergartens Work Regulations* (1979) describes the task of kindergarten work as,

15

> According to the Party's educational principle and Chairman Mao's instruction 'care for and educate children well', young children will be provided the basic overall development education in order to healthily and happily grow up, lay a good foundation for primary education…
>
> (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 1999: 123-124)

The educational goal is described in the *Kindergarten Education Outline* (1981):

> Based on young children's developmental status, the educational goals for kindergartens are to promote children's overall development including physical, intelligent, moral, and aesthetic development in order to let them healthily and happily grow up and lay good foundation for primary education and for the future of a new generation.
>
> (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 1999: 168)

The *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (2001) also states that kindergarten should provide appropriate environment for children's overall development both physically and spiritually. At the same time, with an increase of women working in the paid labour force rising from 43% of total labour force in 1980 to 45% in 2004 in China (World Bank Group, 2002), kindergartens provide crucial support for families with working mothers in that mothers can make contributions to the country's economy and social development without being distracted by child rearing (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 1999).

1.113 An emphasis on the educational function of kindergarten

Besides the notion of the promotion of children's physical and spiritual growth revealed in the policy review, there has been an emphasis of the educational function of the kindergarten. For instance, the usage of 'assignments' was first highlighted in the *Kindergarten Curriculum Criteria* (1932). Then, educational contents prescribed in the *Kindergarten Temporary Regulations* (1952) revealed that physical education, language, knowledge of the environment, drawing and hand-crafts, music, and calculation were regarded as the main foci for kindergarten children whilst 'assignments' were classified into compulsory assignment and selective assignment and 'teaching' first became a formal term (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 1999). Chinese 'pin yin', Chinese characters, and mathematics teaching were not put into the policy until 1960 by the Ministry of Education and National Women Association. The importance of learning Chinese 'pin yin', a phonological system for Chinese characters by combining sounds into syllables, was described as:

> Having children learn Chinese 'pin yin' well from an early age is good for them to use 'pin yin' to learn the Beijing dialect pronunciation correctly, to learn to speak

16

Mandarin correctly, which will actively promote the standardisation of our mother tongue. Children will use 'pin yin' letters to read children's books if they master Chinese 'pin yin' from an early age; they will develop their language ability better through reading and get better education on communist moral quality… In addition, raising the requirement of mathematics can decrease the length of mathematical learning in primary schools and will actively promote the mathematical reform in primary education.

(China Pre-school Education Research Association, 1999: 112-113)

Different teaching methods and teaching tools to teach Chinese pinyin, literacy, and mathematics were emphasized in this document in order to improve teaching quality. For example, play, folk songs, stories, music, physical exercises, and a variety of learning materials and equipment such as pictures, flash cards, and slides were encouraged in kindergarten teaching (China Pre-school Education and Research Association, 1999). 'Teaching' as a formal term was well justified in this way. 'Assignments' were used in the *City Kindergarten Work Regulations* (1979) to refer to language, common knowledge, calculation, music, arts, and physical education whilst 'assignments' were defined as 'an important teaching form as planned to transmit basic knowledge, and skills to children and develop children's intelligence' (China Pre-school Education and Research Association, 1999: 127). This is reflected in Sidel's (1982: 87) argument that Chinese early years policies after the mid-1970s are in tune with the society's rapid industralization and modernization focusing on 'the acquisition of skills and knowledge rather than the highly political approach of the Cultural Revolution Period'.

It was not until in the *Kindergarten Education Outline* (1981) that the terms 'assignments' and 'teaching' were replaced by 'having lessons' (China Pre-school Education and Research Association, 1999: 193). Play, physical education, having lessons, observation, labour work, and entertainment were defined as appropriate educational activities. It corrected the misconception that having lessons was regarded as the only way to implement the *Kindergarten Education Outline* (1981) and addressed the importance of a balanced use of having lessons and other kinds of educational activities. Although the terms including 'assignments', 'teaching', and 'having lessons' were not used any more in policies such as the *Kindergarten Work Regulations* (1989) and the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (2001) whilst 'educational activities' or 'educational processes' were frequent references in those policies. The role of the teacher is defined in the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (2001: 15) as 'facilitator, co-operator, and guider for children's learning activities'. In addition, teachers' guidance was divided into two categories –

'direct guidance' and 'indirect guidance', which should be well balanced in arranging and organising children's educational activities (Ministry of Education, 2001: 14).

1.114 The position of play

The importance of play was mentioned throughout the history of Chinese early years policies. For example, the *Mengyang Yuan Regulations and Family Education Law Regulations* (1904) puts play, songs, conversations, and hand-crafts into Mengyang Yuan's curriculum, which was transplanted from Japanese policy influenced by the kindergarten movement led by Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852). The *Kindergarten Curriculum Criteria* (1932) designed by Chen Heqin, who was influenced by American progressive education, emphasized the importance of play, stories, music, and arts to the children's development. The *Ministry of Education on Regulations for Kindergarten Children's Work and Rest System and All Types of Activities* (1956) claimed that kindergarten educational and teaching work is implemented by means of play, assignments, and outdoor activities. However, it is the *City Kindergartens Work Regulations* (1979) that first described play as 'the basic activity for children' and 'an important means to implement children's overall-development education' (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 1999: 127). This document defined different types of play activities including creative play, physical education play, intelligence play, and musical play and so forth by providing enough time and sufficient materials for children's play activities. That play was not random activities but was led by educators was also addressed in the document. Both the *Kindergarten Work Regulations* (1989) and the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (2001) considered 'play as the basic activity' whilst it seems that the importance of play is built upon the educational purpose for the sake of children's learning and development engaged in the five areas – health, language, social development, science and arts.

1.115 The rights of the child

There has been emphasis on the rights of children since the enactment of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). The China Children's Development Centre established in 1983 aims to promote Chinese children's overall development through cooperation and collaboration at national and international levels such as the

United Nations International Children's Emergency Funds (UNICEF), which has promoted the awareness and development of children's rights across China (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 2003). For example, the *Chinese Children's Development Guidelines in the 1990s* (1992) highlights that the Party and the government pay attention to children's survival, protection and development by developing medical and health services for children, decreasing infant mortality, and providing special programmes and a mainstream system for children with disabilities. The *Mother-Infant Health Development Law* (1994) provided the statutory assurance for the health development of mothers and infants, which promoted the expansion of medical and health services for families (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 1999). Overall, children's rights involved in survival, education, and development have been promoted by the government efforts since the 1990s.

1.12 The English context

For the purpose of thesis writing, 'the English context' refers to the context in which England is mostly involved although there are some occasions where it might mean the context of the UK, especially when it is hard to confirm whether England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Island is involved.

1.121 The historical development of early years education and care

Since the establishment of the first infant school by Robert Owen in Scotland in 1816, the development of early years education and care in the United Kingdom (UK) has been remarkably slow compared to much of mainland Europe (Pugh, 2006). The year of 1870 marked the beginning of public-funded compulsory education for five-year-olds. During the First World War (1914-1918), the predominant form of early years education and care in the UK was in state primary schools. Baldock, Fitzgerald, and Kay (2005) argue that successive governments supported the principle of free nursery education in the twentieth century but seldom found funding for it, which led to the emergence of voluntary playgroup movement in the 1960s and the private sector of day-care centres in the 1990s. The government figures of June 2006 show that there is universal part-time educational provision for three- and four-year-olds as well as 1.5 million childcare places including crèches, registered childminders,

out-of-school care, sessional care and full-day care in England (see Figure 1.3, cited in Brehony and Nawrotzki, 2007).

Fig. 1: School day/term-time childcare places
as of June 2006
(Ofsted 2006, 14)
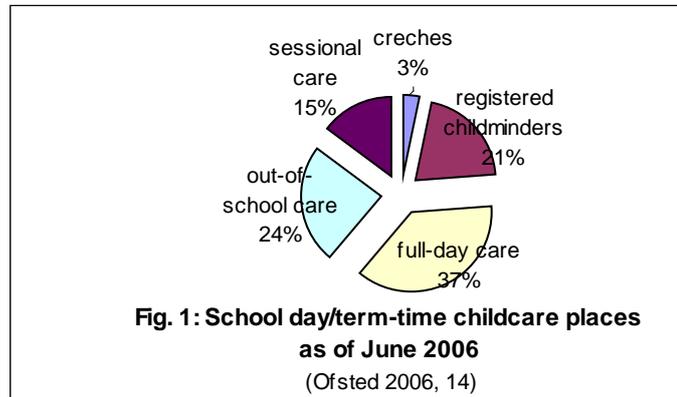
Figure 1.3 School day/term-time childcare places in England (2006)

The expansion of early years education and care in England and other countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is identified as a result of four broad contextual challenges (OECD, 2006): the rise of the service economy alongside women's entry into paid employment, the necessity of reconciling work and family responsibilities based on gender equality, the falling fertility and continuing immigration, and the attempt to solve the problem of child poverty and educational failure. The Conservative party between 1979 and 1997 attempted to tackle the issue of the 'cycle of deprivation' in that the inability to cope in the market economy was considered due to the children's experiences of growing up in poverty, which made deprivation of one generation lead to the next (Baldock et al., 2005; Chitty, 2004). The measures introduced to break this cycle were the provision of effective education in parenting and better education for pre-school children. For example, the Department of Health (1991) announced an extended and improved system of regulations for childminding and day care; the Early Childhood Education Forum in 1993 called for an expansion in early childhood services through better co-ordination; the 1995 Voucher policy made additional funding available in private, voluntary and local authority nurseries to parents; and work on the *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning* was announced by the Department of Education and Employment (DfEE) in 1996. However, the considerable real changes concerning both principles and practical issues involved in early years sections in the UK did not occur until the Labour government came to power in 1997 (Baldock et al., 2005; Pugh,

2006). Several major elements in the policy adopted in and after 1997 will be illustrated in the following passages.

1.122 High-quality early years education and care

The Labour government proposed clear targets on high-quality education within the early years. In 1997, the Labour government published a white paper *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997), in which some targets including high-quality education for four-year-olds, provision of childcare and education to meet local needs, establishment of early excellence centres, and the effective assessment of children starting school were set up for early years practice for the year 2002 (Anning and Edwards, 2006). The call for quality early years education and care was further supported by the provision of integrated services for children through joint efforts covering education, social care, and health (Andreae and Matthews, 2006; Hawker, 2006; OECD, 2006; Pugh, 2006). For example, each local authority was required to set up an *Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership* (EYDCP) (DfES, 2001) to represent the full range of stakeholders of early years education and care. The EYDCPs were expected to operate independently of Local Education Authority (LEA) infrastructures in order to give equal entitlement to different sectors. Integrated services envisioned by the creation of Children's Trusts which replaced the EYDCPs were developed and pioneered in Sure Start programs. Children's Trusts were being promoted through the Guidance on the Duty to Cooperate under the *Children Act 2004* (DfES, 2004a). The act highlights that a high-level policy and decision-making body operate through formal constitutional agreements representative of different stakeholders in the process of inter-agency governance in order to provide integrated services for children (DfES, 2004a: 5):

- the reconfiguration of services around the child and family in one place, for example, children's centres, extended schools and the bringing together of professionals in multi-disciplinary teams;
- dedicated and enterprising leadership at all levels of the system;
- the development of a shared sense of responsibility across agencies for safeguarding children and protecting them from harm…

In the meantime, the government calls for better regulation by transferring responsibility to the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and calls for good practice through introducing the *Early Learning Goals* (DfES, 1999) and the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000). For example, the

system of regulation in England was transferred to the Ofsted in 2001, in which regulation was separated from support services and local authorities were given clearer responsibility for the first time. This also introduces an opportunity to establish a system of combined inspections covering education and care in those settings funded by the Ofsted. Early years education and care was put under the same inspection regime in order to maintain consistency in inspection. The new Ofsted inspection framework adopts National Standards focusing on outcomes rather than detailed regulations on measures and the importance of professional responsibility and a child-focused performance such as children's health, safety, enjoyment and achievement are recognized by local authorities (Baldock et al., 2005; Anning and Edwards, 2006). Good early years practices are encouraged by providing accessible and reasonable practical guidance, especially the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000: 5) highlights the points to which practitioners need to pay particular attention in six different areas of learning for young children by identifying different stepping stones that meet children's current learning interests and needs in order to 'help children make good progress towards, and where appropriate beyond, the early learning goals'.

1.123 The promotion of equal opportunities

The claim for equal opportunities in the English context was a challenge to the objection to education for the poor by the 18th century proponents of liberal political economy (Chitty, 2004). The campaign for equal opportunities started from the legislative reform introducing compulsory schooling in 1870 for children between five and thirteen years of age followed by the attempt to establish the principle of 'free secondary education for all' in the 1944 Education Act. The concept of equal opportunities has been identified as an important principle to ensure the access to early years education and care for all children in spite of gender, class, ethnicity and physical and intellectual status since the 1990s in the English context. For example, the *Rumbold Report* (DfES, 1990: 35) points out that each institution should have 'a policy on equal opportunities for children and adults, encompassing sex, race, class, and disability, which promotes an understanding of cultural and physical diversity and challenges stereotypes, and which is responsive to local needs.' With the introduction of the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000), the *Children Act*

2004 (DfES, 2004a) together with *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2004b), the idea of equal opportunities has been increasingly reinforced in early years practice in order to 'meet the diverse needs of all children' (QCA, 2000: 5). The latest state document the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) further highlights 'every child deserves the best possible start in life and support to fulfil their potential' (DfES, 2007a: 7) and all children 'should have the opportunity to experience a challenging and enjoyable programme of learning and development' (DfES, 2007a: 10). The recognition of meeting needs of children with learning difficulties and disabilities is highlighted particularly in *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2004b: 16):

> 3.11 High quality, more integrated universal services will work together with targeted and specialist services for children with additional needs, such as those with disabilities, those whose parents have mental health problems or those who need to be protected from harm.
>
> 3.12 These children and young people will need:
> - high quality multi-agency assessment;
> - a wide range of specialist services available close to home;
> - and effective case management by a lead professional working as part of a multi-disciplinary team.

Equal opportunity is involved in the recognition and provision of children's cultural diversities as children come to institutional settings with what they have brought from their cultural background and surrounding environment, especially in the English context (Adam, 1994; Siraj-Blatchford, 1996). Both the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000) and the EYFS (DfES, 2007b) pay attention to the continuity of children's cultural experiences between children's home settings and communities. For instance, the EYFS (DfES, 2007b) argues that 'Effective practitioners value each child's culture and help them to make connections between experiences at home, the setting and the wider community'. Woods, Boyle, and Hubbard (1999: 21) further observe that the provision of cultural diversities in the early years settings gives children 'the opportunity to experience and appreciate the richness and diversity of cultures other than their own'.

The promotion of equal opportunities for all children does not contradict the advocacy of individuality, which was regarded by John Dewey as associated with the Renaissance and the critique of established authority in pursuit of a democratic society (Brehony, 2000a; Chitty, 2004). Equal opportunity was therefore regarded as 'desirable aspect of a democratic society' and provided opportunities for individual development (Chitty, 2004: 14). The child as an individual respected by the Western

society was motivated by a Romantic belief in 'liberty, equality, and fraternity' (Edwards, 1967: 208-209), Rousseau's claim for child's natural development, Froebel's advocacy of child-centred play and learning (Bruce, 1987; Kwon, 2002), and Maria Montessori's (1879-1952) advocacy of individual child's work (Brehony, 2000a). These are strong voices among many in an international network for the promotion of individuality in the English context.

1.124 The whole-child perspective

The policy review in the English context also revealed a shift from a learning-oriented focus to the whole-child perspective. For example, the *Early Learning Goals* (DfES, 1999) and the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000) define the learning goals involved in the six learning areas for young children, especially the latter provided framework for practitioners to identify children's stepping stones and shows examples of practice to support children to reach the early learning goals (QCA, 2000). The following policies including the *Birth to Three Matters* (DfES, 2002), *Children Act 2004* (DfES, 2004a), *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2004b), and *Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfES, 2007a; DfES, 2007b) try to look at the child from a perspective of 'a whole child' based on 'a strong child, a skillful communicator, a competent learner and a healthy child' rather than learning-oriented vision. For example, *Birth to Three Matters* (DfES, 2002: 4)

- recognises and celebrates babies and children,
- recognises their individuality, efforts and achievements,
- recognises that all children have from birth a need to develop, learning through interaction with people and exploration of the world around them…
- recognises the 'holistic' nature of development and learning…

The *Children Act 2004* attempts to take account of children's interests and views and ensure children's 'physical and mental health and emotional well-being', 'social and economic well-being', and contributions to society. The EYFS (DfES, 2007a: 9) introduces the vision of 'a unique child' by addressing the child's sense of belonging, resilience, confidence, healthy emotional social wellbeing through the establishment of positive relationships with peers and adults and the provision of play experiences and creative activities.

1.2 Research on the early years curriculum

1.21 Views of the child and childhood

Many scholars seem to acknowledge that the early years curriculum starts from how we perceive the child and childhood (David, 2001; MacNaughton, 2003; Bruce, 2005; Duffy, 2006). Views of the child and childhood define what are to be included in the early years curriculum and how to implement the curriculum. The Chinese view of the child has experienced three stages – the traditional perspective, the modern view, and the contemporary stage (Liu, X.D., 1999; Tang, 2006a). The first stage considered children as private property attached to the family and as the means to extend family development in the traditional Chinese society before the end of the nineteenth century (Liu, X.D., 1999). The second stage, the modern view of the child during the new cultural movement in the 1920-30s and influenced by the Western progressive education, highlighted the importance of treating children as children rather than as miniature adults (Tang, 2006a). This is most reflected in Chen Heqin (1892-1982), the Chinese kindergarten forefather, who claimed that we should let children do whatever they were able to do on their own and let them think whatever they were able to think alone (Chen, 1989). The views of the child in the 1950-1960s were greatly influenced by the Soviet Union's early childhood practices (Yu, 2000), in which young children were required to be obedient students subordinate to teachers, teaching, and textbook. The Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976) was regarded as 'sabotage to education' by the minister of Chinese Ministry of Education in 1980 (Xinhua News Agency, 1980, cited in Sidel, 1982: 79). Young children were involved in this political battle and some of them were trained as Red Guards to protect Chairman Mao's political territory (Yu, 2003). The third stage, the contemporary view of the child, recognised the rights of children, the values of childhood as an important phase for children, and the potentials of children in learning and development (Liu and Feng, 2005). For example, the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001) emphasised the importance of respecting children's personalities and rights in order to promote each child's individual development:

> Kindergarten should provide [a] healthy, colourful environment for young children's activities and lives in order to meet the overall developmental needs of young children and make them gain good experience in their happy childhood. Kindergarten education should respect children's self-esteem and rights, respect the

law of development and the features of learning, see play as the basic activity, combine education and care, and take into account the individual differences so as to promote children's individuality.

(Ministry of Education, 2001: 4)

In the context of England, the view of the child and childhood is not a static phase either. For example, the traditional English society perceived the child as vulnerable, dependent upon adults, and vacuum regarding the child's development and learning to be imposed by the adult (Pinchbeck and Hewitt, 1969; Moss and Petrie, 2002), which was similar to other parts of traditional European views of the child and childhood (Aries, 1962). This has been challenged by the contemporary view of the child as competent and independent with great potential for learning across the world (Edwards, Gandini, and Forman, 1998; Moss and Petrie, 2002). Early childhood, consequently, has been shifted from a period seen as children's dependence upon adults to a period that children themselves constructed their own culture within a certain society and to a period which existed in its own rights rather than as a preparation for adulthood, which was strongly argued by James and Prout (1997) and Moss and Petrie (2002).

1.22 Views of how children learn

My literature review shows that there are far more discussions on the topic of how teachers teach than how children learn in the Chinese context. Teaching is considered as the primary means for children's learning as more research on the kindergarten curriculum focuses on how teachers plan the educational activities and how teachers carry out their lesson plans (Wang, Q.X., 2003; the Early Childhood Curriculum Reform New Concept, 2004; Zhang, 2004). Teaching-based topics also dominate influential Chinese early years journals such as *Pre-school Education Research*, *Early Childhood Education*, *Early Education*, and *Early Childhood Pedagogy Research*. Children's learning potential and the role of play in children's learning have not attracted much attention in the field of early years research in the Chinese context although there has been recently an awareness of the importance of taking children's learning interests and needs into account when designing the kindergarten curriculum (Wang, Q.X., 2003). As argued by Liu (2004), the concept of children's learning has been much restricted to knowledge-oriented book-based study due to the influence of traditional Chinese pedagogy focusing on the importance of

the teacher in transmitting knowledge to students. Some Western discourses such as 'making connections' and 'meaning-makers' which are considered as the essential topics for children's learning (Wells, 1986; Worthington and Carruthers, 2003) are seldom found in the Chinese context.

In contrast, the understanding of how children learn, especially how children learn best or effectively, is considered to be the direct inspiration for practitioners to plan the early years curriculum in the English context. The importance of observation and documentation of children's learning in promoting the quality of teaching and learning in the early years has been widely acknowledged (Ackers, 1994; QCA, 2000; Anning and Edwards, 2006; DfES, 2007b). Learning through play can be called one of the most popular motif among the early years practitioners (Bruce, 1991; David, 2001; Macintyre, 2003; OECD, 2006). Pedagogically, the advocacy of play has been associated with the progressive child-centred approach and 'a joint emphasis of exploration, hands-on experience, child-initiated activity and the importance of choice, independence and control' (BERA Early Years Special Interest Group, 2003: 13). There is little doubt about the value of play in children's learning among early years professionals but the less articulated agreed pedagogy of play leads to the problematic nature of play in practice (BERA Early Years Special Interest Group, 2003; Woods and Attfield, 2005). For example, the discrepancy between the rhetoric and reality of play, the extent to which play and learning are linked, and the role of adults in children's play have been hotly debated (BERA Early Years Special Interest Group, 2003; Gifford, 2005).

The importance of the adult in supporting children's learning is commonly acknowledged in the English context. As Bruce (2005: 41) illustrates, 'Children learn best when they are given appropriate responsibility, allowed to experiment, make errors, decisions and choices, and are respected as autonomous learners.' This means children will not learn best until appropriate support is provided by adults in their learning environment although children are treated as autonomous learners with responsibility, freedom to experiment and make decisions. Siraj-Blatchford (1998) argues that the processes of children's learning are through play, watching adults and peers perform tasks, by partaking in real-life experiences and through talking about those experiences with others. Children are never lone learners and children learn effectively with the support of adults and the participation of peers. It is also a common sense that children enter early years institutional settings with a great deal of

knowledge and skills they have already learned in home settings (Wells, 1986; Bruce, 1987; Worthington and Carruthers, 2003). The partnership between institutional and home settings has been regarded as one crucial element for children's effective learning and parental involvement in children's learning either at home or at institutional settings is highly emphasised by early years professionals (Abbott and Rodger, 1994; Edwards et al., 1998; MacNaughton, 2003).

1.23 Learning areas

Learning areas has been the major domain related to the early years curriculum research in Chinese and English contexts. According to the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outlines* (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001), there are five learning areas for kindergarten children: health, language, social development, science and arts. In the English context, there are six learning areas identified in the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000) – personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematical development; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; and creative development. I shall only discuss here research on language development to depict a general picture of what is going on with learning areas in Chinese and English contexts.

In the Chinese context, the goals for children's language development are prescribed in the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outlines* (2001) as: A child

- is willing to talk with others and speak with good manners;
- is able to pay attention and to listen to the speaker and is able to understand daily language;
- is able to clearly express what he/she wants to say himself/herself;
- likes to listen to stories and read picture books;
- is able to understand and speak Chinese Mandarin.
  (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001: 6-7)

The goals stated here emphasize the importance of communicative skills for children's language development. As argued by Wang (2001), there has been wide use of story-telling, nursery rhymes, interactive talks, vocabulary games, and making stories involved in language activities in Chinese kindergartens. The tendency of knowledge-based formal learning manifested in language activities has been criticised by some researchers and there is a growing awareness of the importance of spontaneity involved in children's language learning (Liu, Y., 1999; Zhu, J.Y., 2003).

English language teaching has been very popular since the last decade. Many researchers attempt to use playful teaching methods in order to make English learning more enjoyable for children (Wang, 2000; Song, 2000; Zhang et al., 2000). However, English language teaching for the sake of the language itself has prevailed in the Chinese context (Tang, 2000) and the cultivation of children's understanding of diversity of cultures in the world has not been well integrated into English language teaching and learning (Chen and Pang, 2006).

The goals of 'communication, language and literacy' identified in the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000: 45) as to provide 'opportunities for children to communicate thoughts, ideas and feelings and build up relationships with adults and each other' in activities involved in all areas of learning and 'to share and enjoy a wide range of rhymes, music, songs, poetry, stories and non-fiction books'. Wells' (1986) work on young children's language development emphasizes 'meaningful interactions' between children and adults has been influential in England (Maxwell, 1996; Whitehead, 2002; Bruce 2004). The essence of communication is argued by Wells (1986: 33) as 'meaningful interactions', in which positive 'intersubjectivity' or 'the pattern of mutual attention' was considered as the essential foundation for any communication. The multicultural context in contemporary England promotes a growing awareness of the needs of children with English as an additional language. It is highly recommended by Whitehead (2002) and Siraj-Blatchford (2006) that practitioners provide opportunities for children's linguistic diversity to help bilingual children build up confidence in communication and language development in order to allow for children's well-being.

1.24 Debates over teaching and play

1.241 The Chinese context

Play is identified as the basic activity for kindergarten children (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001) and there has been a growing awareness of the importance of play for young children's learning and development in the last two decades (Li, 2003; Liu and Feng, 2005). Researchers have explored how to help children to participate actively in different activities by integrating playful elements into the educational process (Wong, 2001; Improve Chinese Kindergarten Teachers' Professional Qualification (ICKTPQ) Project, 2003). However, my literature review

reveals that the majority of the activities entitled 'project approach', 'creative activity', or 'explorative activity' involved in kindergarten curriculum research are mainly directed by teachers and children's learning process is manipulated by teachers' planning rather than children's learning interests (ICKTPQ Project, 2003; Liu, 2004). As a result, children in these research projects were not offered sufficient time or space for spontaneous play. A huge gap exists between the importance of play stated in policies and the practice of play in Chinese kindergartens.

The term 'teaching' is not mentioned in the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outlines* (2001) whilst the role of the teacher is defined as 'supporter, co-operator, and guider for children's learning activity' (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001: 15). However, teaching has been the mainstream in terms of research in the early years ranging from language teaching, mathematical teaching, science teaching to teaching of arts. The dominance of formal teaching seeking to pass on cultural heritage, instruct knowledge-based study, and answer riddles, which originated in Chinese pedagogical traditions, has been influential in all the fields of education (Wang, Guo, Liu, He and Gao, 1997). Chinese kindergartens cannot totally escape from the influence of pedagogical tradition. In the meantime, some distinctive early years approaches such as Reggio Emilia, High/Scope, and Forest School have influenced Chinese kindergarten practices. For instance, Liu and Feng (2005: 94) argue that 'respecting children', 'active learning', 'teaching for individual learning needs', 'play-based teaching and learning', and 'teaching and learning through daily life in kindergartens' have been frequently mentioned in kindergartens in the last two decades. However, the gap between those ideal concepts and kindergarten practice will not be bridged until a good balance between teaching and children's learning is achieved.

1.242 The English context

Early years education and care in England is underpinned by a strong tradition that play is regarded as essential to young children's learning and development, which is based substantially on the work of pioneer educators such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Froebel, Margaret MacMillan, Maria Montessori, and Rudolf Steiner (Bruce, 1987; Brehony, 2000b; Kwon, 2002; Miller, Devereux, Paige-Smith and Soler, 2003; Bruce, 2005). Although not claiming play as the exclusive mode of

learning in early childhood, there is much research evidence to demonstrate that child-directed, playful experiences are important because they allow children to co-construct knowledge with other children and with adults who scaffold their experiences (Weinberger, 1996; Bennett et al., 1997). The *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (2000) with an emphasis on learning through play has been broadly welcomed by some early years practitioners (Miller, Hughes, Roberts, Paterson, and Staggs, 2003; Pugh, 2006). The perception that early childhood should be a time of spontaneity and exploration according to children's individual interests rather than a time of direct teaching is very strong among early years practitioners in England (Bennett, 2001; David, 2001).

However, the issue of play is never straightforward and the play debates have been put on the agenda in educational policy, research and practice across the world. The role, purpose and value of play and even what counts as play are still hotly debated in early years research (Wood and Attfield, 2005). For example, the value of play is affiliated to its contribution to work by using play as a way of teaching children skills such as independence and concentration, the necessities for work. This is traced back to the historical impact that Froebel's play approach in the form of the Gifts and Occupations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries utilized children's play activities to be formalised work (Brehony, 2004) and that Montessori reinforced the value of children's play through serious work by means of systematically-designed didactical materials in a well-prepared environment. The contemporary play/work divide, according to Wood and Attfield (2005), is most concerned with the conflicting perspectives about the relationship between playing/learning and parents' high demands for children's achievement. Other problems such as the tensions between adult-initiated play and children's spontaneous play are also ongoing debates (Moyles, 1989; Bruce, 1997).

The *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000: 1) refers 'teaching' to the roles of practitioners including 'establishing relationships with children and their parents, planning the learning environment and curriculum, supporting and extending children's play, learning and development, and assessing children's achievements and planning their next steps'. The activity of teaching involves 'all adults who work in this area and occurs in all phases of the educational system' (Fumoto, Hargreaves and Maxwell, 2004: 180). Therefore, 'teaching' in the English context is used from a very broad sense rather than as a concept focusing on

direct instruction and knowledge transmission (Goodman and Kuzmic, 1997; Wood, 1998). However, the notion of teaching young children is not popular in discourse among the English early years practitioners. Practitioners consider early childhood as a time of spontaneity and exploration according to individual children's interests and a strong belief among practitioners is that young children learn best through hands-on self-chosen play activities rather than direct teaching (Bruce, 1991; David, Raban, Ure, Goouch, Jago, Barriere and Lambirth, 2000).

1.25 The need to fill the gap

The policy review on early years education and care in China and England reveals a contrast between the two contexts. The educational function with knowledge-based learning at the centre dominates the Chinese early years policies coupled with signs of awareness of the importance of play for young children and recognition of children's rights. The English context emphasizes the quality issue by providing integrated and multi-disciplinary services, highlights the principle of equality of opportunities despite gender, class, ethnicity, and physical or intellectual status, and treat children more from a perspective of a whole child focusing on social, emotional and economic well-being and creative development. The research on issues emerging out of the early years curriculum such as views of the child and childhood, views of how young children learn, and debates over teaching and play also shows us a contrast between Chinese and English contexts. This is further confirmed by Rosenthal's (2003) argument that the way young children are educated depends upon the approach to early childhood adopted by the particular society. For example, children are encouraged to develop independence and express their own thoughts in individualistic societies. These pave a way for the empirical investigation into the early years curriculum in Chinese and English contexts.

There have been some cross-cultural comparative studies in the field of early years in the last two decades. For example, Lubeck (1985) compared early years practice in a white community and a black community in the USA. The children's learning experiences in the black community setting were much more controlled by adults focusing on formal reading and writing as well as moral development such as cultivation of co-operative spirit, group solidarity and empathy. By contrast, a much more informal learning approach and reciprocal interactions between children and

adults alongside encouragement of independence, competitiveness and individuality were highlighted in the white community setting. Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989) set a good example for comparative research on early years provision by comparing preschool daily life scenarios of the Japanese, Chinese and American kindergartens from different perspectives to develop 'an ongoing dialogue between insiders and outsiders, between practitioners and researchers' and between Americans, Chinese and Japanese (Tobin et al., 1989: 4). Tobin et al. (1989) analysed and interpreted the similarities and differences arisen from the three countries in depth, which thoroughly illustrated the socio-cultural nature of early years provisions. However, a Goldilocks effect was voiced among the American research participants: American kindergarten practice was considered 'just right' whilst China was 'too controlled' and Japan was 'too uncontrolled' (Tobin et al, 1989: 142).

Hartley (1993) studied three Scottish nursery schools in different socio-economic areas by comparing the time of children's nursery lives, space, assessment, authority and the structure of activities. One of the nursery schools was much concerned with children's readiness for school whilst the other two were more associated with 'the imperatives of capitalism and child-centred educational philosophy' (Hartley, 1993: 145). This was further interpreted by Hartley (1993) as the social constructed nature of early education. Penn (1997) conducted comparative research on nurseries in Italy, Spain and the UK focusing on similarities and differences in staffing, children's nursery experiences, and elements for good practice. Penn (1997) reflected upon the UK practice of early years education and care by pointing out the lack of theoretical perspectives in the UK practice, the problems existing in children's access to nurseries, regulations on health and safety issues, and problems in nursery work training in order to bring changes in UK practice. Bertram and Pascal (2002) conducted the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks (INCA) project in 21 countries across the world such as Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Singapore, UK, and USA to investigate five areas: the early years curriculum organisation and content; assessment frameworks; staffing and qualifications; regulation and quality assurance; and access and equal opportunities. The INCA project aims to 'enrich descriptions of practice in the countries concerned', 'clarify the context' and 'contribute to an analysis of fundamental issues, related to the framework in England' via an international perspective on the crucial issue of the early years curriculum (Bertram and Pascal,

2002: 1). The Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD) (2006) observe that the OECD countries share a core of established principles including child-centrededness, the importance of play, integration of learning into a holistic view of the child, the child as active and autonomous learner, working with parents, inclusiveness and equal opportunities. However, in terms of the early years curriculum, England among some other countries such as Belgium, France, Ireland and the Netherlands are considered as adopting a primary model focusing on formal learning in comparison to the social pedagogic tradition adopted by the Nordic and central European countries highlighting the importance of the development of the whole child, creativity and social identity (OECD, 2004; OECD, 2006). These comparative studies offer us promises to conduct research located in the cross-national contexts.

My literature review shows that there are only very few researchers who have conducted research to compare Chinese and English early years practices. Among the very few, David and Powell (2005) argue that teacher-directed activities alongside Chinese parents' concerns over children's academic development in China are associated with the Chinese Confucian traditions which focused on filial piety and society-based concept. This indicates a gap between a curriculum that encourages children's play and the practice that undermines the values of play in contemporary China. Interestingly, David and Powell (2005) point out that Chinese kindergarten teachers use children's natural tendency to play as a motivation for teacher-directed playful activities. In addition, messy play as commonly accepted in the Western world is not acceptable in Chinese context as a result of parent's expectation of a sense of orderliness and sterility. Merry, Wei and Rogers (2006) argue that there is significant difference between the British and Chinese children's drawings in their research. For instance, the British children's drawings were more related to individual expression with less teachers' instruction; in the traditional Chinese approach, in which teachers explain the drawing task, show children a completed drawing as a model, model drawing step by step and ask children to draw according to what they have been taught, Chinese children's drawings revealed likeness to the model drawing but were lacking in individuality. This was interpreted as the influence of pedagogical differences between the two contexts in that the importance of encouraging children's individual exploration and creative development was addressed in the British context

whilst the Chinese pedagogy emphasizes the value of being compliant and obedient rather than of being individual (Merry et al., 2006)

Drawing upon the importance of comparative research in providing opportunities to understand 'otherness', reflect upon 'owness' (Fairbrother, 2005; David, 2006) and bring in changes in practice (Bertram and Pascal, 2002), there is great need to do comparative research. This itself makes it significant for me to conduct a comparative research on the early years curriculum in Chinese and English contexts. The previous review of policy and research also reveals the practicability in conducting comparative research on the early years curriculum in the two contexts. These make my research theoretically and practically grounded. More discussion of comparative research is involved in chapter two.

1.3 The early years curriculum

1.31 Understandings of the term 'curriculum'

Since the 1960s, curriculum has emerged as one of the most substantial fields of study within educational research and development. For example, Hargreaves (1994) summarizes the process of curriculum research development in the 1960s-1970s extending from the early behavioural frameworks of curriculum aims and objectives to organizational processes of curriculum project research and development. In the process, problems arising out of curriculum implementation, frameworks of human meaning through which people experienced and interpreted the curriculum, and decision-making and deliberation are highlighted whilst there is an awareness that curriculum was defined not through reference to universal schemes and principles, but according to particular judgement in certain circumstances.

The definitions of curriculum are always hotly debated. According to Jackson (1992), definitions of curriculum shift over the decades going from 'fixed course of study' terminology to broader terms such as 'learning opportunities' and 'experiences which a learner encounters'. Curriculum as prescription has a concern to develop models of idealized practice, namely, what ought to be happening in schools. The understanding of the curriculum as learning experiences can be found in Marsh and Stafford (1988) that the curriculum is an interrelated set of plans and experiences of students under the guidance of the school. This is most reflected in the description by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) (DES, 1985):

> A school's curriculum consists of all those activities designed or encouraged within its organisational framework to promote the intellectual, personal, social and physical development of its pupils. It includes not only the formal programme of lessons, but also 'informal' programme of so-called extracurricular activities as well as those features which produce the school's 'ethos', such as the quality of relationships, the concern for equality of opportunity, the values exemplified in the way the schools set about its task and the way in which it is organised and managed. Teaching and learning styles strongly influence the curriculum and in practice they cannot be separated from it. Since pupils learn from all these things, it needs to be ensured that all are consistent in supporting the school's intentions.
>
> (DES, 1985, cited in Ross, 2001: 123)

In this view, curriculum includes both formal and informal programmes such as school ethos, which influence 'the quality of relationships', 'the concerns for equality of opportunity', and the values underpinning the school's organisation and management. The so-called informal programme here is equal to the notion of 'the hidden curriculum' identified as understanding of alternative orientations to official knowledge (Jackson, 1968; Eggleston, 1977; Marsh, 1997). This description of the curriculum by DES (1985) reveal that the curriculum is not considered as one way transmission of ideas and information from the teacher to the student, rather, it is a process in which teaching and learning styles and interactions between the teacher and the student are highlighted. This is further backed up by Kelly's (1999: 77) notion of 'curriculum as process and development', which starts not from a consideration of knowledge or culture to be transmitted but from 'a concern with the nature of the child and with his or her development as a human being'.

1.32 Understandings of the early years curriculum

1.321 The Chinese context

Contemporary perceptions of the kindergarten curriculum draw on three strands in the Chinese context. The first strand defines the kindergarten curriculum as 'all kinds of activities for the young children in kindergarten educational situations in order to promote overall and harmonious development both physically and spiritually' (Feng, 1997, cited in Tang, 2004: 282). The second strand regards the kindergarten curriculum as 'the learning experiences of the child designed and organized according to the kindergarten educational goals in order to promote the healthy and harmonious development of the child both physically and spiritually' (Liu , 1999: 268). The third strand defines the kindergarten curriculum as 'neither a series of detailed goals, nor experience or activities to promote the child's development, but a mediator with

certain structure and functions to link educational goals and the promotion of the child's development' whilst the curriculum 'reflects both the teachers' plans with purpose and its unfolding process' (Zhang, 1997, cited in Tang, 2004: 227).

The activity-based curriculum addresses the role of teachers in preparing or planning activities for children and the curriculum is treated as a one-way interaction from teachers to children. The second strand of the kindergarten curriculum pays more attention to what children will learn and have learnt rather than what teachers offer. The third strand strives to address the role of the curriculum in linking the educational goal to children's learning and development. The commonality among the three strands of the curriculum definitions is that they all address the importance of the educational goal, that is, 'the promotion of the harmonious development of the child both physically and spiritually' (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 1999: 420). Therefore, the understanding of the kindergarten curriculum in Chinese context is educational-goal driven, which indicates the dominant role of adults rather than children in the curriculum.

1.322 The English context

Understandings of the early years curriculum are not straightforward in the English context either. Contemporary views of the early years curriculum are built upon the perceptions of the curriculum discussed earlier. For example, there is agreement that the early years curriculum includes both the formal/received curriculum planned by the practitioners and the informal/hidden curriculum including principles, beliefs, values and the way how the setting is organized (Miller et al., 2003; Duffy, 2006). Understandings of the early years curriculum have moved from the traditional perception of the curriculum as 'a body of knowledge to be transmitted, subjects to be delivered, formal learning contexts or schooling' to a 'a person-centred approach' by identifying young children as being social, communicative, creative, healthy and secure (Duffy, 2006: 80). Bruce (1987: 65) maintained that a curriculum for the early years concerns 'the child and the processes and structures within the child', 'knowledge the child already has' and 'knowledge the child will acquire competently but with imagination'. Furthermore, Bruce (2005) argues that the curriculum in the early years is related to the three Cs – the 'child', 'context', and 'content' – in which children's family background and cultural origins are to be

considered as important elements for our perceptions of the child and selection of what counts as valuable for children's learning.

Meanwhile, there has been a growing awareness of the cultural influences upon the early years curriculum. For example, Siraj-Blatchford (1998: 5) argues that children's cultural identity should be seen as 'a significant area of concern for curriculum development' in order to tackle the issue of some ethnic minority groups' underachievement. David (2001) and Wood and Attfield (2005) argue that any curriculum model is underpinned by a set of beliefs and values about what is considered to be appropriate for children's developmental and learning needs in certain societies. Woods et al. (1999) demonstrate how children's diverse cultural backgrounds in their research sites are taken into account in the process of implementing the early years curriculum. The socio-cultural construction of the early years curricula is further confirmed by Sole and Miller' (2003). In a comparison of three early years curricula approaches, the English Foundation Stage Curriculum is associated with 'a view of the child as a future pupil' whilst Reggio Emilia sees the child as a co-constructor of the curriculum and Te Whariki provides space for the development of individuality as well as the needs of local culture (Sole and Miller, 2003). The three approaches are considered to have been significantly influenced by the social cultural context of their particular societies. This is also reflected in Duffy (2006: 81) in that early years practitioners should consider the framework of the curriculum concerning the values, aims and principles such as 'what do we believe is important for the youngest children and why do we believe this'.

1.33 Challenges and problems

As discussed earlier, the term of 'curriculum' has not been mentioned in formal state documents related to the field of early years since 1949 in Chinese context and the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (2001) does not use the term, either. Is there some neglect of the term of 'curriculum'? Or, is it not appropriate for the Chinese Ministry of Education to address the 'curriculum'? However, as Yu (1996) points out, pre-school education curriculum as one among a variety of educational curricula does exist in kindergarten practices whether the term 'curriculum' is being officially used or not. There has been a lot of research undertaken on the kindergarten curriculum, for example, historical research on

Chinese kindergarten curriculum (Wang, Ch.Y., 2003), social development integration curriculum (Wang, X.L., 2003), ability-development curriculum (Zhu, J.Y., 2004), quality-education curriculum (Zhang, 2004) and so on. Meanwhile, the kindergarten curriculum is in the daily vocabulary of kindergarten teachers. This indicates incoherence between the absence of reference to the kindergarten curriculum in formal state documents and the popularity of investigating the kindergarten curriculum among early years researchers.

In the English context, the early years curriculum has seldom been defined clearly although much research on the early years curriculum has been conducted. For example, in the book *A Curriculum Handbook for Early Childhood Educators* (Siraj-Blatchford, 1998), the term 'curriculum' is not defined at all. My literature review shows that understanding of the early years curriculum draws on the two-fold assumption: the curriculum is something that needs to be transmitted into the child on the one hand (Rodger, 1994; Siraj-Blatchford, 1998), and the curriculum starts from how children learn and extends to what to learn on the other (Bruce, 1987; David, 2001; Duffy, 2006). However, this 'something' includes the concept of subject knowledge in disguise of the so-called learning areas such as language, mathematics, creativity, science and so on (Riley, 1998; Barber, 1998; Miller and Devereux, 2004) and the different early years approaches such as Friedrich Froebel, Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, and Reggio Emilia (Wood and Attfield, 2005). This, in fact, reveals a dilemma between the perceptions of the curriculum as domains of subject knowledge to be transmitted in the child and the ideal picture of the child-centredness in the early years curriculum. The working definition provided by the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000: 1) – 'everything children do, see, hear or feel in their setting, both planned and unplanned' – leads to a segmented perception that the curriculum can be referred to anything. In addition, important pedagogical issues related to children's learning such as the role of the adult, the position of play are missing in this definition. Therefore, it does not convey a clear message about the early years curriculum.

1.34 A working definition of the early years curriculum

There is a need to define the early years curriculum either in Chinese or English context. First, the curriculum as one of the most crucial factors in defining the

quality of early years education and care (Tang, 2000; Yu, 2000; Pugh, 2001; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, and Taggart, 2004) is an area that no early years professionals can escape either in practice or in research. Secondly, the ambiguity involved in understanding the term 'early years curriculum' either in Chinese or English context makes it necessary and important to conceptualize a working definition for practice and research. Therefore, I have tried to combine the quotation of the curriculum defined by DES (1985) with the various aspects on the early years curriculum valued by professionals in Chinese and English contexts in order to develop my understanding of the early years curriculum. Here is the working definition of the early years curriculum for this current research:

> The early years curriculum is a process, in which adults including practitioners, parents and children in certain settings engage in a variety of activities including adult-planned and children-initiated spontaneous activities in order to enable children to gain rich learning experiences and harmonious development based on certain values underlying a particular setting and the whole society.

This working definition emphasises the nature of the curriculum as a process rather than as subject-based disciplines. The process involves the co-construction of learning experiences and activities between adults and children, which include activities planned by adults and spontaneous activities emerging out of children's learning interests and needs. This confirms the claim made by the early years professionals that the early years curriculum starts from the child and develops with the child's learning interests and progress (Bruce, 1987; David, 2001; Bruce, 2005). The aim of the early years curriculum is to 'enable children to gain rich learning experiences and harmonious development', which echoes the concept of curriculum as process and development (Kelly, 1999) or curriculum for life (Quicke, 1999). Furthermore, this working definition highlights the values, which is officially addressed in the DES (1985) and also suggested by early years professionals (Siraj-Blatchford, 1996; Bruce, 2005; David and Powell, 2005; Wood and Attfield, 2005).

This working definition will facilitate me to conduct my empirical investigation of the early years curriculum in Chinese and English contexts focusing on a variety of activities – such as the language, mathematics, arts, and play activities – by looking into children's learning experiences involved in the adult-child and child-child interactions, the role of teaching and play, and underlying values. This will further analysed in the chapters three to eight.

1.4 Summary

This chapter serves as a theoretical framework for my research. The policy review reveals the values and principles underlying the Chinese and English early years education and care. The literature review of research on the early years curriculum depicts a general picture of the early years curriculum research in both contexts. Drawing on the understandings of the curriculum and the early years curriculum, the working definition of the 'early years curriculum' is introduced to this study. The chapter lays the foundation for the forthcoming investigations. However, it is important to address the interplay between the literature review and the empirical investigations, in which they both inform and are informed by each other in order to allow for further refinement of both the conduct and analysis of the whole research project.

Chapter Two
Research methodology

This chapter discusses the methodological issues involved in my research project. It is divided into four parts. The first part sets up my research position, which is underpinned by qualitative interpretivism and symbolic interactionism. The rationales and process involved in formulating research questions are explained in the second part. The third part is a justification of my research as a comparative ethnographic study. Then, the procedure of the whole research project including the two phases of data collection and the aspects of data analysis is discussed. I conclude with a discussion of the ethical issues of the research.

2.1 Research position

2.11 Qualitative interpretivism

As discussed in Introduction, my experiences involved in working with young children in Chinese kindergartens and English nursery schools have motivated me to conduct a comparative research on the early years curriculum in Chinese and English settings. I am keen to explore how similarities and differences in the process of curriculum practice between the Chinese and English settings are constructed as well as the potential reasons for this from research participants' perspectives. This can be claimed as 'a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 4). It indicates the nature of my research on the early years curriculum as qualitative interpretive approach in an attempt to understand 'meanings and the way people understand things' in cultural contexts (Denscombe, 2003: 267). This is also echoed in my research training experience that I have been very much influenced and impressed by the qualitative interpretive paradigm addressing the importance of studying research subjects in natural settings and attempting to interpret the meanings research subjects construct or create (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). This is a position which can be distinguished from positivism, in which reality is perceived as objective existence whilst the relationship between the researcher and the researched is perceived as being isolated from each other (Robson, 1993). My qualitative interpretive research position is further

strengthened by the assumption that the human world is different from the natural, physical world in that human beings have the capacity to interpret and construct reality (Schwandt, 1999; Denzin and Patton, 2002). The world of human perception is constructed and shaped by cultural and linguistic efforts, which determine that the existence of social reality depends upon human perception (Patton, 2002).

2.12 Symbolic interactionism

My research position is also closely associated with symbolic interactionism. Drawing on the Chicago School of the 1920s and 1930s and G.H. Mead's work, Woods (1990; 1996) argues that human behaviours are symbolic while the construction and interpretation of meaning in human interactions involves the interplay between the self and others. The ability to take the role of the other is crucial in constructing and interpreting human interactions. By the same token, Patton (2002) holds that the fundamental premise for symbolic interactionism is human beings' reflective ability to interact with each other on the basis of the shared meanings constructed and interpreted by both sides. The importance of symbolic interactionism to qualitative interpretive inquiry lies in its notion of mutual dialectical relationship between social interaction and meanings. Human beings interact with each other drawing on the basis of meanings whilst meanings are constructed and interpreted through the process of social interaction. The representation of meanings takes various forms from verbal symbols such as language to non-verbal symbols such as human expression, body posture, religious rituals, artefacts and other textual documents. Meanings of things and social reality built upon human interactions are commonly recognised context-shaped or cultural-bound (Woods, 1990; Patton, 2002; Rampton, 2007). The contexts in which the research subject is being studied and the researcher lives are also crucial in interpreting social reality (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Hodder, 1994).

Therefore, this current study seeks to investigate the process of what and how similarities and differences in the early years curriculum practice between Chinese and English contexts are constructed as well as the interpretation of this from the perspectives of research participants. This position enables me to develop the idea that the similarities and differences in the process of the curriculum practice between Chinese and English contexts cannot be interpreted without an in-depth investigation

into the interactions of those being involved, for example, the adult-child and child-child interactions; nor can it be interpreted without locating the interpretation into the context to which research participants are bound.

2.2 Research questions

2.21 Rationale for defining research questions

Research can start from the identification of a research topic of the researcher's interest or related experiences (Creswell, 1994; Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Mason (2002) identifies 'five important questions' in the process of defining research questions: (1) the ontological perspective about the social reality, namely, what is the nature of social reality; (2) the epistemological position, what is the representation of evidence of social reality; (3) broad research topic question, what topic is the research concerned with; (4) what is the intellectual puzzle; and (5) what exactly are the research questions. The importance of defining research questions has been considered as the key to determine research topic, data collection methods and data analysis (Robson, 1993; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; Mason, 2002).

Defining research questions most relevant to my research topic has been intertwined into the whole process of my research project. I found that my identification of research questions has gone through the sequence referred by Robson (1993) and Mason (2002) that first address a general research topic and then divide it into some relatively specific research questions related to the research topic. Defining research questions is 'fundamentally nonlinear' (Marshall and Rossman, 1995: 15), which comes from 'real-world observations', theoretical concerns, research interest, or direct experience (Robson, 1993; Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Development of research questions in this current research has undergone a spiral trajectory with the interplay between a process of literature review and a process of fieldwork investigation.

2.22 The formulation of research questions

The research topic in the early stages of a research project, however, is a broad area, which researchers 'find it very difficult to explain to others briefly specifically what their research is about' (Mason, 2002: 13). This is what I have experienced in

the process of formulating my research questions, which can be called a pilgrimage, full of hardships but always guided by light of hope. There were three stages in formulating my research questions. The very first stage focusing on a research topic 'a cultural analysis of the Chinese kindergarten curriculum' was generated through literature review before the start of my pilot study. This research topic was motivated by the concern among Chinese scholars that Chinese traditional culture identified most valuable to Chinese children's development is declining in contemporary China (Hu, 2004; Yao, 2004). The major question at this stage was 'in what ways cultures are present in the Chinese kindergarten curriculum and what the potential reasons are for that'. The second stage focused on a research topic of a comparison of the early years curriculum in Chinese and English contexts. The major research question at the stage is 'what and how are the similarities and differences arising out of the early years curriculum practice constructed between the Chinese and English settings'. This research question emerged out of the empirical investigation in the first part of the pilot study in the Chinese settings and the continuous literature review. It acted as a theoretical framework for the conduct of the second part of the pilot study that was conducted in the English settings.

The third stage was a refinement and revision of the research questions formulated in the second stage by reflecting upon what I had learned from the pilot study and revisiting the related literature. There were two major research questions:

- What and how are similarities and differences constructed in the process of early years curriculum practice between the Chinese and English settings?
- How can we understand the similarities and differences from the perspectives of research participants in the Chinese and English settings?

These two open-ended research questions sought to explore what was happening in natural settings, which was underpinned by the qualitative interpretive paradigm. In addition, the attempt to understand what was happening in natural settings through the perspectives of research participants was underpinned by symbolic interactionism discussed in the section 2.12 earlier. The research questions guided the whole process of the main research on the one hand, it was further revised with the progress of the empirical investigations in both Chinese and English settings on the other. The completion of the pilot study in the Chinese and English settings and the on-going literature review helped the main research focus on the four activities involved in the

early years curriculum practice in the Chinese and English settings – language, mathematics, arts, and play activities. The activity types, the process of the activities, the adult-child and child-child interactions, and the roles of teaching and play were used as the major categories for the comparison of the four activities in the Chinese and English settings. This will be analysed in detail in chapters three to six.

2.3 A comparative ethnographic approach

2.31 The selection of a comparative study

2.311 Practical reasons

As mentioned in the Introduction, this comparative study was motivated by my educational background, work experience and research interest. The accessibility to research sites is a very important practical reason for me to conduct this comparative study although Walford (2001: 151) seriously criticises the tendency in comparative research that 'researchers settle for research sites to which they can easily gain convenient and ready access rather than thinking through the implications of particular choices'. However, I would argue that 'convenient and ready access' to research settings is very important for any research for it shows the promise that positive relationships between the researcher and the research site are to be established. This, therefore, will promote the smooth conduct of research. In addition, the selection of my research sites came after a careful thinking process rather than just an easy pick-up. For example, I had had established good relationships with two research sites located at Zibo in mid-east part of China and with another two research sites based in London before I conducted the pilot study. In particular, the great support from the headteachers of those research sites had laid a firm foundation for the smooth progress of my research.

Financial issues as well as safety issues justified my selection of research sites in Zibo, my home city, rather than Beijing, Shanghai or any other bigger cities in China and in London, my study place, rather than other cities in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. No research can ignore the issue of finance and safety, which determines the researcher's status of being secure and thus guarantee the quality of research. The progress of my research project has so far proved that it was a wise and practical decision to choose the research sites in Zibo and London.

Finally, my identity as a scholar with a Chinese background and a research student in the field of Early Childhood Studies in England provided me with the advantage of doing a comparative study between the Chinese and English contexts. As a native speaker of the Chinese language, I felt at home when I was doing research in the Chinese research sites, which promoted the validity of the current study regarding the analysis and interpretation of the research data. As a research student with more than twenty years learning experience of the English language and with an MA degree in Early Childhood Studies from an English university, I had strong confidence in my language ability in terms of going into the English nursery schools to do my research. This made me feel confident and comfortable when I was with the practitioners, children and parents in the English research sites. This helped me conduct the interviews, questionnaires, and informal conversations as effectively as I did in the Chinese settings.

2.312 Theoretical rationale

2.3121 The context of 'glocalization'

The concept of 'globalization' has been developed by various scholars since the late 1920s (King, 1991; Waters, 1995) and the impact of globalization upon education have been assessed by different researchers (Dale, 1999; Dimmock and Walker, 2000; Dale, 2005; Madseon, 2006). In the context of globalization, there is a tendency that similar policies and practices spread across political, cultural, and geographical boundaries on the one hand (Dimmock and Walker, 2000) and the voices that claim for the recognition of local or national culture or values are very strong on the other. For example, Kraidy (2002) argues that interwoven with globalization is a strong tide called 'glocalization', in which the global concepts or practices are localised and accommodated to the local needs or culture rather than entirely transplanted (Kraidy, 2002). Similarly, Brewer's (2000: 173) globalization critique draws our attention to the local voices, 'Local 'fields' as sites for interesting and innovative social action and particularistic social meanings, which ethnography once explored, get subsumed under the homogenisation that occurs with globalisation'. In the process of 'glocalization' comes along the necessity for conducting comparative educational research across nations in contemporary world in order to explore how local cultures accommodate to globalisation or vice versa.

2.3122 The early years domain

In terms of early years education and care, the globalized ideology such as 'child-centred education', the importance of play in young children's learning, and the potential of children's learning ability (Edwards et al., 1998; Bruce, 2005; Liu, 2005; David, 2006) have spread all over the world, including China, through international academic exchanges, communications and professional training programmes (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 2003). However, the practice of such ideologies is different from culture to culture as they are tailored to be in tune with the local cultures. This makes comparative cross-national research necessary and exciting as it aims to explore educational phenomena in different contexts (Fairbrother, 2005). Cross-cultural research provides opportunities to understand what is happening over the world including understanding of 'otherness' and reflection upon 'owness' through policy, theoretical or practice issues (Alexander, 1999; Fairbrother, 2005). To borrow David's (2006: 39) argument, 'studying other countries' forms of provision creates challenges concerning services in one's own country' and 'such challenges to thinking and practice are beneficial'. It is hoped that my comparative research will encourage and challenge early years professionals to understand different approaches of practices and reflect upon their own practices.

2.3123 The comparability of the early years curriculum between China and England

First, both China and England are in a context, in which growing attention has been paid to the early years. The importance of early years education and care has been recognised in terms of both children's individual development and the development of the whole nation (OECD, 2006). Quality of education has been voiced by both governments. Appropriate curriculum is considered to be a key issue in assuring the quality of early years education and care (Tang, 2004; Pugh and Duffy, 2006). Curriculum guidance from the national level is enacted by both governments – the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000) in England and the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001) in China. These two documents provide an overall guidance for the practice of early years settings respectively in England and China (Devereux and Miller, 2003; Liu, 2005; Pugh and Duffy, 2006). Physical and emotional well-being, language, mathematics, and creative development were identified as key learning areas by both

the documents. In addition, the importance of play in children's learning and the role of teachers in supporting children's learning were addressed in these two documents. The influences upon the early years curriculum in China and England show some similarities, too. For example, the historical influence from the Froebelian kindergarten movement with child-centredness and the importance of children's play at heart has laid the foundation for the English nursery system (Brehony, 2001; Kewon, 2002), which shadows the practices of the early years curriculum in contemporary UK (Bruce, 2005). The Froebelian influences transplanted from Japan in the late nineteenth century also supported the further development of Chinese kindergartens (China Preschool Education Research Association, 2003; Yu, 2003). All these, therefore, made this current study comparable between Chinese and English contexts.

2.3124 Comparative purpose: similarities and differences

Phillips (1999: 15) argues, 'comparing is a fundamental part of the thought process which enables us to make sense of the world and our experiences of it'. 'To compare' in a strict sense means to 'examine two or more entities by putting them side by side and looking for similarities and differences between or among them' (Postlethwaite, 1988, P. xvii, cited in Alexander et al., 1999: 25). However, Livingstone (2004) is critical of the fact that many comparative researches prefer to compare similarities rather than differences. The distinctions or differences are the most exciting and challenging points for comparative study. The caution here is that researchers should not just lazily put the task of comparing differences onto the shoulders of readers themselves by merely displaying data in parallel but not making real comparisons (Livingstone, 2004). Drawing upon these discussions here, my current study seeks to find out both similarities and differences arising from the early years curriculum practice between Chinese and English contexts and attempts to go beyond the descriptive level of displaying research data in parallel in order to reach the higher level of theoretical comparison.

2.32 The ethnographic approach

2.321 Rationales

2.3211 Understanding culture

Critiques of economic determinist analyses of schooling alongside the limitations of positivism opened the way for alternative methodologies with a naturalistic trend – interpretivisim (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Gitlin, 1993). Ethnography gained its popularity in the context of this naturalistic trend. Ethnography is derived from anthropology, which aims to 'provide a detailed and permanent account of the cultures and lives of small, located tribes' (Denscombe, 2003: 68). Most ethnographic studies are exploratory or discovery-oriented research to understand people's attitudes, values, beliefs, and views of their world (Lubeck, 1985; Denscombe, 2003; Siraj-Blatchford, 2004). This is argued by Tobin (1999: 124) as 'the insider/outside dialogic encounter' as he identifies the key feature of ethnography as 'a study of an insider's culture, privileging insider's meanings'. Ethnographic research is based on the assumptions about the world that the multiple realities are socially constructed in an individual or a collective way (McMillan and Schumacher, 1989). These discussions do not contradict but are rather in tune with the qualitative interpretivism and symbolic interactionism mentioned in the sections 2.11 and 2.12 with regard to the attempt to understand and interpret the socially constructed meanings in certain cultures and societies.

2.3212 Time modes

Ethnographers attempt to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the participants. This is first facilitated by the research process and methods involving flexibility in adopting a combination of various research methods including participant-observation, in-depth semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and artefact or document collection (Denscombe, 2003; Siraj-Blatchford, 2004). Then, the length of time to be spent in ethnographic fieldwork, especially for participant-observation, is commonly considered as a crucial element for the in-depth ethnographic approach in order to understand and interpret social phenomena (Denscombe, 2003; Troman et al., 2006). However, it is difficult to identify an ideal length of time to be spent in the fieldwork for ethnographic research (Jeffrey and Troman, 2006). The practical requirement of the length of time perhaps depends upon

the researchers' concrete situations. For example, Walford proposed a 'compressed ethnography' approach, in which the school site was visited for a total of 3 weeks over a year (Walford, 2001); Lubeck (1985) spent 2.5 months in the preschool setting of a white community while she spent one school year in a black community in which the Head Start programme was adopted. Jeffrey and Troman (2006) suggested three 'ethnographic time modes' – a *compressed time mode* (Walford, 1991), which 'involves a short period of intense ethnographic research in which researchers inhabit a research site almost permanently for anything from a few days to a month' (Jeffery and Troman, 2006: 26); a *selective intermittent time mode*, where a longer period of time is spent in fieldwork 'from three months to two years but with a very flexible approach to the frequency of site visits' (Jeffrey and Troman, 2006: 28); and a *recurrent time mode*, which 'may aim to gain a picture by sampling the same temporal phases' such as beginnings and ends of terms and school celebratory periods (Jeffery and Troman, 2006: 31).

2.3213 The role of the researcher

The role of the researcher is conceived as the engagement of self (Woods, 1990; Ball, 1993; and Woods, 1996) and as the 'primary research tool' (Troman, 2006: 2). The engagement of self is of great importance in terms of the conduct of fieldwork and data analysis. Regarding data collection, the researcher her/himself is the major tool involved in accessing the research sites, observing what is going on in the sites, and interviewing and communicating with research participants (Troman, 2006). The process of data collection and analysis requires the researcher's full time commitment. Woods (1996) argues that the engaged self is intertwined with 'the other' in the process of ethnographic research, in which social phenomena are co-constructed by all the people involved in the context. This means that the researcher needs to take the role of the other in order to understand and appreciate the inside knowledge of the social phenomenon under study.

2.3214 Thick description

One of the most distinctive features of an ethnographic approach is 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). As Lubeck (1985) argues, 'thick description' helps the researcher apprehend and render in detail the meaning system of an interacting group.

The distinction between 'thin description' and 'thick description' is illustrated by Siraj-Blatchford (2004: 195):

> A thick description is one that includes everything needed for the reader to understand what is happening. While a thin description would simply describe the rapid closing of an eyelid, a thick description will provide the context, telling the reader whether the moment was a blink caused by a piece of dust, a conspiratorial gesture or a romantic signal transmitted across a crowded room.

'Thick description' provides much more meaningful information than 'thin description'. Thick description in this way helps readers deeply understand the described. However, good ethnography driven by its interpretative nature must go beyond 'thick description' in order to develop context-bound generalizations although ethnography does not aim to make generalizations from a broad sense (McMillan and Schumacher, 1989). I shall apply this to my data analysis, which is a two-fold process: beyond a thick description of what was happening in the Chinese and English settings comes a higher level of theoretical abstraction or generalization of what was observed and told by linking fieldwork data to theory, policy and socio-cultural backgrounds.

2.322 The relationship between my study and the ethnographic approach

My research aims to compare the early years curriculum in Chinese and English Contexts. This aim can only be fully achieved through empirical investigations in the natural context in which research subjects are being studied (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) so as to investigate the process, phenomena, views, and values. This will make contributions to the construction of the occurrence of similarities and differences. This comparative study can be well defined as an ethnographic approach in terms of the strategies to be used in the research including participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and informal conversations, which are widely used by ethnographers (Lubeck, 1985; Tobin et al., 1989; Woods et al., 1999). Regarding the time mode in ethnography (Walford, 1991; Jeffrey and Troman, 2006), my research project was an example of 'compressed ethnographic approach' as the time spent in the fieldwork was two months in the Chinese and English research settings respectively. The data analysis includes 'thick description' of what was going on in the research settings and conceptualization of the comparison of the early years curriculum between the Chinese and English settings, which is in line with the argument that good ethnography must go beyond 'thick

description' in order to develop context-bound generalizations (McMillan and Schumacher, 1989). My study, therefore, has a strong relationship with the ethnography approach.

2.4 The research procedure

2.41 Data collection – two phases

2.411 The pilot study

2.4111 The research settings

This comparative research using an ethnographic approach is a small-scale case study (Yin, 1994), which will offer detailed in-depth account of comparisons to escape from the critique of the conventional large-scale research with 'too much emphasis placed upon policies, plans and structures, at the expense of research on the actual processes of implementation of these in practice' (Vulliamy, 2004: 266). Throughout this thesis, I use 'setting' to refer to any out-of-home early years provision in the independent, private or voluntary sectors and maintained schools (DfES, 2007a) either in Chinese or English contexts. Therefore, 'setting' is a general term to address my research sites including both the Chinese kindergartens and English nursery schools. Two Chinese kindergartens and two English nursery schools were chosen as research sites for the case study involved in the pilot which was conducted between August 2005 and February 2006. These two Chinese kindergartens and two English nursery schools were used as opportunity or convenience samples, which involved choosing samples in areas where access is offered (Woods, 1996) or from those to whom the researcher has easy access (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). The selection of my research samples was based on my professional connection with those settings (see section 2.311). As argued by Cohen et al. (2000: 102), the choice of convenience sampling is frequently used in small scale case study and ethnographic research by acknowledging that 'it does not represent the wider population'. This is applicable to my ethnographic case study.

The two Chinese research settings were located in Zibo, a city with a population of 4.3 million in the mid-east of China and a city with a Confucian tradition as the cultural origin, in which moral standards with filial piety at the heart were established as the basis of the Chinese society (Zhang and Fang, 2004). Both settings were assessed as 'model kindergartens' by the local education authority in

Zibo. The differences are that kindergarten one was funded by the government and had a history of more than 40 years whilst kindergarten two was a newly self-funded kindergarten set up in 2003. The class size of kindergarten one was 40 children with four teachers whilst kindergarten two is 26 children with four teachers. The term 'teacher' in Chinese context refers to any adult who works with children in kindergarten classroom, whatever their qualifications (China Pre-school Research Association, 1999). However, teachers are entitled different roles in Chinese kindergartens. For example, among the four teachers in kindergarten one here three were allocated in the role of 'education' whilst the fourth mainly dealt with care or welfare for children and maintenance of the classroom physical conditions. The parents at kindergarten one mainly worked in the public sector including health department, banks, public transport, post-office, and information technology whilst the children at kindergarten two were mainly from high-salary families, especially those who owned companies in the private sector. The children in the two research settings were mainly between 3.5 years and 5 years and attended kindergarten from 8:00am to 5:30pm Mondays to Fridays.

The two English research settings for the pilot study were based in the Southwest of London. Nursery school one is a State-maintained nursery school located in a community, in which apart from the British cultural origin children are from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds including Asian and African cultural backgrounds. The class where I carried out my research in nursery school one had 30 children altogether with four practitioners in a day. The term 'practitioner' in English context refers to any adult who works with children in a setting in spite of their qualifications (QCA, 2000; DfES, 2007a). The practitioners in the English nursery schools had much more shared responsibilities in comparison to the Chinese teachers in terms of the role they were involved in the education and care of children. In nursery school one, six children were having only morning sessions and the rest were having day sessions from 9:15am to 3:30pm Mondays to Fridays. Nursery school two was a private nursery school located in a Jewish community, where children were from a Jewish cultural background. There were about 15 children and 4 practitioners each day in nursery school two. Children in this setting were having half-day activities from 9:30am to 12:30am Mondays to Fridays. Both the nursery school one and the nursery school two had mixed-age children. However, nursery school one had children from 3 to 5 years old whilst nursery school two had children from 2.5 years

old to 4 years old. At the time of my research, both nursery schools were using the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000) as framework for their practice.

2.4112 Research methods

The methods involved in the process of data collection in the pilot study included participant observations, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, informal conversations, and open-ended questionnaires in Chinese kindergartens and English nursery schools. I used field-notes as a major strategy for recording observations while I took photos and used digital video camera as supplementary means to document the different activities indoors and outdoors. Tobin et al. (1989) and Troman (1997) chose to observe some typical times of day or typical days of the week in order to give 'a representative range with which to sample the routine events of school life' (Troman, 1997, cited in Troman et al., 2006: 29). However, my research question 'what and how are similarities and differences constructed in the process of early years curriculum practice between the Chinese and English settings' and the working definition of 'the early years curriculum' discussed in the previous chapter (see section 1.34) made areas of learning represented in language, mathematics, arts, and free-play activities the most suitable targets for my observations in both Chinese and English settings. In addition, my contact with the research settings prior to my pilot study had enabled me to be familiar with the routine events of the Chinese and English settings. This further justified the decision to observe areas of learning rather than typical times or days as the focus of my observations in this study.

Six teachers and two headteachers in the two Chinese kindergartens and three practitioners and two headteachers in the two English nursery schools were interviewed and tape recorder was used to record interview. I distributed open-ended questionnaires to 54 parents in the two Chinese kindergartens with 33 responses in total and to 26 parents in the two English nursery schools with 8 responses in total. Apart from the differences of questionnaire response rates, parents' attitudes towards my research revealed marked differences between the two contexts. For instance, Chinese parents seemed to be much more enthusiastic about my research by returning questionnaires promptly as promised whilst English participants returned their questionnaires much later than they promised. Informal conversations with Chinese

teachers and parents and with English practitioners and parents were conducted in order to explore topics not included into the interview or questionnaire investigations. The data collection in the pilot study continued for three weeks in each Chinese and English setting.

2.4113 The implications of the pilot study

The pilot study revealed areas for development and laid a foundation for the main research. The research questions were reformulated, data collection strategies were further revised, and even research sites were reconsidered after the completion of the pilot study. For example, the fact that some important topics such as teachers' views of early childhood and of the ways how young children learn were not included into interviews in the Chinese settings during the pilot study made me revise the research plan by adding these questions to the main research interview plans in the Chinese setting. The pilot study also alerted me to meditate about the links between the pilot study and literature review in order to improve the research strategies for the main research. For example, only two of the four research settings in the pilot study were chosen as the research samples for the main research, which will be explained in the following part. This echoes what Yin (1994: 74) argues, 'the pilot case study help investigators to refine their data collection plans with respect to both the content of the data and the procedures to be followed'.

2.412 The main research

2.4121 The research settings

The main study was undertaken between March 2006 and July 2006. Only the government-funded kindergarten in Zibo and the State-maintained nursery school in London were chosen as research settings for the main research. In this sense, the main study was a continuous investigation into the two settings studied in the pilot. This has promoted the progress of the main study because my previous experience in both the settings eased some tensions concerning access to research sites, the negotiation with research participants, and the time for me to become familiar with the settings. The reason why I only chose state settings for the main study rather than both State and private settings is my awareness of the fact that it would make data analysis much more difficult and over complicated if both State and private settings were chosen as

the research sites for the main research. For instance, the two-level inter-national comparison – comparison between the Chinese government-run kindergarten and the Chinese private kindergarten and comparison between the English State-maintained nursery school and the English private nursery school would expand the analysis into a much larger project. Furthermore, another four-level cross-national comparison, that is, Chinese government-run kindergarten and English State-maintained setting, Chinese private kindergarten and English State-maintained nursery school, Chinese government-run kindergarten and English private nursery school, and Chinese private kindergarten and English private nursery school would make this study far too complex. In addition, it would be extremely hard to compare private settings as they have been influenced by a variety of factors. For example, the Chinese private kindergarten in the pilot study adopted the Montessori approach whilst the English private nursery school was based on the Jewish culture. This, in some sense, would make cross-national comparison incomparable.

However, it is important to add a caveat regarding the selection of one setting in each country and the possibility that other types of settings might yield a different data set. Therefore, any attempt to simply apply this case study to a wider population either in China or in England must be avoided. This is not to say that theoretical implications cannot be drawn. Rather, this small-scale case study seeks to reveal in-depth analysis drawing upon the data collected from the two settings in China and England and throw light on the early years curriculum practice in Chinese and English contexts.

2.4122 Research methods

The research methods adopted in the main research were similar to the pilot study. The two major strategies for the main research were whole-day participant observations and informal daily conversations with the research participants including headteachers, Chinese teachers, English practitioners, parents and children in both Chinese and English settings. Observational filed notes of what was happening in the classrooms, photos and some videos of some particularly interesting events or activities, conversational memos, and research diary were the forms for my research data. However, there were some slight differences between the Chinese setting and the English setting in terms of the strategies. The time gap in terms of conducting the two phases of research in two countries at some degree made the first site become a

pilot for the second. For example, the English setting in the pilot study, in Yin's (1994: 74) words, assisted me to 'develop relevant lines of questions – possibly even providing some conceptual clarification', which lay the foundation for the data collection in the Chinese setting in the main research period. Similarly, the data collected from the Chinese setting in the main study seemed to serve as another pilot for the English setting in the main research. Because of this, slight changes of research methods were made in the main research. For example, informal daily conversations replaced open-ended questionnaires in the main research to investigate parents' viewpoints. Meanwhile, more informal daily conversations with Chinese teachers and English practitioners were adopted in the main research in comparison to the pilot study.

2.42 Data analysis

2.421 The nature of my data analysis

This current research involves description of educational phenomenon and interpretation of the voices and views of the research participants. This interpretive orientation determines the qualitative nature of my data analysis (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that grounded theory is characterised as its non-predetermined, developing, and emerging nature and the reciprocal relationship between theory and data. My current study is a process to generate a theoretical account from the empirical investigations through the ethnographic comparison. The conduct and analysis of my research data is not confined to a pre-planned hypothetical framework whilst it develops with the organisation and reorganisation of the research data collected from fieldwork as well as with the recollect of literature review. The interplay between logical thinking based on the literature review and how to present data went through the process of my data analysis. The interplay is nonlinear but spiral sometimes with overlaps sometimes with conflicts, which makes the process of data analysis provisional and in need of refinement (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This echoes what Fetterman (1989) argues that in the context of an ethnographic stance, 'the analysis is as much a test of the … ability to think – to process information in a meaningful and useful manner' (cited in Robson, 1993: 374). The data analysis in my research, therefore, is qualitative by

nature with discover-orientation and interpretation at the centre rather than an attempt to test some pre-designed hypotheses.

2.422 Three types of data

My data analysis was built upon the data collected from the pilot study and the main research. The reason why both the pilot study and main research were included in the analysis was that the time gap between the pilot study and the main research showed changes in both settings, particularly in the Chinese kindergarten. For instance, direct teaching dominated the process of the curriculum implementation in the Chinese kindergarten during the pilot study (Tang, 2005a; Tang, 2006b; Tang and Maxwell, 2007) whilst the fieldwork in the Chinese kindergarten during the main research showed more space and time were given to children for their play. The data collected from the Chinese private kindergarten and the English private nursery school in the pilot study were not included in the analysis due to the aforementioned reasons (see the section 2.4121).

There were three types of research data for analysis in the research: observational data in the form of field notes, photos, and videos; communicative data including interviews, questionnaire and conversations; and documentary data including children's work, school policies, teaching plan, syllabus, textbook, policies at the national and supranational levels and so on. In terms of observational data, I attempted to present what was happening in the settings by reading and understanding of field notes and further examination of photos and videos. Communicative data provided the perspectives of research participants on some issues related to the research questions. The process of interpreting research participants' views involved both the transcripts of communicative data and the context in which research participants were living as the meanings they construct are always context-bound (Rampton, 2007). Documentary data as the third type acted as a bridge on the one hand to link the previous two types of data by displaying or explaining how they would fit in the process of answering research questions and a higher level of data base on the other in order to go beyond the first two types of descriptive data.

2.423 The process of data analysis

Research data lay a foundation for analysis but they do not speak for themselves (Burgess, 1982). Qualitative data analysis aims to develop a meaningful and adequate account (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Dey, 1993). It is a process of breaking down data into components, looking into their characteristic elements and structures, making connections between and within the components, and bringing about concepts or an overall picture of social phenomena being studied. Coding procedures are mainly involved in the breaking down of data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) identified three types of coding: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding refers to 'the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 61); axial coding is defined as ' a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 96); selective coding is a 'process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 116). It is important to note that the three types of coding should not be used in a linear way but rather they are interwoven into the whole process of data analysis. Similarly, Dey (1993) defines the process of qualitative data analysis as 'describing', 'classifying' and 'connecting', which is connected by the event and its contexts, process, and intentions.

However, it is important to note that data analysis is not just a process of bringing order, structure, coding, decoding, organising and reorganising data but rather a process of deep understanding of the relevance between the data and research questions (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Mason, 2002; Schostak, 2006). It involves understanding the raw data, recollecting data from the raw data base, taking out the data most relevant to research questions, and then analysing them by focusing on how to answer research questions in a logical way (Robson, 1993). The process of data analysis is also a visiting, revisiting, organising and reorganising research data and related literature in a spiral trajectory. This requires the researcher's ability to think and rethink logically, abstractly, critically, reflectively, and open-mindedly (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The process involved in my data analysis accords with the discussions above. My analysis starts from reading and annotating data including the field notes, photographic data, video data, memos or research diary, and literature review. This first enabled me to depict a general picture of my data: What data were the most relevant to the research questions? Were there some similar data between the Chinese and English settings? Were there some data revealing marked differences between the two settings? Those three questions emerged out of my understanding of empirical data whilst they were at some degree guided by my overall research questions. At this stage of analysis, I collected the data most related to those three questions and put them into the framework of data analysis. For example, the observational data first reminded me of the contrast that the direct teaching was prevalent in the curriculum practice in the Chinese setting while the English setting was dominated by the play-based activities. This stage was mainly a process of description. Then, the second stage sought to go beyond description to coding and classifying (Dey, 1993). I mainly used open coding referred by Strauss and Corbin (1990) in order to differentiate what were identified as relevant data and develop a clearer map of related categories for the comparison of activities in the Chinese and English settings. I would argue that open coding here involves an interplay between reading raw data and reviewing relevant literature (Hughes, 1994), which helped me to formulate the categories such as the activity type, the activity process, the teacher-child and child-child interactions, and the roles of teaching and play in order to compare the two settings. The third stage focused on how to make connections within and between those categories identified at the second stage in order to formulate a theoretical level account. It is not just to connect the categories generated by the similar methods such as observational data or interview data but to make connections between categories generated by different methods. For example, relate the observational categories such as the roles of teaching and play to the interview data related to teachers' perspectives on teaching and play and parents' perspectives on early childhood (see chapter nine); connect the process of the curriculum practice with the documentary data such as the teaching plan and policies at setting, national and supranational levels (see chapter nine).

2.424 Formulation of the three levels of analysis

Analysis was divided into three levels: a micro-level comparison, which was mainly drawn from the observational data; a meso-level (Hargreaves, 1985) comparison mainly based on communicative data including open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and informal conversations; and a macro-level comparison mainly focusing on conceptual generalization inferred from documentary data including related literature and policies of setting, local, national and supranational levels. The micro-level comparison is a 'thick description' of what was observed in Chinese and English settings in term of the curriculum practice. For instance, what and how are the similarities and differences constructed in the different learning activities including language, mathematics, arts and children's play activities between the two contexts. The macro-level comparison attempts to produce a theoretical level of analysis in order to avoid Hargreaves' (Hargreaves, 1976, cited in Hargreaves, 1985: 22) criticism of micro researchers, who 'often seemed, like ostriches, to be so preoccupied with the fine-grained detail of school and classroom life, that they rarely took their heads out of the sand to see what was happening in the world outside'. For example, the macro-level analysis went beyond the thick description of the Chinese and English settings and moved to the philosophical and policy issues with regard to teaching and learning, and the relationship between culture and the early years curriculum in order to produce a theoretical account. The meso-level, as Hargreaves (1985: 41) argues, acts as the link between the micro-level and macro-level in order to bridge the gap between 'the world of small scale face-to-face interaction' and 'vast social structures of immense proportions'. The meso-level comparison here brought in some aspects inferred from the adult's perspectives in order to link the micro-level and macro-level comparisons.

It is important to point out that those three levels of analyses are not separately from each other, rather, they are always interrelated (Hargreaves, 1985). However, for the purpose of analysis, the three levels were put separately in this thesis. Furthermore, this study does not seek to generalize about the wider population either in China or in England. The findings embedded in the three levels of analysis are only applicable to the particular research settings used in this study in order for readers to 'understand how ideas and abstract principles can fit together' (Nisbet and Watt, 1984, cited in Cohen et al., 2000: 181).

2.5 Ethical issues

The ethical principles of dignity and confidentiality, autonomy, beneficence, and justice concerning the rights and welfare of the research subjects (Pring, 2000; Coady, 2001) for undertaking research are acknowledged to be of the utmost importance to the whole process of this research. There were three types of ethical issues involved in this research: access to the research sites and research participants, the relationship between data collection and the setting routine, and publication of research findings. My access to the Chinese and English research sites and participants was built upon the informed consent forms, which stated clearly the aim of research project and consent statement (see Appendix 1, 2, 3, and 4). However, differences were revealed in research participant's awareness of ethics in early years research between the Chinese and English settings. The English participants seemed to be more concerned about the impact my presence might have on the children whilst the Chinese participants, especially classroom teachers, seemed to see me more as a consultant whom they could come to seek help or advice for their teaching.

This study was overt research for both Chinese and English research sites. Participant observations, interviews, conversations and questionnaires as data collection methods were conducted aiming to bring about as less disturbance as possible to the setting routine. For instance, field notes were used as the major form of data for observations in natural setting both indoors and outdoors whilst photos and videos were only used as supplementary means to record events where it was hard for me to take notes. Being a participant observer, I offered children and adults help in the Chinese and English research sites when they needed me. Mutual trust and understanding was thus built up between me and the research participants. This helped reduce the side effects caused by my presence to the research settings and participants, especially the children. In order to protect the confidentiality of the research participants, the anonymous identification of the data such as pseudonyms for all research participants including teachers, practitioners, parents and children in both the Chinese and English settings have been used in publications including academic seminars, conferences, journals, and the PhD thesis. I explained to the teachers and parents in the Chinese and English settings that photos to be used in the hard copies of my PhD thesis would be kept in the Library of Roehampton University only for the purpose of academic learning and dissemination.

2.6 Summary

This study is underpinned by qualitative interpretivism and symbolic interactionism. It seeks to answer the research questions – what and how are similarities and differences in the early years curriculum practice constructed between the Chinese and English settings and how can this occurrence of similarities and differences be interpreted. This study is a comparative case study in terms of the research scope to be involved in cross-cultural contexts whilst the nature of ethnographic study is justified in the methods of data collection and data analysis. The research procedure includes a two-phase research design and aspects of data analysis. My data analysis as a whole is qualitative characterised as discovery-oriented and interpretation-grounded. The process of data analysis is a spiral trajectory interwoven by logical critical thinking of research data and on-going revisit of related literature. Three types of research data – the observational data, communicative data and documentary data – are analysed in three levels – the micro, meso and macro.

Chapter Three

Language activities in Chinese and English settings

This chapter compares language activities in the Chinese and English settings. The *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001) in the Chinese context and the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000) in the English context identify language development as one of the most important learning areas for young children. The two contexts share common goals for children's language learning focusing on cultivation of children's confidence, willingness, and competence in communicating, speaking, listening, and understanding in language-related situations. The analysis here focuses on the four elements – the activity types, the process, the adult-child and child-child interactions, and the roles of teaching and play involved in language activities between the Chinese and English settings. As we know, language activities are integrated into all the other types of learning activities such as mathematics, arts, and play activities. However, for the purpose of thesis writing and convenience of data analysis, language activities are analysed separately from the other activities.

3.1 Language activity types

3.11 The Chinese setting

Language development has been included into the curriculum since the transplantation of the Froebelian kindergarten from Japan to China at the end of the nineteenth century, in which talk between teachers and children was highlighted (Yu, 2001). The *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (2001) identifies the goals for children's language development as five categories:

> A child
> - is willing to talk with others and speak with good manners;
> - is able to pay attention and to listen to the speaker and is able to understand daily language;
> - is able to clearly express what he/she wants to say himself/herself;
> - likes to listen to stories and read picture books;
> - is able to understand and speak Chinese Mandarin.
>   (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001: 6-7)

This document acts as a framework for kindergarten practice of the early years curriculum in contemporary China (Li, 2001; Cai, 2006; Zhu, 2006). Research in China shows that language development as part of children's overall development has been integrated into all kinds of kindergarten curriculum activities (Tang, 2000; Wang, 2001; Early Childhood Curriculum Reform New Concept, 2004; Wu, 2004) in order to enlarge children's vocabulary, improve children's oral speaking ability, provide opportunities for children to express themselves, cultivate children's interests in literature, and promote children's cognitive and moral development (Wang, X.L., 2003; Zhu J.X, 2003; Zhu J.Y., 2003).

In the Chinese kindergarten class, activities for children's language development are divided into two major types – taught language activities or 'language lessons', a term used frequently by teachers in their teaching plan to refer to the major means to carry out language activities, and child-initiated language activities. In general, taught language activities dominated the process of language learning in this kindergarten class. Story telling as part of the taught language activities by means of direct teaching played a major part in helping children to develop literacy and an understanding of text. Most of the stories were chosen from the textbook, which was recommended by the local education authority as the kindergarten teachers' reference book. The textbook in the name of 'constructivist curriculum' is underpinned by the principle that children are the foundation of the curriculum and children play a major role in constructing their learning (Sun, Zhang, Han, Chen, & Xu, 2004). Formal reading of rhymes was a second type of taught language activities. There were usually two or three sessions of formal reading in a week and each session lasted about 30 minutes, in which children were asked to read following the teacher and attend to different tasks focusing on how to be able to read the text. For example, all the children were given the text 'An Old Man Lives Upstairs' and the teacher directed them to read the text several times before they focused on the recognition of some Chinese characters. Teaching of the English language was a third type of taught language activities in this kindergarten class although the latest official document the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outlines* (2001) did not require kindergartens to teach children the English language. One third of the children, 15 out of 40, in this kindergarten class attended special English language classes outside school hours and in addition to the English lessons provided by this kindergarten.

Child-initiated language activities were mainly carried out by their spontaneous talk or conversations, which promoted children's communication and interactions with each other to a great extent (Zhu, J.Y., 2003). Children's talk away from teachers' control was also found most interesting in terms of the themes and the ways in which they expressed themselves. They initiated ideas, negotiated with each other, tried out things, and enjoyed playful experience. Children enjoyed talking and communicating with peers in the process of their play at the home corner. Their play could be shifted from having dinner in one minute to rushing to hospital in another because one child exclaimed, 'My head… Such a terrible headache I've ever had.' Children talked about their daily lives during break times and got interested in sharing their stories with others; children's talk with me about their clothes, favourite food, and their parents during break times showed that they were eager to express their feelings and share with others. Sometimes, children initiated literacy-related activities spontaneously. For example, they independently chose some books in the book corner to read aloud and they were frequently joined by other children to share their reading. Compared with formal language activities, informal activities appeared to help children a great deal to develop their interests in talking, listening to, and communicating with others.

3.12 The English setting

In the English context, 'communication, language and literacy' are identified as one of the six learning areas for children at the Foundation Stage (QCA, 1999; QCA, 2000). The *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000: 45) addresses the importance of providing 'opportunities for children to communicate thoughts, ideas and feelings and build up relationships with adults and each other' in activities involved in all areas of learning and 'to share and enjoy a wide range of rhymes, music, songs, poetry, stories and non-fiction books'. As already mentioned in the literature review, the guidance has been used widely among the English settings as a framework to plan activities in the Foundation Stage (Sylva et al., 2004; Marsh, 2005; Pugh and Duffy, 2006). This was echoed in the English nursery school class.

Compared with the Chinese kindergarten class, there was a wider range of language activities in the English nursery school class. For example, practitioner planned activities such as story-telling, table-top activities, multi-literacy activities

including computer-based literacy and activities related to children's multicultural background and child-initiated language activities were adopted in the English setting. Another difference between the Chinese and English settings lay in the fact that children rather than practitioners played a major role in carrying out language activities either in practitioner planned or child-initiated activities. Take story-telling and table-top activities for examples. Story-telling as an important means involved in communication, language and literacy was used on a daily basis in this English nursery school class. Story-telling was usually a collective activity time for children, in which children were often divided into two groups: a smaller group of some younger children at the age of 3-4 years old sitting with a practitioner inside the sensory room, which was used as a enclosed area to carry out some activities focusing on exploration of sound, lights and so on; a bigger group of 4-4.5 year olds sitting in the carpet area next to the sensory room with two practitioners. There were a wide range of themes involved in story-telling including magic, classical English stories, fun stories, and daily life stories. For example, children enjoyed the story 'Five Little Monkeys' and actively acted out the story in groups.

Table-top activities focusing on children's communication, language and literacy development were usually planned two or three times a week. Children chose to engage in table-top activities such as telephone tables or literacy tables rather than practitioners asking them to do it. What to do and how to do it were decided by children themselves whilst practitioners mainly provided support for individual children when they needed help. This showed marked differences to the Chinese setting mentioned earlier. Interestingly, informal activities initiated by children themselves in this English setting were very similar to what had happened in the Chinese setting in that children in both settings took initiatives in developing topics of shared interests and interacted with each other through 'sustainable conversations' (Tassoni and Hucker, 2000): children develop a long period of conversations based on shared topics and meanings, and enjoy themselves in the process of their spontaneous talk.

3.2 The process of language activities

3.21 The Chinese setting

3.211 Story-telling

The process of story-telling was usually divided into four parts in the Chinese setting, which is, as argued by Wang (2001), also very common among Chinese kindergartens. First, the teacher introduced the stories by different means, for instance, direct reading of the story, using a recording of the story, displaying illustrations, or raising some questions, in order to have the children's attention. In the second part, children were usually asked to listen carefully to the whole story read by the teacher. Then, it was followed by a time of asking-answering questions between the teacher and children. Questions raised by the teacher were mostly related to recall of the facts about the story. The final part of story-telling usually was ended by children acting out the story plot or retelling the story.

Here is an episode collected from the pilot study. Nineteen children sat on chairs in a half circle surrounding the formal lesson area in the classroom. Teacher Lan asked the children to get ready for the new lesson and showed children pictures using transparent slides of a car, a truck, and a big earth-mover in a crowded street. Then, teacher Lan read children the whole story of 'The Slow Earth-mover':

> A small car and a truck were complaining to a big earth-mover which was driving in front of them, 'How slowly you are driving! We cannot even pass by!' The big earth-mover kept silent and still moved slowly among the long queue of vehicles ahead of it. A few minutes later, there appeared a huge lump of clay getting in the way. All the vehicles had to stop. The small car and the truck got more anxious, 'How can we move? How unlucky we are today! We were following a stupid earth-mover at a snail-speed. Now, we were blocked by this…' No sooner had they finished their complaint than the earth-mover began to move a bit forward after the other vehicles tried to spare some space for it to go out. The earth-mover came to the huge lump slowly and stopped confidently right in front. The earth-mover continued to move forward towards the lump. The long wheel pressed over the big lump and suddenly no lump existed at all! All the vehicles began to slowly move forward. It was the turn of the car and the truck to move. They both apologized to the earth-mover, 'Sorry, we were impolite to you… Thank you for your help…'
>
> (Video recording on 2nd September 2005)

When teacher Lan finished reading the story, she moved on to the second part asking children questions related to the story:

> Teacher Lan [asked all the children after she finished reading the whole story]: What kind of trouble did the car and truck have in the story?
> Kun [boy]: The big truck and the small car were sweating.
> Yue [girl]: They are blocked by the earth-mover.

70

Teacher Lan [nodded at Yue and then turned to another question]: Why did the earth-mover run so slowly?
Bin [boy]: The earth-mover's belt turned over and over.
Teacher Lan: Yes, you are right. The earth-mover's wheel is a very long circle and it takes time to turn round.
[At that moment, some children were curious about other things shown on the slide.]
Le [boy]: Why are the eyes of the big truck like people's eyes?
Yang [boy]: No, it's not the big truck. It's the earth-mover's eyes that look like people's eyes.
(field notes from 2nd September 2005)

However, teacher Lan did not respond to these discussions but asked children to act out the story. Teacher Lan spent some time in keeping children, especially some boys, in order and distributed the roles by asking them to act out the earth-mover, big truck and car. It seemed that there was not enough room for children's performance. Some children's vehicles drove off the track when they stretched out their arms to imitate driving. Teacher Lan had to stop them and asked, 'what will happen if the car drives off the track or if you break the transport regulations?' This question aroused children's interests in talking about some accidents they saw in the street. However, teacher Lan did not respond to the children's talk. Instead, she asked the children to act out the story for a second time. Only eight children pretended to drive whilst the rest were standing by without participation.

3.212 Formal reading of rhymes

Formal reading of children's rhymes in this kindergarten was based on a special textbook designed for children called the *Happy Garden of Chinese Characters*. Children in formal reading sessions all sat around tables with textbooks in hand and attended to tasks focusing on how to read and recognise the Chinese characters. In these formal reading sessions, the teacher usually had a book in hand standing in front of all the children and read the text slowly. Then, children were asked to read after the teacher over and over until the teacher was satisfied with their reading. In the final part the teacher used flash cards to test children's recognition of the characters chosen from the rhymes. Here is an episode about a rhyme 'Three Ducklings' taught by teacher Lu. Before the start of formal reading, all children sat at table with textbooks in hand.

Teacher Lu: Today, I don't want to be Teacher Lu. I would rather like to ask a child to be our teacher. Those who sit properly and read well come to the front to read!
[No children went to the front.]
Teacher Lu: Ok, let us read together. I point to the characters, you read after me together!

71

[Teacher Lu used slides pointing each character slowly in front of all the children. Then children began to read the whole passage in the following.]

Three Ducklings

One duckling Kwa kwa kwa.
What do you call? Scared, scared, scared.
We want to swim but too scared to get in.
Two ducklings Kwa kwa kwa.
What do you call? Get down, get down, get down.
We encourage each other, not scared any more.
Three ducklings kwa kwa kwa.
What do you call?
Hurry up, hurry up!
You catch, I catch, we catch fish and prawns'
…

(field notes from 31st March 2006)

When the children finished reading the whole passage of the Three Ducklings, teacher Lu asked the children 'who read the best'. Most children pointed to the girl Yi, who sat at the front table. Teacher Lu nodded at her with smiles. Some girls shouted, 'Teacher Yi, could you guide us to read?' Teacher Lu encouraged Yi to come to the front. Yi put her fingers onto the slide and read clearly in a loud voice, 'Three ducklings…' All the other children were required by teacher Lan to read after Yi from the beginning to the very end of the rhyme.

Then, another four children were asked to be teachers by taking the lead in reading the rhyme and the other children were asked to read the same rhyme for a fifth time. During the course of reading, some children lost interest and kept looking around or looking at the back of the classroom. The boy Dong, who sat in front of me, even sighed uneasily in a low voice, 'Oh, mum, when can we finish reading these ducklings?' After the completion of reading the whole rhyme, children were shown some flash-cards and were asked to recognise the characters.

3.213 English language teaching

The English language teaching lesson was held once a week in the mornings and it lasted 30-40 minutes each session. According to the teachers' weekly plan, the aim of English language teaching was to 'cultivate children's learning interest in English' and 'to make them feel happy in learning English'. The process of English language teaching seemed to be dominated by 'accurate and clear reading of some English words' indicated in the weekly teaching plan. It usually started from a review of previous English lessons, in which children were asked by the teacher to answer

questions by using simple English words such as the names of animals and vocalising of numbers or using simple English sentences such as 'My name is…' or 'It's sunny today'. Then, the teacher introduced the topic to the new lesson. The major part of a new lesson usually focused on how to pronounce English words and sentences correctly reinforced by a combination of formal direct teaching and by playful teaching methods. Playful teaching methods might involve the use of props such as dolls and videos might be used in order to maintain children's interests. The following episode was collected from an English language lesson taught by teacher Huang. At the beginning of the English lesson teacher Huang reviewed the short rhyme of 'finger' and counted numbers from one to ten.

> Teacher Huang [taking out a felt tortoise from a box put on the front desk and asked the children in Chinese]: What is this?
> Children [answered in Chinese]: Little tortoise!
> Teacher Huang [in Chinese]: Are you scared?
> Children [in Chinese]: No.
> Teacher Huang [in Chinese]: What's the name of the little tortoise?
> Children [in Chinese]: Xiao gui gui.
> ['gui' here is the Chinese pinyin for 'tortoise' whilst 'gui gui' is often used by young children to address 'tortoise'.]
> Teacher Huang [in Chinese]: This is Robbin. Can you say Robbin?
> Children: Robbin, Robbin…
> Teacher Huang [took out a crocodile and asked in Chinese]: What's the name for the little crocodile?
> Children [in Chinese]: e e.
> ['e' here is the Chinese pinyin for 'crocodile' and young children use 'e e' to refer to 'crocodile'.]
> Teacher [in half Chinese and half English]: It's Jack. Jack!
> Some children: Jack, Jack.
> Teacher Huang [said to the children in Chinese]: One day this little tortoise bumped into the little crocodile. They both forgot their names. Do you remember what they are called?
> Children: e e…
> Teacher Huang [spoke in English, holding the tortoise in hand]: I am Robbin. Hello, hello!
> Some children laughed: Aha, my name is Robbin.
> (field notes from 31st March 2006)

The next part moved on to practice speaking English sentences. Teacher Huang taught the children to speak in English – 'I'm four years old'. Then, she explained the meaning of 'I'm four years old' to the children in Chinese. She continued to introduce another new sentence 'I love reading'. Children were then asked by teacher Huang to go to the front to practise speaking these sentences in English. Most of the children who went up to the front to do practice looked very nervous and the two sentences were mixed up by some children. For example, when teacher Huang asked them to say 'I'm Robbin' and 'I love reading' some children

spoke 'I'm reading' and 'I love Robbin' instead. Teacher Huang corrected them and made them repeat what she said. Similar cases happened quite often in the English language class in this kindergarten classroom. For instance, teacher Huang taught children to speak, 'I am xxx. My hands are big. My arms are long.' However, some children stuck to 'my hands am big' and 'my arms am long'. According to the headteacher Ai, English teaching is part of enlightening education for young children and it helps children to have 'a gradual understanding of the Western culture' and to 'understand that the world is made up of different cultures and nations'. However, my observational data revealed that the English language lessons appeared to be a language drill for the sake of language itself rather than appreciation and understanding of cultures. Such practice is criticised by some Chinese researchers who believe that treating language drill as the main aim of language learning decreases children's interest in learning English (Song, 2000; Yan, 2000).

3.214 Children's spontaneous talk

Spontaneous talk initiated by children also provided opportunities for children's language development, in which children talked and interacted with each other in a way different from that of formal language activities. In this Chinese kindergarten class, children's spontaneous talk happened during the course of corner activities, break times and outside the classroom, where children initiated talk around shared interests and had conversations with children, teachers and sometimes even myself, the researcher in the role of a participant observer. For example, during break times children talked freely with other children about their parents, friends, new clothes, toys and so on; the book corner, which was set up at the balcony area of the classroom, provided opportunities for children to talk about stories or texts displayed on the book shelf; corner activities without much intervention from teachers offered children chances to communicate with each other freely in home-corner play and construction play. According to my observations in this setting, children enjoyed themselves in their spontaneous talk with others and their eagerness to express their feelings was clearly manifest in the case of their spontaneous talk.

The following episode happened when three girls were playing in the playground after the morning exercises. It started from a leaf which was picked up from the bush by Tong whilst Yi thought it was wrong to pick the leaf.

Yi: No, you shouldn't pick it off!
Tong: Why not? It has no life!
Yi: You are wrong. It gets its own life!
Tong [turned to the bush and picked another three leaves and stepped on the leaves]:
Look, they don't feel pain. They are not alive.
[Yi and the other two girls were looking at Tong with surprise and puzzlement.]
Yi: But I think they get their own life. Look at the tile on the ground. The tile is not alive. But the leaves are alive.
Xuan: Do you know if the baby in mum's belly gets life?
Yi and Tong [laughed together]: Aha, baby in mum's belly…
(field notes from 29th April 2006)

The topic here focused on whether leaves have life. Tong thought that leaves had no life whilst Yi disagreed with her. Tong attempted to persuade Yi by picking up another three leaves and stepping on them to show that leaves had no life because they did not feel the pain. Yi, however, used tiles as an example of things that have no life. Xuan turned to another topic on the baby in mummy's belly, which seemed to release the tension between Tong and Yi. We can see that children's spontaneous talk in the above was so different from children's responses in formal language lessons. In formal language lessons, children's talk was mostly associated with how to respond to teachers' questions, which reduced the possibility for children to extend their own ideas. By contrast, children developed interests in sharing talk and conversations with others in the informal environment of the playground, which promoted their curiosity in exploring and eagerness to learn (Liu, Y., 1999; Zhu, J.Y., 2003). Children in spontaneous activities were not asked by others to solve problems but they attempted to solve problems by themselves. The three girls' conversations might have lasted longer if they were not asked by teacher Huang to go back to the classroom to prepare for the next lesson.

3.22 The English setting

3.221 Story-telling

The process of story-telling was mostly concerned with reading the whole story to children alongside a brief discussion of some questions related to stories in the English setting. Story-telling acted as a multi-functional means besides the function of literacy development. According to Anning and Edwards (2006), story-telling helps children to learn to listen and gets children to be familiar with the structures of narrative forms such as beginnings, middles and ends. Practitioners in this nursery school class argued that story-telling enabled children to enjoy being together in a group, gave children time to calm down and released tension they had got from their

robust free play activities. According to my observations, children usually very much enjoyed listening to stories and participating actively in questions and discussions afterwards. The following episode took place in the sensory room with a group of three-four year olds. Eight children were sitting on the floor with practitioner Frances, who had two picture-books to hand.

Frances: I've got two books here. I want you to choose one.
Children: Room on the Broom.
Frances: Good. Let's do this then!
Frances [opened the book]: Listen, who's making that noise?
[All the eight children were very concentrated and interested.]
Frances: A witch and a cat! [Frances showed the picture to each child]
Frances [began to read the story]: The witch had a cat and a very tall hat. And long ginger hair which she wore in a plait. How the cat purred and how the witch grinned. As they sat on their broom stick and flew through the wind. But how the witch wailed, and how the cat spat. When the wind blew so wildly it blew off the hat...
(field notes from 31st January 2006)

Frances asked children to move their jaws after she read the beginning of the story. Children then puffed their mouth and moved their jaws up and down to 'blow off'. Frances watched each child and gave praise for each of them and then continued to tell the story. Children did some other actions of making 'woosh' and 'roar', which were part of the story plot. In general, this story appeared to be quite fun for children as they enjoyed listening and doing actions related to the story. In the meantime, the illustrations for the story built up space for children's imagination of what would be happening at the next stage. For instance, when Frances told them that the witch's hat flew down to the ground a girl laughed and said, 'A doggy got it!'

3.222 Table-top activities

Table-top activities such as telephone table activities were used twice or three times a week in this English setting. Practitioners set up the table equipped with telephones, papers, pencils, sometimes helmet and police uniforms. Children themselves decided how to use telephone tables and how to interact with others at telephone table. Therefore, the process involved here was in the hands of children themselves rather than controlled by the practitioners' plan. This is most distinguishable from the Chinese setting preoccupied with teachers' direct teaching in formal language activities. Here is an example, in which two boys were making calls at the telephone table.

Howard [with the receiver in hand]: Hello, hello!

> Quid: I am not here at the moment!
> [Quid put down his receiver and began to draw something on a piece of paper using a pencil]
> Howard [taking up the receiver]: Can we play games?
> Quid: Hello… Yes. How are you? Hello, hello…
> Howard: Hello!
> [Howard turned to a notebook on the table]
> Quid [showing Howard]: This is my book.
> Howard [pointing to his]: Look, I got mine too!
>   (field notes from 10th May 2006)

Quid then showed Howard what he drew in his notebook, 'This is Frank's police car! This is mine, and this is your police car!' Howard looked very pleased on hearing that Quid drew a police car for him too. Quid told Howard, 'So, we each got one'. At that moment, they both were distracted by the art table behind theirs. Then, they were joined by practitioner Irene:

> Irene [picking up the receiver]: Bee bee… Hello, it's your call!
> Irene [handing the receiver to Quid]: It's your mummy. She wants to speak to you!
> Quid: Hello, hello…
> Irene [turning to Howard]: My telephone got different tones. Do you want to hear it?
> Howard [looking at Irene in curiosity]: Can it be twinkle star?
> Irene: Yeah. Doo doo doo doo doo doo doo…' [Imitating the tune of 'twinkle star']
> Howard [picking up the telephone opposite to Quid]: Hello, it's me…
> Irene: Can you speak louder please? I can't hear you well!
> …
>   (field notes from 10th May 2006)

The first part of the process was developed by Howard and Quid themselves by a combination of making phone calls and talking about their drawings. Their conversations happened naturally, facilitated by the resources planned by practitioners. Irene joined Howard and Quid after they were both distracted by the art activities. Irene helped them maintain their interests in making phone calls and aroused their curiosity about the call tones.

3.223 Computer-based literacy

Anning and Ewards (2006) argue that the concept of 'multiliteracies' (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000) augmenting the traditional version of 'reading and writing' should be included in the early years literacy framework. My research showed that computer-based literacy was adopted as a daily-basis activity for children in this English setting. For example, computer games focusing on how to go through a maze, taking animals to hospitals, the creation of parties, some rhymes and stories, and basic drawing games were of great interest to children. During the period of my research, two computers were available for children. Most often children sat two or three

together at the computer table where they took turns to play computer games. The process of computer-based literacy offered evidence of children's own interactions, in which they were guided by computer games and tried to solve problems they encountered. Children also interacted with others who were waiting in order to attend to some tasks. This, according to Lee and O'Rourke (2006), promotes children's communication skills and social interactions. The process of computer-based activities was represented in the following episode. Lynn sat at the computer playing with a paint brush whilst Betty sat to the right of her watching.

> Betty: You go this pink!
> [Lynn first tried to use red but then she used pink to colour the blank area in the drawing paper. Lynn picked up the eraser.]
> Betty: You rubber it off?
> [Lynn seemed to be very concentrated and responded to Betty with a slight nodding.]
> Betty: You need a clean paper to work another one?
> Lynn [still cleaned the pink colour but she told Betty]: My mum went to sleep for a long time. I didn't go to school yesterday.
> Betty: I came to nursery yesterday. My mum took me here!
> (Field notes from 12th June 2006)

Betty, who was waiting for her turn, actively initiated conversations with Lynn in the first part of the episode. Lynn looked rather concentrated on her drawing and did not respond to Betty in a way that Betty responded to her. However, Betty's talk did help her to attend to her tasks. For example, she used the pink colour after Betty suggested 'you go this pink'. In the meantime, they talked about their daily experiences. The next part of the episode was followed by another child Tila's joining in and leaving because she did not have enough patience to wait her turn. However, Betty still waited there:

> Betty: Lynn, you take an awful long time! When can I have a go?
> [Lynn did not reply but still randomly coloured her paper.]
> Tila [complained to Lynn]: No, it's Betty's turn.
> Lynn: But I haven't finished yet. I want another go!
> Betty: But we are not allowed to have another go!
> (field notes from 12th June 2006)

We can see the conflicts between Betty and Lynn. However, there were no practitioners nearby and the whole episode ended up with Betty leaving in disappointment whilst Lynn continued to do drawing on her own.

3.224 Multicultural literacy

Children in this nursery school class were from multicultural backgrounds including white British children, African-Caribbean children, children from Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Iran and the Philippines. With English as the dominant language, practitioners offered children from minority ethnic backgrounds opportunities to practise their native languages. For example, some special activities were arranged on special occasions for children to experience other languages and cultures including Hindu, Pakistani, Arabic, and activities related to Japanese and Chinese cultures. These activities not only provided minority ethnic children with opportunities to feel that 'their language and culture is welcomed, valued, respected, acknowledged and visibly supported' (Bruce, 2005: 133) but also offered white British children opportunities to understand and learn about cultures around them. Practitioners sometimes supported some individual children by talking about their mother tongue. For instance, practitioner Kate asked Maria, who was from India, how to say the names of vegetables in Hindu. Maria looked very pleased and kept telling Kate what was Hindu for garlic, onion, cucumber and so on. Those multicultural activities were mostly adult-directed and pre-planned. However, the informal atmosphere created in those activities greatly encouraged the minority ethnic children to learn to communicate with others in English and also to try out their mother tongue through proper interactions with practitioners. This was in accordance with the argument made by Woods et al. (1999) that children from minority ethnic groups benefited from multicultural activities regarding language development, social skills and emotional well-being.

3.225 Children's spontaneous talk

Children's spontaneous talk happened everywhere as children took opportunities to express themselves and communicate with others in all kinds of activities in this English setting. Daily activities were mostly chosen by children themselves whilst all activities were carried out in parallel rather than in a linear way. This is very different from the Chinese setting where children usually did the same thing at the same time. However, children's spontaneous talk in both settings shared similarities to a great extent as children initiated communications with each other based on shared interests and further developed their topics. In this nursery school class, the dressing-up or clothes shop area in the classroom was a favourite place for

children, especially girls. The process of dressing up was combined with discussions and negotiations related to setting up the roles of play and how to develop play in depth. Such kinds of conversations as 'Girls, mum will go shopping today', 'sister, you take care' or 'children, sit there quietly' were very often heard in the dressing-up area. Children's spontaneous talk also happened in all the other activities either inside classroom or outside including water play, sand play, and construction activities. According to my conversation with practitioner Mary, children's talk in those play activities was of great importance to their language development, especially the social skills involved in communicating with each other.

3.3 Teacher-child and child-child interactions

3.31 The Chinese setting

As discussed earlier, taught language activities dominated the process of children's language learning in the Chinese kindergarten class. Teacher-child interactions represented in the taught language activities focused on asking-answering questions related to the stories, rhymes and English words or sentences that children were taught. Asking-answering questions were a one-way direction, namely, from teachers to children. The process of asking-answering questions was mainly under the surveillance of teachers, which authors refer to as quite common among Chinese kindergarten practice (Zhu, J.Y., 2003). However, this did not mean that there were no chances at all for children to initiate some topics. For example, children were motivated to talk about car accidents they saw in the streets when teacher Lan in the previous episode of 'the slow earth-mover' asked them the question of 'what will happen if the car drives off the track or when you break the transport regulations'. However, teacher Lan did not respond to those children's questions. In contrast, to observed practice in the English teaching lessons there was a lack of the 'genuine context' argued by Whitehead (2003) as of importance for children with English as their second language. This made children's English learning in this Chinese research site turn into a rigid copy of teacher's teaching. Therefore, it would seem not surprising that children said 'my hands am big' rather than 'my hands are big' as mentioned in the section of 3.213.

However, child-child interactions in spontaneous activities revealed a stark contrast to taught language activities. First, spontaneous activities provided a relaxing

environment for children, in which they became naturally curious and interactive initiating talk with peers themselves. Secondly, children interacted with others based on a two-way direction of communication rather than one-way: they raised questions, defended themselves, attempted to persuade others, and developed their argument. This was hardly found in taught language activities in this kindergarten class. Thirdly, spontaneous talk as the emergent curriculum beyond the teaching plan promoted the achievement of the learning goals involved in children's language development such as willingness to talk with others, patience to listen to others, and ability to express themselves (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001; China Preschool Education Research Association, 2004).

3.32 The English setting

Due to the fact that most activities, even those planned by practitioners, were carried out by children's participation and that it was children themselves who decided what to do and how to take up the adult-planned activities, language activities in the English setting were very much informal by nature. This led to the fact that the practitioner-child interactions as observed in language activities in the English setting were very different from those happening in the Chinese setting. More chances for children to take initiatives in the English setting resulted in practitioners following children and providing support when they perceived the children were in need of it. The example set out in the telephone table episode (see the section of 3.222) showed this clearly in that practitioner Irene came to support Howard and Quid when they were distracted by art activities. Practitioner-child interactions, in consequence, were built upon practitioner observations of children, which had the potential to provide insights into understanding of children's learning in order to give appropriate support to children in need (Spratt, 2006). In practitioner-led activities, such as story-telling, practitioner-child interactions showed evidence of more two-way direction and questions were discussed among practitioners and children rather than practitioners asking questions and children answering. In the meantime, children with English as a second language were particularly encouraged to participate in discussions. For example, practitioner Iris discussed the topic of animals with children after she finished the story of Pussy cat. Iris listened to Noar, who was from a Pakistani family, with smiles when he told children 'I … got a big… fish.' Iris also encouraged Noar to

speak more about his fish by asking, 'Do you like it?' Noar responded, 'No… It will… eat…me!' According to Iris, those children with English as second language were sometimes afraid to join in discussions because of language learning difficulty but they liked to be included. Therefore, practitioners needed to provide support to meet their needs. Practitioners in this class were sensitive to children's interests and needs but there were times when they were too busy to cater for every individual child. This is why Lynn kept having 'another go' whilst Betty had to complain 'you take an awful long time' and ended up in disappointment; that is why telephone-tables sometimes became war tables, in which boys were fighting for telephones.

Child-child interactions in the process of language activities were dynamic and robust. For instance, in practitioner planned activities such as story-telling, child-child interactions were usually led by practitioners' questions related to story plots, which was similar to the Chinese setting. However, practitioners' tolerance of diversity regarding children's answers as well as the 'search for fun' purpose in the English setting encouraged children's curiosity and interest in active participation like the episode of 'Room on the Broom'. Child-child interactions involved in table-top activities were more individualized in that children themselves made choices about what to do and how to do it. For instance, telephone tables became an effective environment for some children to talk with each other, exchange ideas, and cooperate with each other to solve problems whilst for some other children telephone tables turned into the origin of war when they fought against each other to get more telephones for themselves. Computer-based literacy with moving images, visual and audio effects, and interactive processes between computer and children (Marsh, 2005) attracted more children in this English setting. They knew the rules of computer play: they usually watched others playing, talked with others, sometimes made compliments to others who were playing, and sometimes helped others to solve problems (Lee and O'Rourke, 2006). However, it is unavoidable that negative interactions happened like the episode of Betty and Lynn because more children wanted to play but there were not enough computers. This again suggests that adults' intervention or support was needed in every corner. Children's spontaneity was encouraged by practitioners in all kinds of activities. This made robust child-child interactions occur in children's spontaneous activities as well as in practitioner-planned activities.

3.4 The roles of teaching and play

3.41 The Chinese setting

The essential message from my observations in this kindergarten class is that direct teaching dominated the process of language activities. It seemed that language activities as one of the most important learning areas included in the curriculum in this Chinese setting can only be emphasized by means of taught language activities through the direct teaching of stories, rhymes, and English language. The textbook adopted by this kindergarten class emphasized the idea of 'co-construction of the curriculum' between teachers and children (Sun, et al., 2004). However, my research data suggested that the language activities were mainly planned by teachers and a lot of effort focused on how to carry out the curriculum as planned. This restricted opportunities for children to initiate talk and develop communications with teachers within the process of the activity. The fact that taught language activities focused largely on children's literacy skills at the cost of the beauty and enjoyment conveyed by language activities (Chen, 2005; Xu, 2006) was applicable in this Chinese setting too. The language lessons such as 'The Slow Earth-mover', 'The Three Ducklings', 'Big Tree and Small Flowers' and some others could have been more enjoyable to children if teachers had not paid as much attention to what should be coming out regarding children's literacy development. This was reflected in what teacher Lan told me that she was very stressed driven by the idea of finishing the language lesson as planned.

Play only functioned in children's spontaneous activities as the supplementary means to implement children's language development in this Chinese setting. At the same time, the official status of play is defined as crucial for children's learning and development whilst play is officially treated as 'the basic activities' for kindergarten children in contemporary China (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001). It is true that more time and space were added for children's free play in the activity corners during the period of my research in this Chinese setting. However, 'play' as a concept is equal to 'wan' in Chinese pin yin, which is more related to children's activities with relaxation and fun at the centre (Xinhua Chinese Dictionary Editing Board, 2004). This perception also indicates that play is associated with the notion of 'carelessness and irresponsibility without seriousness' (Xinhua Chinese Dictionary Editing Board, 2004: 984). In this sense, play is naturally devalued compared with the values

attached to knowledge-based study (Liu, 2004). There are distinctions between 'play' and 'educational activity' put into the teaching plan in this kindergarten class. For example, teachers classified activities into two types – 'educational activities' and 'play'. Teachers set up concrete learning goals for educational activities whilst no further information, other than the types of play, was set for play activities. It is evidenced that 'play' played a major part in the corner activity times and play contributed a lot to children's language development by children's interactive communications with each other. However, compared with formal language activities, the importance of play in promoting children's language development is still waiting for recognition (Liu, Y., 1999).

3.42 The English setting

The English setting revealed marked differences to the Chinese setting regarding the role of teaching and play in language-related activities. In general, direct teaching did not happen much in language activities whilst teaching here was more related to a broad sense regarding to 'all the aspects' of practitioners' roles in supporting children (QCA, 2000; Fumoto et al., 2004). Play, instead, as a major means for children's learning, played a major part in children's communication, language and literacy development in this setting. It is not an exaggeration at all that play was nearly integrated into everything children deal with in the activities of communication, language and literacy in this setting. The aspects of teaching and play in language-related activities will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Teaching in this English setting was involved in providing support to individual children's needs. This was echoed in many cases of my observations such as in the sand pit, water play area, and nursery garden, where practitioners encouraged children to talk and communicate and got children reassured with recognition, nodding or even smiles. The boy Noar with English as a second language got beaming smiles after he was encouraged by practitioner Iris to talk about his 'big fish'. In this sense, nothing can be treated as trivial in terms of what children get from adult's support. Secondly, teaching here was about planning and setting up the learning environment both indoors and outdoors to enable children to develop their learning experiences on an individual basis (Bruce, 2004; Dowling, 2006; DfES, 2007b). In terms of language activities, practitioners in this English setting attempted to provide

children with different learning opportunities each day. For example, they set up a telephone table on Monday, names or letters table on Tuesday, picture-book table on Wednesday and so on. This does not mean that direct teaching did not happen at all in this nursery school class. Rather, direct teaching happened such as in story-telling whilst it was about providing opportunities to enable children to enjoy being together, and got children to calm down and release tensions along side the literacy-based purpose of helping children develop curiosity about prints and interest in reading.

Practitioners' trust and belief in play was evidenced in this English setting in that play prevailed at every corner of language activities. Not only children played but also practitioners put themselves in a playful position to build links between what they were doing and how children would respond. For example, during the course of story-telling practitioners used playful tones to mimic the roles involved in stories and encouraged children to be playful characters too. Children enjoyed doing the actions of making 'woosh' and 'roar' in the story told by practitioner Frances and children actively participated in talking about their favourite animals after practitioner Iris' story of Pussy cat. Children's spontaneous talk was mostly involved in playful situations, in which children put themselves in the roles of 'mummy', 'sister', 'baby' or 'children' and inform each other in a way like 'mummy will go shopping today', 'sister, you take care, I'm going to the holidays' or 'children sit there quietly. I will bring sweeties for you'… Children's playful conversations here can never be planned or designed by practitioners whilst the importance of play in helping children to become 'a skilful communicator' and 'a competent learner' cannot be denied (DfES, 2002). In the meantime, again, the set-up of the learning environment which encouraged and stimulated children's playful spirit including essential physical materials and a relaxing atmosphere, was essential prerequisite for children's playful experiences.

3.5 Summary

Language development in the Chinese kindergarten and 'communication, language and literacy' in the English nursery school class were identified by practitioners and within policy documents as one of the most important learning areas to be included in the early years curriculum. The Chinese and English settings shared similar learning goals for children's language-related development – to provide

children with a wide range of opportunities for them to express themselves properly and gain literacy-related experiences with enjoyment. Both the Chinese and English settings adopted adult-planned activities such as story-telling and English language learning, in which adults, including Chinese teachers and English practitioners, provided direct teaching. Children's spontaneous talk in both settings also shared similarities in that children developed shared topics, extended their interests through talk with others, became curious to explore and solved problems by themselves in a relaxing environment.

However, there were marked differences between the Chinese and English settings. In general, teachers' direct teaching with the purpose of carrying out a teaching plan dominated the language activities in the Chinese setting including story-telling, formal reading of rhymes, and English language teaching whilst children were mainly taught together for their language development. By contrast, in the English setting children played the major role in further developing practitioners' planned language activities whilst practitioners were more engaged themselves in observing children and providing support for individual children's needs. Differences were revealed in adult-child interactions too. For example, teacher-child interactions involved in taught language activities in the Chinese setting were driven by a linear routine of reading-listening and asking-answering focusing on the content of what children had been taught. This restricted the possibility of two-way interactions between teacher and children on the one hand and reduced the chances of child-child interactions on the other. Practitioner-child interactions in the English setting were built upon practitioners' observations of children, which provided insights into understanding of children in order to give support to individual children in need. It was most often children themselves rather than practitioners that decided what to learn and how to learn it in the English setting. This promoted robust child-child interactions in the process of language activities in the English setting. The roles of teaching and play involved in language activities in the two settings contrasted to each other: teachers' direct teaching played the major role in developing children's language in the Chinese setting, which made children's play a supplementary means for their language development; in the English setting, children's play dominated the whole process of language activities and teaching functioned more broadly related to supporting individual children in need.

Chapter Four

Mathematical activities in Chinese and English settings

I still remember a mathematical puzzle – which one is heavier, one jin of cotton or one jin of metal (jin, a Chinese word for measuring weight) – raised by our maths teacher at our village primary school when I was seven years old. Like many other country children in our class, I thought that one jin of metal was of course heavier than one jin of cotton. We got so confused when the teacher explained that one jin of metal is not heavier nor lighter than one jin of cotton but they had the same weight… In today's world including China and England, some mathematical puzzles are still challenging for young children. For example, it is hard for young children to understand key mathematical ideas such as the concepts of transitivity and conservation – why is it that 'the amount of liquid poured into a new and different shaped container remains the same' (Barber, 1998: 65). This chapter seeks to uncover the similarities and differences represented in the process of mathematical activities which were full of mathematical puzzles between the Chinese kindergarten class and the English nursery school class. For example, what types of mathematical activities were adopted in the Chinese and English settings; what were involved in the process of mathematical activities; what kinds of adult-child interactions and child-child interactions were manifest in mathematical activities; and what roles of teaching and play were involved in implementing mathematical activities.

4.1 Mathematical activity types

4.11 The Chinese setting

Mathematical development has been regarded as one of the most important learning areas for young children in the history of Chinese early years policies. For example, mathematical development was acknowledged as an independent activity beside physical education, language, understanding the environment, art work and music in the *Kindergarten Temporary Regulation Draft* (1952) while it was included in cognitive development by the *Kindergarten Work Regulation* (1996) (China Preschool Education Research Association, 1999). The *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outlines* (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001: 10) defines mathematical

development as part of science learning aiming to 'guide children to get interested in such phenomena as numbers, quantity, shapes, time and space, to construct basic number concept, and learn to solve some simple problems involved in their daily lives and play by using some simple mathematical methods'. My research data revealed that mathematical development was considered as one the most important educational activities in the Chinese research setting. There were mainly three types of mathematical activities adopted in this setting including taught maths activities, maths games, and children's spontaneous activities involved in activity corners.

Taught maths activities were a teacher-planned activity usually happening twice a week in the Chinese setting. In these taught maths activities, children were supposed to develop knowledge and skills in understanding number, representation of quantity of objects, colour patterns, the relationships between shapes and numbers, concepts of time and space, and the comparison of length and width of objects (China Preschool Educational Research Association, 2004). This reflects the impact of Piaget's developmental theory upon the early years mathematical curriculum across the world (Barber, 1998; Montague-Smith, 2002; Zhu, J.X., 2003). Some maths games introduced by teacher Hong in this kindergarten class included a 'number board', a 'seven-shape board', and some simple operational activities. These activities were of great interest to children in this Chinese setting. The difference between the taught maths activities and maths games lay in that the former was usually carried out through the direct teaching of the whole class according to the teaching plan whilst the latter were designed as supplements to the taught activities and usually chosen by a small group of children according to their interests. Children's spontaneous activities in the activity corners, especially in the construction corner and art corner, also promoted children's initiation of mathematics-relevant talk. Overall, taught maths activities by means of teacher's direct teaching were the major channel to carry out mathematical learning in the Chinese setting.

4.12 The English setting

Mathematical development is considered as an independent learning area alongside the other five learning areas by the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000). 'Counting, sorting, matching, seeking patterns, making connections, recognising relationships and working with numbers, shapes,

space and measures' are included in mathematical learning in this document (QCA, 2000: 68). This is similar to the domains of maths learning addressed by the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001) in section 4.11. The *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000: 68) emphasised the importance of using stories, songs, games and play to develop children's mathematical understanding in order to help children 'enjoy using and experimenting with numbers'. This is echoed in my English research setting. My research data showed that the English setting adopted a wide range of mathematical activities including table-top activities, maths games, action rhymes, and children's spontaneous activities involved in water play, sand play, construction play and so on.

Table-top activities were arranged by practitioners in this English setting related to sorting out animals, small people samples, matching colours, measuring, and arrangement of space and shape. Some maths games including dominos and the Snakes and Ladders, and action rhymes were usually held in small groups of 4-6 children at one time led by one practitioner. These maths activities were mostly carried out in small-groups or by individual children with the aid of practitioners or independently in a relaxing and meaningful environment. For example, the practitioner showed the children how scale works in the activity of making cake and children were most interested and engaged in the whole process. My observations in this English setting showed that children in mathematical activities got considerable support or intervention from practitioners. This is in accordance with the argument that children need massive support from adults in their maths learning (Barber, 1998; Zhu, J.X., 2003; Gifford, 2005).

4.2 The process involved in mathematical activities

4.21 The Chinese setting

4.211 Taught maths lesson

Taught maths lesson was the major means of implementing mathematical learning in the Chinese kindergarten class. It happened twice a week lasting 35-45 minutes each session. It was based on a teaching plan guided by the textbook. The process of a taught maths lesson started from the teacher's review of the previous teaching and moved on to direct teaching of a new lesson. Children were engaged in doing some maths exercises in the end. The following episode taken from my pilot

study was about the representations of quantity of objects, which will show us the major process involved in a taught maths lesson. Teacher Hong first gave the introduction by asking children to count how many times she clapped her hands, stamped her feet, and patted her shoulders and bottom. Most of the children could count correctly. The following started from teacher Hong's questions:

Teacher Hong [holding the textbook in hand]: There are trees, children, grassland, birds and lake… in the picture.
Teacher Hong: Listen. For example, how many ladybirds are there in the tree? One, two, three, four, five, six. Yes, ladybirds, six. [Hong pointed to the objects in the textbook. Children were counting at the same time.]
Teacher Hong: How can we show the quantity of the ladybirds in the picture?
Bin [boy]: Draw them out.
Zeze [boy]: Use dots to show out.
Teacher Hong: Besides drawing and using dots, what else can we use to show the quantity of ladybirds?
Piao [girl]: Use numbers, write 6, but I cannot write.
(field notes from 8th September 2005)

Teacher Hong looked very pleased hearing Piao's answer. She asked Piao to invite some children to help her write the number '6'. Another girl Zhu volunteered to go to the white board in front of the whole class. Zhu wrote quickly '1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6' onto the white board. Zhu looked rather confused when teacher Hong asked her 'Is there 1 ladybird, 2 ladybirds or 6 ladybirds?' However, Zhu's answer, 'I don't know what Piao means' was not responded to by the teacher whilst she continued to ask what else they could use to represent the quantity of the ladybirds. Some children were actively supplying answers such as Zeze's answer of 'use circles'. However, teacher Hong did not respond to the boy Kai when he said, 'Teacher, you close your eyes. I draw the numbers and you guess how many numbers'. What she seemed interested in was about how to represent the quantity of objects shown in the textbook.

The maths lesson then moved on to the teaching of colour patterns. The green-red pattern was shown by arranging plastic construction blocks and then the pattern of white-purple-blue was explained by using wooden blocks. Teacher Hong asked the children to name the patterns when she showed them through slides. Then, the children were divided into four groups sitting at desks to arrange wooden blocks into a regular pattern. One girl made a brown-black-red pattern using six blocks and two girls made a brown-red-black pattern using nine blocks, respectively. Most of the children were arranging the blocks randomly without taking colour pattern into consideration. Piao did not make a regular colour pattern but did make a pattern of shapes: two blocks piled upward together, two blocks in horizontal parallels, two

blocks piled upward, and two blocks in horizontal parallels. She murmured to herself, 'They are beds for babies'.

The third part of the maths lesson was practical exercises for children. Teacher Lan was asked to offer help. All children were given their textbooks. They were asked to work out the quantity of things including seesaws, children, slides and revolving machines showed in textbook. All the children were working very hard at this assignment. For example, many children mistook the quantity of revolving machines (an entertainment machine with some chairs for people to sit in; it can turn around and around when the power is switched on) as the quantity of the chairs fixed to them. The second task was to colour in flowers according to the fixed pattern red-yellow-blue shown in the picture. Several children succeeded in colouring with the help from the teachers but many were still confused. They were worried if they coloured the flowers in a wrong way. For example, the boy Dong said to his peers, 'We must not colour carelessly. Teacher will not be happy.' The girl Yue asked me anxiously, 'I have no yellow marker. Can I use this (orange) instead?' It took them 45 minutes to finish this formal maths lesson. Later, teacher Hong commented on her maths teaching as unsuccessful because 'it was too difficult for the children to understand the mathematical concept' and 'I cannot finish my teaching on time according to my teaching plan'. It seemed that carrying out the teaching plan was her priority whilst she attempted to make children understand her teaching.

4.212 Formal writing of numbers

Formal writing of numbers as part of taught maths activities took place every two weeks in this Chinese setting. Children were taught to write the numbers in the way that they were demonstrated by the teacher. All children were given the same task and did their writing on worksheets at the same time, supervised by teachers. Each time children were asked to keep writing only one or two numbers such as 0 and 1 until they were approved by teachers. My observations showed that the majority of the children could sit at table writing the same numbers for a long time and appeared to be enjoying their writing.

The following is an example of a formal writing of number 7 and 8 happening during the main research period. Teacher Lu was in charge of this activity. After she showed children through slides how to write '7' and '8' in good order and in good

shape, each child was given their own worksheets, which were designed as 田-shape. The children were asked to write 7 first as many times as they could until the writing was approved. Then, children were allowed to write the number '8'. Teacher Huang was supervising children after teacher Lu left the classroom for her professional meeting. Teacher Huang sang praises for the children when they wrote the numbers well. She also explained how to write correctly and corrected the mistakes when the children wrote incorrectly. For instance, she looked through the girl Ru's worksheet, 'All the 7s are very good! While these 8s I circled are not as good as those 7s. Keep writing!' Ru listened to teacher Huang very carefully and kept writing 8 until teacher Huang smiled. Teacher Huang also asked the children to hold the pencil tightly with thumb and forefinger and use the middle finger to support the end of the pencil in order to write 7 and 8 nicely. Teacher Huang told the boy Le who was left-handed in writing, 'You are again using your left hand. We need to write with our right hand. Otherwise, you can't write fast!' Le immediately put the pencil into his right hand and began to write '8' with patience. Most of the children treated their writing of 7 and 8 very seriously and persistently. For example, the girl Jia opened another page and continued to write after she finished writing a whole page of 7 and 8 and murmured to herself, 'I will not stop writing until daddy comes. I will be continuing to write before daddy comes…' And even the boy Yang, who was known as 'the naughtiest boy' in the class, patiently wrote two lines of 7 and two lines of 8. Being a participant observer, I strongly felt that children were highly motivated in what they were doing. I was quite moved by the girl Jia's remarks 'I will not stop writing until daddy comes'.

4.213 Maths games

Some maths games such as the 'number board', the 'seven-shape board' and some other informal operational maths activities were introduced to this kindergarten class in March 2006 by teacher Hong, who was inspired by the Montessori Method during the period of her teaching in a Montessori Class. These activities were mainly carried out within a small group of children rather than the whole class during the periods of corner activities. Those activities were not written into the teaching plan and thus served as supplements to the taught maths activities. The main process was associated with individual children's maths learning experiences based on interactions with the teacher or their peers. For example, the 'number board' was a piece of paper

stuck onto a small table at the back of the classroom. There were 100 squares on the piece of paper and some of the numbers between 1 and 100 were written into the relevant squares whilst some numbers were missing. Ten small number boxes were fixed to the edge of the table: the first box held numbers 1 to 10, the second box 11-20 and so on until the tenth box had the number from 91 to 100.

From the very beginning when the 'number board' was introduced by teacher Hong, many children became very interested. Different crowds of children experimented with the board after teacher Hong showed the children how to use it. As was observed, most children could do well within the number of twenty whilst they had some difficulty in calculating out which numbers should be put in, for example, between 34, 37 and 39. However, several children could do up to the number '60' independently or with the aid of teachers. Children who succeeded in doing this were very cheerful. Even Dong, a boy, who was shy and not usually active in class, once grasped a number 14 and put it in the right place when the teacher asked children to find out which number should be put in between 13 and 15. He said with excitement, 'I am the first to put it in, I am the number one. I have never been the number one before!'

A 'seven-shape board' was also introduced by teacher Hong. She bought several new sets of 'seven-shape board' made of thin wooden blocks, which was in the shape of a whole square made up of seven different shapes. She introduced different methods to children how to play with the board. For example, she broke the whole square into separate ones randomly and asked children to try to put them back to its original shape of square; children could also put the wooden blocks into any shapes they like. Children were interested in playing with the 'seven-shape board' within a small group, which involved children's independent and cooperative efforts.

Some other maths games were also introduced by teacher Hong. For instance, she attached some number cards to the plastic strip curtain which enclosed the science corner and separated it from the major part of the classroom. On the strip curtain hung some cards written with '3 cows + 5 grass = ()+()'. What is required in the brackets is a certain number of object pictures. For instance, the first bracket here needs three pictures of cows and the second bracket five pictures of grass. However, according to my observations, children seemed not to be interested in this operational maths game. Some children sometimes wandered around the number cards in the science corner

but they seldom stopped to try to work out which numbers should be put in the brackets.

4.214 Corner activities

Corner activities, especially construction corner activities, provided children with opportunities to develop their mathematical learning. The construction corner as a new initiative introduced to this class in February 2006 was opposite to the main classroom. The construction corner and the main classroom were separated from each other by the corridor. The construction materials include boxes of small plastic blocks, plastic construction blocks and wooden blocks. Children at the construction corner sometimes played individually and sometimes through peer cooperation. Besides children's building up blocks as part of mathematical learning process in dealing with matching and sorting objects related to space, shape, size and structure (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001; Montague-Smith, 2002), children's spontaneous talk in the construction corner was found to be related to mathematical aspects. This was evident in the following episode, in which four boys were playing with plastic sticks at the construction corner.

> Chen [boy] [holding a plastic stick in hand]: Look, my flying monster! Xiu xiu xiu…
> Ha, how xiu [the first three 'xiu' represents the cry of the flying monster whilst the
> fourth 'xiu' means 'shy' in English]
> [Boy Duan was putting some small plastic blocks together kneeling down on the
> floor and made the plastic fence on his left side fall down.]
> Fan [boy], 'Duan, look what you are doing!'
> Duan, 'Bang bang bang!' [holding his trifle-like plastic tool]
> Bin [boy], 'Look, my sword!'
> Chen, 'I have many canons!'
> Fan, 'I get 1,000!'
> Chen, 'I get 10,000!'
> Duan, 'I get 500!'
> Bin, 'The smallest is 10,000!'
> Chen, 'It's wrong, 0 is the smallest!'
> Boy 4, 'Having nothing is the smallest!'
> (field notes from 28th March 2006)

The boys' comparison of numbers grew out of their weapon play. They got a sense of number and attempted to compare which was bigger and which was smaller. Mistakes were made when Duan seriously put in his '500' to assume that his 500 is the biggest one while Bin insisted that 10000 is the smallest number. However, children's interest in comparing or counting numbers were considered of importance for further development of abstract thinking and problem solving involved in mathematics (Barber, 1998; Zhu, J.X., 2003). Children's spontaneous talk related to

mathematical aspects was also found in other kinds of activities. For example, children were talking about how many colours when they were drawing rainbows in the art corner; they talked about how many family members, the year in which they were born, and the ages of their parents, while on the playground. This shows that children's spontaneous talk related to mathematical concepts happened in the environment which was much more informal than that of the formal maths lesson activities.

4.22 The English setting

4.221 Formal maths activities

Practitioners planned some formal maths activities focusing on counting numbers, matching colours, sorting shapes, measuring, and arranging space and size in this English setting. The process of those activities was mostly associated with a two-way direction of interactions between practitioners and children based on children's interests and needs. This does not mean that practitioners had no goals for these activities. Instead, the goals prescribed in the weekly plan were an overall guidance for setting up the environment rather than a frame for how to implement the activities. This is distinctive from the taught maths lessons in the Chinese setting, in which teachers attempted to carry out activities according to the teaching plan in a strict way as discussed in the section 4.211.

The following episode of counting numbers happened at the table at the back of the classroom. Practitioners had put some colour wooden beads and threads on the surface of the table. Four children stood by the table putting beads into their threads. Kim put many beads into his thread already and put it around the neck of practitioner Ulta, who said, 'Wow, what a beautiful necklace, thank you!' Kim left the table for a while. Howard put beads into the box and restarted with another thread counting 'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven…' Practitioner Mary was observing standing next to Howard. She smiled at Howard and said, 'Well done!' Howard continued to put more beads whilst Bob put his thread with several beads around his neck. Quid could not hold his thread properly and some beads fell off the thread. When Quid picked up the beads from the floor and gave them to Howard, who took the beads and put them into his own thread. Then, Mary helped Howard to work out how many beads he had got in his thread:

Howard [finished a long string, holding both end of the thread in pride]: Look at me!
[He began to count himself although it was difficult for him to hold the thread and count at the same time. Mary helped him to hold the other end of the thread.]
Howard: One, two, three, four, five… nineteen… [he paused a bit] twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three! I got twenty-three!
[The other three boys were looking at Howard in surprise but continued to do their own.]
Mary: Twenty-three! How great it is!
Howard [continued to get some more beads into the thread]: One, two, three, four… twenty-four…
Mary [at the same time counted from the other end]: I got thirty. [She asked Howard to count again. Howard held his thread tightly and began to count for the third time until he got twenty-five.]
Mary: How many do you get this time?
[Howard did not answer holding his thread.]

(field notes from 19th May 2006)

Howard was interested in counting the beads with Mary's help whilst the other three children seemed to be more interested in putting beads onto their threads. Mary supported Howard in tune with his interest. It also seemed that Mary's presence at the table also helped other boys to concentrate on what they were doing.

There were also some practitioner-led maths activities in the English setting. The process was similar to those formal maths lessons in the Chinese setting. However, there were more small-group based activities, which provided each child with an opportunity to participate (QCA, 2000). For instance, practitioner Frances led a group of eight children to explore shapes before lunch time. They were standing in the middle of the playground outside the classroom.

Frances [in a low voice]: Do you know any shapes?
Flick: I know, triangle, circle … and triangle again.'
Some other children [tried to figure out what they know about shapes too]: circle, triangle… rectangular…
Frances: Do you know what we are looking for today? Just shapes!
[Frances asked them to start their journey together forward and reminded them that they should stop when they found any shapes. The children stopped together when they were walking by a table.]
Frances [facing all children]: What shape is this table?
[Children paused a bit and finally] Tila: Rectangular!
Frances: Good, it's rectangular!
[Frances asked Tila to take a photo of the table with the camera that Frances brought with her for the shape visit. Then, they kept going forward.]
Sarah [in a loud voice]: Stop! Rectangular! Rectangular! [while the other children were walking in the front. Frances asked the children to go back to Sarah, who was pointing to the wooden bench.]
Frances: Look, children, Sarah found rectangular!
[Sarah was asked to take a photo of the wooden bench too.]
Flick [found a triangle shaped object]: Triangle, I found it!
Frances: Why is it triangle, but not rectangular?
Flick [opened her eyes widely and said in seriousness]: Because it's got a shape like this!

Frances [with gestures to imitate the shape of triangle]: Because it got three lines joined together!
[Then the journey went on with some other children's discovery of circle and square…]

(field notes from 30th January 2006)

This outdoor shape visit lasted about 25 minutes. Children looked very refreshed when they were called to be ready for lunch. Each child in this group got a chance to find a shape and took photos with the camera. The whole process of finding out shapes seemed enjoyable for this group of children. Interestingly, Flick seemed to be the most excited about the journey and she kept finding out different shapes herself. However, she was told by Frances, 'You are good at pointing, but you should learn to listen to others too!' Flick looked a bit frustrated hearing what Frances said to her.

4.222 Mathematical games

Mathematical games such as dominoes, jigsaws, the Snakes and Ladders, and action rhymes were usually held with a small group of 4-6 children at a time. These games were initiated by practitioners and children were guided by the game's rules to take turns to participate. The practitioner in these games kept eyes on each child to make sure that everyone participated in the correct way. The following episode is about the traditional game 'Snakes and Ladders', which was played between practitioner Kate and a small group of 4 children. Kate sat with the four children at the carpet area, where lay the dice and a plastic picture. On the plastic paper were drawn some numbers, snakes and ladders. First, Kate distributed four plastic plates to the four children and asked them to put the plates on the edge of the plastic picture. Kate then asked Bob to throw the dice onto the carpet:

Kate: Can you see how many dots?
Children [together]: One, two, three!
Kate: Good counting!
[Kate asked Bob to move his plastic plate to the place matching the number of the dice. Bob put his plate to the place where 3 was written.]
Kate: Claire, could you throw the dice?
[Claire threw the dice to her feet.]
Kate: How many dots?
Claire [a bit uneasy]: Two.
Kate: No! [Kate reminded Claire to look at the dice more carefully]
Claire: One!
Flick [sitting next to Claire]: Three!
Kate: Yes, there are three. But I asked Claire to answer it! [Flick kept in silence immediately]
Claire [pointed and counted]: One, two, three!
[Kate smiled at Claire nodding when Claire finished her counting. Then Claire put her plate to the same place where Bob put his.]

The other two children Flick and Samuel threw dice and put their plates into the place where 4 and 5 were written… When the first round was finished, Kate asked the children if they would like to 'have another go'. All the four children wanted to play another time. In the second round, Kate changed part of her role in that she observed more and let the children work on their own according to the rules set for the first round.

Books with pictures for counting or ordering, rhymes and songs are highly recommended as effective means to develop young children's mathematical learning (Montague-Smith, 2002). Hopkins et al. (1999) argue that rhymes can help children to be familiar with the number names, especially action rhymes provide children opportunities to develop their understanding of spoken and written numbers. A lot of rhymes were taken into action in this nursery class. For example, the Two Little Fat Gentlemen, the Four Little Frogs, the Five Little Monkeys, and so on were acted out very often during the group time either in the morning or afternoon. Children enjoyed reading and acting out the rhymes. The Five Little Monkeys was one of the most favourite action rhymes in this English setting. Of course, this does not mean that those rhyme actions are merely related to children's mathematical development by a combination of counting the numbers of animals and acting out the movements. Rather, these activities were regarded as a multi-functional means by practitioners such as Irene and Mary in that they contributed to children's learning and development in communication, language and literacy, creativity, physical development and personal, social and emotional well-being too.

4.223 Daily-life related activities

Play dough, cake making, water play, sand play, construction play and other types of activities related to children's daily lives were also included in maths activities in this English setting. Children were found to be much engaged in daily-life mathematical learning experiences by using a wide range of materials such as bottles, cups, flour, tea pots, scales, dolls, and so on. This was in line with the argument that the encouragement of familiar, meaningful context was of great importance to young children's mathematical development (Hughes, 1986; Maclellan, 1997; Montague-

Smith, 2002; Worthington and Carruthers, 2006) and the belief that children's mathematical development arose out of 'daily experiences in a rich and interesting environment' (QCA, 2000: 70). In the process of these activities children were exploring mathematics in a practical way. They experienced the physical changes involved in making cakes and modelling play dough. They also felt the transitivity and conservation of objects (Barber, 1986) by transferring water from one bottle to another and investigated the mathematical concepts of space and structure by building up blocks. This was contrasted to the Chinese setting where children were mainly taught together by the formal maths lessons planned according to the textbook (Tang, 2006b; Tang and Maxwell, 2007).

4.224 Children's spontaneous talk

Children's talk related to mathematical aspects such as awareness of measurement of objects and interest in numbers was found when they were engaged in spontaneous activities. For example, it happened that two boys Kyle and Gabe found a spider in the grass during the period of outside play. Kyle told practitioner Flaura, who was standing nearby, 'We found a spider!' Gabe, 'A big spider!' When Flaura asked Gabe, 'How big is it?' Gabe told her, 'Long and big!' by stretching both his arms in an exaggerated gesture. Flaura smiled but did not extend the topic whilst she warned them to walk carefully in the grass in order not to step on some insects. Children's talk related to numbers sometimes occurred in this English setting, too. For example, children talked about how many dolls they had for their 'play babies'; they told others when it was their birthday; and they talked about pounds and pence in the post office play area. Children were very often involved in mathematical relationships in the English setting as occurred in water play area and domestic play activities. However, it seemed that their spontaneous mathematical talk did not develop in depth like the episode of comparing numbers in the construction corner by some Chinese boys mentioned in the section of 4.214.

4.3 The teacher-child and child-child interactions

4.31 The Chinese setting

My research data showed that the taught maths lessons dominated the mathematical activities. The main focus of the formal maths lessons was direct teaching of mathematical knowledge based on the textbook. For instance, the teacher asked children to count the objects and match the objects with the relevant numbers in the taught lesson of matching numbers; the teacher asked children to guess which ropes were longer and compare the ropes of different lengths in the taught lesson of knowing length. Teacher-child interactions involved in the process were characterised by the one-way knowledge transfer from teachers to children by means of asking-answering questions. This can be identified as the impact of the Chinese traditional pedagogy which emphasized the importance of subject knowledge transfer (Huang and Guo, 2003). The episode of the formal maths lesson of quantity of objects taught by teacher Hong revealed strong tension between the teacher's direct teaching and children's learning. Many children understood the concept of numbers as they could count correctly and some children could use drawing, dots, lines and circles to represent the quantity of objects. However, they could not understand that the quantity of things can be represented in the form of numbers. It happened that Piao knew that number 'six' could represent the quantity of the ladybirds but she could not write '6'. Zhu could write the numbers '1-6' correctly but she could not understand why only '6' rather than '1-6' represented the quantity of the ladybirds. The confusion was still there even though the teacher wrote the number of '2' beside the two short lines to represent the quantity of teachers and '10' beside the ten short lines referring to the quantity of children. This indicated that the link between teaching and children's understanding was missing. This link considered by Worthington and Caurrthers (2003) as the 'bi-numerate' context is the most crucial for children's mathematical learning in that their learning at school settings cannot be separated from their own maths experiences at home. As Ye (2006) and Zhang, J. (2006) argue, children's learning of mathematics at home in the Chinese context is much more involved in daily experiences related to counting numbers, matching, sorting, classifying and measuring through interactions between parents and children. However, taught maths lessons in this Chinese setting usually took place in the textbook-based learning environment, which was less related to children's daily life experiences. This led to

the incoherence between what teachers taught and what children really took in (Zhang, J., 2006; Zhao, 2006). Children's interesting responses were sometimes ignored by the teacher in the process of taught maths lessons. For example, Kai was not paid attention to by the teacher when he said, 'Teacher, you close your eyes. I draw the numbers and you guess how many numbers'; Piao's interesting baby bed during the period of practical exercise of making patterns was also not noticed by the teacher. Consequently, there was less room for the child-child interactions in the course of taught maths lessons.

However, teacher-child interactions involved in maths games and corner activities were contrasted to the aforementioned. The 'number board' and the 'seven-shape board' usually encouraged positive teacher-child interactions based on a small group of children rather than a whole class. Individual children could turn to the teacher and get an immediate response. Teacher-child interactions here were based on informal relaxing atmosphere rather than knowledge-oriented focus. For instance, the teacher encouraged the children to participate, gave clues on how to work out a task, and showed children where they got it right and where they got it wrong. The children were much more interested and cheerful than they were in taught maths activities. This was clearly shown in some examples such as the boy Dong's excitement 'I am the first to put it in, I am the number one. I have never been the number one before!' In a similar vein, more chances were produced for child-child interactions in children's spontaneous activities outside of the taught maths activities. For example, children in the construction corner initiated mathematical topics, discussion and debate although they could not work out whether it was true that 500 was greater than 10000.

4.32 The English setting

As discussed in the sections 4.221 and 4.223, mathematical activities in the English setting were mostly related to children's daily-life experiences occurring in a relaxing and meaningful learning environment. This promoted the development of active interactions between children and practitioners. Practitioner-child interactions were more involved in a process, in which practitioners paid attention to children's learning needs, encouraged children to sustain motivation and interests, and offered aids to individual children (Anning and Edwards, 2006). For example, practitioner

Mary attempted to fit into Howard's number counting at the bead table; Kate encouraged Claire to count the dots on the dice with patience and made sure that all of the four children engaged themselves in playing with the Snakes and Ladders according to the game rules. However, there was tension between children and practitioners, especially in the practitioner-led maths activities. Practitioners aimed to make sure that each child participated in the activities whilst the differentiation between the children's knowledge and understanding made this principle hard to implement. For example, in the episode mentioned in the section of 4.221, Flick's enthusiasm in looking for shapes was confronted by Frances because Frances attempted to leave some opportunities for other children who had not responded actively in their shape search trip.

Child-child interactions, in the process of maths activities in this English setting, were represented both in practitioner-planned maths activities and in child-initiated maths activities involved in water play, sand play, construction play, dough play, and other types of daily-life play experiences. Children initiated interactions with each other based on playful experiences and most related to how to deal with play materials in different ways. For example, through transferring water from one bottle to another in a playful way, children were exploring the transitivity and conservation of water. My research data also showed that children were cooperative in the daily-life play activities in making dough, building sand castles, and constructing wooden buildings.

4.4 The roles of teaching and play

4.41 The Chinese setting

My research data indicated that the taught maths activities were the major means to implement children's mathematical learning in the Chinese setting. Direct teaching dominated the process focusing on how to carry out what had been planned according to the textbook. Opposite to Rowland's (1987) argument that children could control the process of maths learning, which deepened teachers' understanding of children's mathematical development, children were actually directly taught to learn what had been planned by the teacher. Direct teaching in the Chinese setting offered little room for children's exploration of maths concepts based on their own interests. There were many examples showing that children's own thoughts were not developed

by teachers in the process of taught maths lessons. Rather, direct teaching became a process of a rigid format of knowledge transfer whilst the consequence was children's passive receipt of knowledge. Some teachers more or less realized this problem. For instance, teacher Hong regarded her maths lesson as 'unsuccessful' because 'it was too difficult for the children to understand mathematical concepts'. This revealed a dilemma existing amongst the teachers in the Chinese setting: the balance between what teachers want to teach and what children need to learn and the balance between how teachers teach and how children learn. This was evident in teachers' discussions when they had their professional development activities each afternoon. A lot of the discussions focused on what to teach and how to teach whilst they kept reminding themselves to be 'reflective teachers' in order to tune into children's learning interests and abilities. The maths games and corner activities provided opportunities for children's more active learning, which was promoted by their interactions either with the teacher or with their peers. Teachers felt excited about this. However, taught maths lessons as the major means in this Chinese setting really squeezed those informal maths activities into 'corners'.

I have argued that play did not feature a great deal within the process of maths activities in this Chinese setting. However, children's spontaneous activities happening in the construction corner and art corner were the most obvious exceptions, where some children used the construction materials in a playful way and initiated spontaneous talk related to mathematical aspects. Meanwhile, the maths games and corner activities did give children more opportunities for interactions with teachers and peers. Teachers in this Chinese setting did recognise the importance of play in children's maths learning but play was far from being treated as an important means to implement maths activities by teachers.

4.42 The English setting

Similar to the role of teaching in language activities in the English setting, mathematical teaching was more related to setting up the learning environment with relaxing and supportive atmosphere, observing children in activities, and offering support to individual children. Setting up the learning environment meant providing opportunities for practitioner-directed and child-initiated activities both inside and outside the classroom (Worthington and Carruthers, 2006). This was clearly

evidenced in a variety of mathematical activities including formal planned activities, maths games, and children's spontaneous activities as discussed earlier in this chapter. Therefore, in comparison to the Chinese setting, teaching in the English setting was more involved in a broad sense, which could be used to include all aspects of the role of the practitioner involved in working with children (QCA, 2000; Fumoto et al., 2004). The major similarity between the two settings was that children's mathematical learning was identified by both Chinese teachers and English practitioners as a learning area, in which children needed considerable support from the adults.

Play formed the major means to support children's mathematical learning in this English setting. The maths activities based on children's daily-life play experiences provided them with opportunities to interact with materials and with peers in a relaxing and meaningful environment. This enabled children to develop their mathematical learning in a variety of activities such as water play, sand play, construction play, dough play and so on. This wide range of play materials provided by practitioners helped children develop their understanding of basic mathematical concepts such as numbers, quantity, weight, size, texture, structure of objects. Children also explored abstract mathematical concepts including transitivity, conservation, the relationship between numbers and quantity of objects, and the relationship between size and weight, and the relationship between space and shapes.

4.5 Summary

The observational data showed that both the Chinese and English settings adopted a variety of maths activities including teacher/practitioner-directed activities, maths games and children's spontaneous activities. The first similarity between the two settings was that counting, classifying, matching, measuring, and sorting with reference to numbers, shapes, and spaces were identified as important for children's mathematical development. Another similarity revealed that children's spontaneous play-based activities in both settings provided them with more opportunities for their mathematical development by independent or cooperative efforts.

However, there were more differences than similarities between the two settings. The taught maths activities dominated the maths learning in the Chinese setting focusing on textbook-based knowledge whilst activities related to children's daily-life experiences formed the major means to implement maths learning in the

English setting. This defines the differences manifested in the adult-child and child-child interactions between the two settings too. Adult-child interactions in the Chinese setting focused on a one-way direction of raising-answering questions between teachers and children whilst the English setting offered more relaxing two-way practitioner-child interactions, in which practitioners turned to children according to their interests and needs. The formal maths activities directed by teachers in the Chinese setting did not provide much space for child-child interactions whilst child-child interactions were greatly encouraged either in practitioner-led or child-initiated maths activities in the English setting. The roles of teaching show noticeable difference between the two settings too. For example, direct teaching focusing on instruction, demonstration and reinforcement by raising questions dominated formal maths activities in the Chinese setting; the English setting revealed that teaching was mostly related to the set-up of the learning environment, observations of children, and provision of support to individual children. There was not much space for children's play in terms of mathematical activities in the Chinese setting whilst it was children's play rather than direct teaching that dominated the mathematical activities in the English setting.

Chapter Five

Arts activities in Chinese and English settings

Arts activity is identified as one of the five learning areas by the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outlines* (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001) in the Chinese context whilst 'creative development' is defined as one of the six learning areas by the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000) in the English context. The aims of arts activities described in the Chinese context are to help children to:

1. Be able to appreciate and like beauty represented in the environment, life, and arts;
2. Be able to participate in art activities and freely express their feelings and experiences;
3. Be able to perform art activities in a way that they like.
   (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001: 11)

Children are encouraged to cultivate a sense of aesthetics in order to represent and create beauty which is represented in the environment and in life. Opportunities which encourage children to express freely their feelings, understanding and imagination are considered crucial for their aesthetical development (Kong, 2004; Kong, 2006; Wang, 2006). In the English context, creativity is considered as 'fundamental to successful learning' whilst being creative refers to children's capacity to 'make connections between one area of learning and another' in order to extend their understanding (QCA, 2000: 116). A stimulating environment indoors and outdoors in which imagination, originality and expressiveness are valued is of great importance to children's creative development involved in visual art, music, dance, imaginative play and role play in the English context (Lowenfeld and Britain, 1987; QCA, 2000; Craft, 2003; Bruce, 2006; Duffy, 2006). For the purpose of comparison, this chapter will focus on arts activities including visual art, music, and dance in order to analyze the similarities and differences between the Chinese and English settings represented in the activity types, the process, the adult-child and child-child interactions, and the roles of teaching and play.

5.1 Arts activity types

5.11 The Chinese setting

Arts activities in the Chinese kindergarten class included visual art, music, and dance. There was a shift from the more direct teaching of arts activities involved in the pilot study to more chances for children's own exploration during the main research period in the Chinese setting. The pilot study showed that visual art such as drawing, painting, and craftwork was mainly taught by teachers in order to show children the proper use of art skills such as how to cut lines and how to make craftwork according to the instructions described in the textbook. Music activities were usually taught in a whole class by teacher Hong, who had a specialist degree in music, but in a playful way for children to participate in singing and acting out the music piece in the end. The introduction of corner activities offered children more opportunities for their individual exploration of arts activities. Children enjoyed doing arts activities in different activity corners. For example, during the corner activity time in one afternoon, a group of children first played the musical instruments in the music corner and then became fond of dancing to the music that was played on the tape recorder. Their excitement and enjoyment were clearly expressed by their happy smiles and brisk dance steps. The direct teaching of arts activities was still happening in the main research period but with more playful elements integrated into the process of teaching the arts activities seemed to be more enjoyable for children, which will be discussed in the section of 5.212.

5.12 The English setting

Similar to the Chinese setting, visual art activities in the English nursery school class included drawing, painting, and craft making and were carried out on a daily basis through children's exploration of a wide range of learning resources such as recycled materials including paper boxes, plastic bottles, and waste magazines, decorative materials, and natural materials such as fallen leaves, flowers, shells, pebbles, wools, pine cones, and branches. Children's body parts were engaged in art activities in the English setting too. For example, children were encouraged to use their fingers, hands, and even feet to create art works. Unlike the Chinese setting, music activities in the English setting were much more informal. Children usually chose to do music activities individually or in a small group. The large group music

activities happened in circle times in the morning before lunch and in the afternoon before parents came to pick up their children. In those cases, children were involved in singing nursery rhymes led by practitioners. Children's interests in music were revealed in their spontaneous activities both inside and outside. For instance, a group of children took turns to sing a song on the stage, which was set up by the practitioners. All of them were very patient in listening to others' singing and gave each 'singer' warm applause when he/she finished. Dance activities in this nursery school class were usually planned by practitioners and carried out in different groups usually according to children's own interests. Each child was encouraged to make an effort to dance in tune with the music or just dance randomly at his/her own pace.

5.2 The process involved in arts activities

5.21 The Chinese setting

5.211 Visual arts

Compared with the pilot study, more learning resources were provided for visual arts activities during the main research period in the Chinese setting. For instance, paper, pens, pencils, markers, glue, cellulose tapes, water-colour paints, oil-paints, sand, recycled materials such as paper boxes or plastic bottles, fallen leaves, flowers and dry tree stems were provided. This offered children opportunities to create art works by using a greater variety of materials (see photograph 5.1).

Photograph 5.1: Children's art work made of flower petals in the Chinese setting

The dominance of formal teaching in visual arts during the pilot study had given way to more small-group based activities during the time of the main research. The following episode was taken from the pilot study on craft making of a 'Pink Rabbit'

according to the textbook. Teacher Lan explained to the children what they needed to do for the task. First, she showed the children a pink toy rabbit:

> Teacher Lan: Hello everybody! I'm a pink rabbit. I would like to make friends with all of you. [She walked to the children holding the rabbit in hand and asked the children to kiss the rabbit.]
> Teacher Lan: Do you like to make a rabbit just like this pink rabbit?
> Children: Yes.
> Teacher Lan [took out some paper, on which some lines were drawn]: Look carefully, are these lines all the same?
> Children: Yes, they are the same.
> Teacher Lan: Look at them again. Are they the same?
> Children [thought a while]: No.
> Bin: Some lines are longer, some are shorter.
> Teacher Lan: Those lines are called mountain lines; those lines are called valley lines; and these are ordinary lines… You must look very carefully when I distribute the paper to you. Make sure which are mountain lines, which are valley lines…
> [Mountain lines refer to the lines marked in the textbook in the shape of a pointed triangle and valley lines in the shape of an inverted triangle. Mountain lines and valley lines were marked for children to make different parts of the pink rabbit by cutting and sticking]
> (field notes from 2ⁿᵈ September 2005)

Teacher Lan then distributed papers to children and asked them to look at the lines on paper. She reminded them how to cut the 'mountain lines', 'valley lines' and 'straight lines'. Then, she brought scissors to each table and reminded them of the safe use of scissors. For instance, children must put scissors only in front of their own chest and pass scissors with the sharp end pointing inside their palm rather than pointing to other children. Three tables of children began to cut their paper according to what teacher Lan told them. It showed that some children, especially boys, experienced difficulty in cutting lines correctly. Teacher Lan walked around the tables and helped them cut in a correct way. Children seemed frustrated but they concentrated on their cutting and showed their excitement when they finished their work. Teacher Lan showed her concern about those children who could not cut correctly. However, she found it hard to give those children enough support because of the big class size and heavy teaching task.

The processes involved in making the pink rabbit were also found in other art activities during the main research when teachers needed to demonstrate how to use materials in complex situations. However, more opportunities were provided for children to make their own choices in doing art work based on small groups during the corner activity time. Teacher Hong expressed her concerns, 'It is a big issue that has worried us for a long time: how to provide children with opportunities to deal with art activities with real freedom and independence.' She doubted the values of

those art activities which mostly involved simple cutting and sticking. The introduction of art corner activities provided children with opportunities to develop originality, imagination and expressiveness based on small groups or individual work, which was beyond a mere display of art skills. It seemed to go beyond the notion of appreciation of beauty and creation of beauty claimed by the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outlines* (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001). Rather, what was represented in the process of children's art work creation showed the elements of children's creative development in terms of freshness, originality, fluency, open-mindedness (Taylor, 1975; Isbell and Raines, 2003; Prentice, Matthews and Taylor, 2003). It is also important to address that behind children's art work were their expressiveness of feelings, understandings, experiences of the world around them (Tang, 2005b). This was reflected in the following episode, in which several girls and boys were painting at the art table:

> Han: We are drawing rainbows, aren't we?
> Xin: I am not drawing a rainbow. I am drawing a small sun!
> Hao: Kai, what are you drawing? [Kai was concentrating on his painting and did not respond]
> Han: They are rainbows if all of our pictures come together!
> [However, Han's rainbow turned into sheep when teacher Lu came to ask her what she was drawing.]
> I: Bobo, what's in your picture?
> Bobo: I cannot tell you, I haven't finished yet!
> Xin: I think you are drawing a big cock!
> Bobo [finishing her painting]: Yes, I drew a big cock!
> …
> Kai: It's fighting! Fight violently!
> I: Who is fighting in there?
> Kai: I will tell you when I think it out.
> Kai [finishing]: I've sorted it out. No.8 Road Army are fighting against the Japanese guys!
> I: Who won?
> Kai: The Japanese guys won!'
> (field notes from 4th April 2006)

In the episode above, Han thought that they were all drawing a rainbow but Xin had followed her own interest and said that she was drawing a small sun. However, Bobo could not tell what was in her picture because she had not finished yet. Interestingly, Kai's violent 'fighting' picture (see photograph 5.2) surprised me most when he told me 'the Japanese guys won' because I thought he would say the 'No. 8 Road Army won'. The dynamics revealed in their interpretation of their work seemed to go far beyond the visual representation conveyed in their painting.

Photograph 5.2: Kai's painting – 'Fighting' – in the Chinese setting

5.212 Music activities

Music activities were usually carried out by direct teaching based on a whole class both in the pilot and main research period whilst more children's individual exploration of music was observed in the main research. Music activities in the form of direct teaching were similar to the process of language and mathematical activities as we discussed in chapter three and four: warming up, teacher's demonstration of the activity, and children's practice of the new activity. The difference between musical activities and language and mathematical activities in the form of direct teaching was that children seemed to enjoy music activities much more through singing and acting than they did in language and mathematical activities. The following episode was a music lesson called 'Little Duckling Has a Flat Mouth' taught by teacher Hong. She first did a warm up by showing children the puppet of a duckling:

> Teacher Hong: Hello everyone.
> Children: Hello Donald Duck!
> Teacher Hong: I am not a Donald Duck. I am an ordinary duckling. Listen, what is the difference between our mouths and this duckling's?
> Several children: The upper lip is longer, the lower is shorter.
> Chen [boy]: Little Duckling's mouth is flat.
> Yang [boy]: They have no teeth.
> Teacher: Can you guess what will be like when little duckling sings?
> Children: Ge ge ge
> Teacher [sing]: Little duckling has a flat mouth. 'Kwa kwa kwa' when he sings. Little duckling has a flat mouth. 'kwa kwa kwa' when he sings…
> (field notes from 6th September 2005)

Teacher Hong asked the children to follow her three times to finish the first part of the 'duckling' song. She then held a puppet of a cat and asked children questions about the mouth and introduced the piece of 'little cat has a small mouth. 'miao miao miao' when she sings'. Then, singing about little pig, squirrel, and sheep were continued in

the same way as they did about little duckling. In the second part the children sang together in the music played by teacher Hong on the piano. The end of the activity was a robust performance suggested by teacher Hong, in which children were using the puppets to make stories. Piao was asking some children to be the piglet's daddy and brother and they were going home for dinner.

The introduction of the music corner promoted more opportunities for children's individual music explorations of their own choice or with the support of teachers in small groups. For example, musical instruments such as bells, drums, trumpets, and mu yu (a Chinese wooden instrument made up of a stick and a stand) were stored in a basket at the music corner in the classroom. Children often picked up some musical instruments and played with them during the corner activity times; some new initiatives such as knocking at the 'mu yu' were introduced too. Children took turns to knock at the 'mu yu' whilst the others listened to the knocks carefully and then imitated the rhyme by clapping their hands afterwards.

5.213 Dance activities

Dance activities were usually combined into other activities. For instance, dance was integrated into music activities whilst sometimes integrated into English language lessons by watching a video. The formal dance activities were usually carried out in the form of direct teaching like the music activities. The following episode was a formal dance lesson called 'Girls in Da Ban Cheng'. Da Ban Cheng is a city located in Xinjiang Province, the northwest of China. The first part of the dance lesson started from teacher Hong's introduction of the song:

> Teacher Hong: Today I got a piece of music from my office 'Girls from Da Ban Cheng'. [She turned on the tape recorder and played the music]
> Teacher Hong: Do you know where this song comes from?
> Yang: Xinjiang.
> Teacher Hong: You are right. This is a song from Xinjiang. [She took out the Chinese map jigsaw and asked children to look for Xinjiang province]
>
> Teacher Hong: Do you know what kinds of clothes do Xinjiang girls wear?
> Xin (girl): [They] wear skirts.
> Xuan (girl): [They] wear Xinjiang hats.
> Pei (boy): There are many bells on their hats.
> Zhai (boy): [They] wear high heels.
> Yi (girl): There is something on their body, called… What is it?
> (field notes from 18th April 2006)

Then it moved on to a slide show. Teacher Hong showed the children some photos of people from Xinjiang Province. Some photos were about dancing girls. Teacher Hong

asked the children questions such as 'do you know whether the girls lift up their chests, raise their heads up or lower their heads down when they dance?' Teacher Hong then asked them to listen to the music on the tape recorder. Teacher Hong danced in the music while the children were watching carefully. Children were then asked to dance together. The third part of the dance activity was rhythm learning, in which teacher Hong used a white board to write the rhythm of the music and clapped hands to make the rhythm. Children followed her example, clapping hands to make rhythm and dancing with her together to the music. My observational data showed that the children enjoyed the music and dancing with their full participation throughout the process. Interestingly, this dance lesson was reflected in the home corner activity that afternoon. A boy joined the girls who were cooking dinner in the home corner by introducing himself as a Xinjiang singer and the girls changed their home play into a Xinjiang dance show.

5.214 Side effects

More than half of the children attended a special art class such as drawing, dance, and chess class organised by a commercial organisation either inside or outside this kindergarten. Regardless of the progress that children had made by attending special classes such as success in passing piano examinations and improved skills in chess play, some less positive consequences were observed. This is most reflected in the following example, in which children were instructed to line up all the spots on the picture of the textbook in a taught maths lesson. A girl Jing stood up and reported to teacher Huang:

> Jing: Teacher, Han is crying!
> [Han sat one row ahead of me. She was wiping tears.]
> Teacher Huang: What's wrong with you? Why are you crying?
> [Han did not answer but kept weeping.]
> Jing: Teacher, she doesn't want to learn playing the electronic piano! And, she did not want to eat meals!
> Teacher Huang [smiling]: Oh, it is because of this. Can you tell your mum when she comes to pick you up this afternoon? Don't cry any more.
> (field notes from 19th April 2006)

After the class teacher Huang went to offer encouragement and reassurance to Han along with several other girls. Xin told Han, 'Actually, I didn't want to learn the electronic-piano that much. I was a little tired when I played…' Jing, 'Yeah, it's the same as learning how to draw!' Yue, a girl, who was commonly recognised as a very

good example for other children by the teachers in this class, told Han, 'I don't want to learn dancing. There are several performances that I cannot do well. But my mum taught me and I learnt it. Now I am not scared of difficulties!' Han kept weeping and used her hand in wiping off tears for a while… However, in the afternoon Han was persuaded by her mother to attend the electronic piano class.

Conflicts arose between some children as a result of their different experiences of attending special art classes. It seemed that children who attended special classes were perceived to be more capable and authoritative than those who did not by their peers. The following incident occurred when some girls were playing in the home corner one afternoon. Yue, who learned dance in special dance class, lay on the floor, stretching her feet to her eyebrow whilst the other girls were watching her:

> Yue: Zhu, can you stretch your foot to your eyebrow?
> Xuan [to zhu]: She [Yue] learnt dancing! You didn't!'
> Yue: I also went to do a performance on TV!
> Zhu [blushing]: You were on TV programme? I don't think so. Only children in Beijing can be on TV!
> Yue: My daddy took me to the TV station on his motorbike! He told me that it was the TV station!
> [Zhu still insisted that there was TV station only in Beijing]
> Yue: My daddy is so clever that he knows everything.
> Zhu: You should listen to your mummy. Your daddy perhaps told you a lie!
> …
> (field notes from 17th April 2006)

Zhu and Yue seemed to be good friends as they often sat next to each other in the classroom and their parents knew each other well. Sometimes, they visited each other at home and their parents took turns to pick them up from the kindergarten. This event, however, seemed to slightly damage their friendship because my observational data showed that they neither sat next to each other nor often spoke to each other in the next few days.

As Merry et al. (2006) point out, Chinese parents compete to have their children attend extra art lessons. Most parents I talked with told me that they chose some special classes for their children according to children's interests rather than forcing them to attend. In this kindergarten class, parents were under pressure to decide regarding whether they should choose special art classes for their children. Parents were anxious that their children would fall behind others if they did not take the choice although they worried about the extra pressure that the special art classes brought their children. Therefore, it was a dilemma when the parents faced the

114

choices of special classes for their children: concern about their children's happy childhood and anxiety about their children's competitive future. For example, Yi was wandering about the music corner watching some girls dancing to the music when her mum came to pick her up in one afternoon. Yi's mum told me, 'I don't know if I should choose a special dance class for her. She did it last year, but it seemed that she did not like it very much. She attended drawing and English classes this year instead. But, it also seemed that she was interested in dancing…'

5.22 The English setting

5.221 Visual art

Visual art activities such as drawing, painting, and craft work were usually chosen by the children themselves and they created art work in their own way in the English setting. The idea that every child is capable of being creative given the appropriate environment (Craft, Jeffrey and Leibling, 2001) was acknowledged by practitioners in this setting. This was also reflected in children's participation in visual art activities, in which children themselves decided how to use the provided materials rather than being instructed by practitioners. The process of visual art activities revealed to a great extent that children enjoyed creating their art work by drawing, painting or making crafts. Practitioners were usually involved themselves in providing additional support such as showing children how to manage special tools. For example, ball painting as a new activity for children was introduced by practitioner Flaura. She was first leading the ball painting activity with a small group of children to enable the ball to flow smoothly in the big tray. Then, she had each child to put the ball into the colour ink and throw it into the tray. All the children cooperated with each other in the process of the ball painting.

The following episode was an individual child's art work. The girl Kyllie was drawing her brother William. Kyllie was one of the youngest girls in this class and her mum was still staying with her when she was drawing at a table in the morning:

> [Kyllie first began to draw the outline of a head with a few short bits to represent her brother's short hair in blue. Then she drew two long blue lines with some short lines crossing at the end of the two long lines.]
> Mum [pointing to the short lines in the paper]: What is it?
> Kyllie: Shoes.
> Mum: A lot of shoes then?
> Kyllie: No, they are boots!

> Mum [seeing Kyllie drawing some red dots within the outline of the body]: You need some chicken pox?
> Kyllie [looking at her mum, in a loud voice]: This is belly buttons!
> Kyllie [added some green dots inside the two blue lines]: This is called belly buttons!
> (field notes from 7th June 2006)

Kyllie corrected her mum seriously, 'No, they are boots!' when mum interpreted the lines as shoes; similarly, Kyllie told her mum 'this is belly buttons' when mum mistook the dots as 'chicken pox' (see photograph 5.3).

Photograph 5.3: Kyllie's drawing 'This is called belly buttons' in the English setting

The communication between the mum and Kyllie showed that adults are usually unaware of 'the quality and depth of young children's spontaneous and self-taught visual expression' (Coates and Coates, 2006: 240). What meanings are underlying children's art work are not usually what adults simply think they are. Instead, children get their own interpretations and narratives behind the simple lines. This is also reflected in some other examples. For instance, the boy Tom used green, blue, orange and red markers to draw several lines to make his 'thunder' first, then he used blue and orange markers to scribble two separate lumps, 'I'm drawing a tornado!' (see photography 5.4).

Photograph 5.4: Tom's drawing 'tornado' in the English setting

Tom's drawing was then interpreted by his peer John as two 'bleeding' aeroplanes. This perhaps made Tom reflect upon his drawing and concluded that he was drawing tigers. All these examples showed us the originality and imagination involved in the

process of children's spontaneous drawing. As Matthews (2003: 3) argues that the significance of children's spontaneous drawing goes beyond the conventional 'visual reality' but 'serves their own intentions, and through which they understand the world'.

5.222 Musical activities

Musical activities were most often carried out as small group or individual activities for children. Big group musical activities were held before lunch time or in the afternoon before parents' pick up time. Some small musical instruments such as drum, bells, electronic piano and sometimes utensil tools such as wooden spoon, metal spoon, folks, sauce pans and so on were provided for the children as musical instruments in this English setting. Those instruments sometimes were displayed inside the classroom and sometimes outside. Children usually picked up some instruments and explored them to make sounds in their own way. Practitioners observed children and seldom gave them instructions on how to use the instruments. There was a musical instrument in the garden, where some metal pipes are fixed onto the wooden frame (see photograph 5.5).

Photography 5.5: musical instrument outdoors in the English setting

Practitioner-led music activities happened almost on a daily basis during the group time. Children's songs such as the 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star', 'Chocolate Bar', 'Penguin Song', 'Sandy Boy', 'Teddy Bear' and so on are sung together accompanied by body actions.

5.223 Dance activities

Dance activities were pre-planned by practitioners in this English setting. For example, during the outside play period in the morning, practitioner Ulta put on some musical CDs and began to dance. Some children playing inside laughed and then

joined Ulta in dancing randomly. Dance activities were also very often combined into other types of activities such as physical activities. Children and practitioners danced together informally in those activities. Practitioners did not require children to do exactly what they did. Rather, they tried to raise children's interests and curiosity in doing things together. According to practitioner Frances, what mattered was children's participation and enjoyment rather than whether they danced correctly or not.

5.3 Teacher-child and child-child interactions

5.31 The Chinese setting

The introduction of corner activities in the Chinese setting changed the nature of teacher-child and child-child interactions when involved in arts activities. The process of the teacher-led art activities such as the 'Pink Rabbit' and 'Grls in Da Ban Cheng' were similar to the process involved in language and mathematical activities focusing on how to carry out what the teacher had planned. However, teacher-child and child-child interactions happened in a much more informal and relaxing environment in arts activities even in a direct teaching lesson such as music (see the section of 5.212) or dance (see the section of 5.213). There was still, however, a process of raising and answering questions with teachers and children and these questions were most related to some problems as perceived by the teacher in the children's creation of the art work. This was echoed in the process of teacher Lan's demonstration of how to cut ordinary lines, 'mountain lines' and 'valley lines' in the art lesson of 'Pink Rabbit'. Children attempted to make sure how to work it out although the terms teacher Lan used in her explanation seemed complicated for the children.

More dynamics was manifest in child-child interactions during the art corner activities. Arts activities offered the children an environment with appropriate materials prepared by teachers, in which the children could initiate robust interactions with each other towards a shared purpose. For example, children attempted to work things out in their own way rather than being asked by teachers. Children initiated talk with each other based on shared interests, exchanged ideas about what were involved in the creation of art work, and developed them into a appropriate plan to solve the problems related to their work. These were evident in the examples of the rainbow

painting mentioned previously (see the section of 5.211) and in the three girl's cooperation in creating a beautiful dance pattern. In addition, children's interest in what others were doing actually helped them to create their own work in an original way. This was reflected in Kai's painting of violent fighting, in which Japanese guys won the battle over the Chinese soldiers, and in Han's expression of 'they are rainbows if all of our pictures come together'.

5.32 The English setting

Arts activities in the English nursery school setting involved much more child-child interactions than practitioner-child interactions because arts activities were mostly carried out by children in a small group or individually. Practitioner-led arts activities such as ball painting by practitioner Flaura and music activity at group time revealed that practitioners sought to introduce each child to new activities with opportunities to participate and enjoy the process rather than teaching them how to create art work in a certain way. According to practitioner Flaura, arts activities were opportunities for children to develop creativity by creating their work differently provided that practitioners set up a learning environment of interest to the children. Creativity, in some sense, required practitioners to adopt a position of 'stand by'. Practitioners in this setting were aware of the fact that observation of the process children engaged themselves in and listening to children's interpretation of their own work were of great importance for their understanding of children's learning, assessment of children and their curriculum planning. Unfortunately, there was an awareness of this perceived gap between their understanding and their practice in reality, which was reflected in the words of practitioner Ulta, 'I haven't got myself there yet!'

Children's interactions with each other in child-initiated arts activities showed a similar case to the Chinese setting. Children concentrated on and enjoyed what they were doing. They first made good use of the materials at hand sometimes through cooperation with other children, for example, in learning how to wrap a box, how to stick waste bottles onto paper, and how to cut paper properly. In these cases, some children acted as peer supporters for others who needed help. Children's creation of art work was a process of exchanging, trying out, and developing ideas and imaginative thinking. For example, one child's suggestion that they use tissue paper to

wrap presents for their friends changed the way that practitioners planned to use tissue paper to make flowers. The other children then developed the idea of wrapping presents into a quite focused activity. Another example, a child-initiated music performance was joined by some girls and boys, in which children took their turns to use the microphone to sing a song; they simulated the stage atmosphere, which encouraged them to a great extent to be interested in performing. It also seems that children longed for their peers' recognition and participation, which provided a supportive atmosphere to promote the development of new ideas and imagination.

5.4 The role of teaching and play

5.41 The Chinese setting

The teaching involved in arts activities focused on how to deal with real problems related to children's art work creation. This made the nature of teaching quite different from that involved either in language activities or maths activities. Direct teaching in arts activities, however, was more about demonstrating how to develop and use basic skills required in art work creation such as the proper use of scissors, Chinese ink, paint and brushes in order to get children to be familiar with the basic rules of using materials. In addition, direct teaching was about building up links between the context in which arts activities were involved and children's own experiences. For example, teacher Hong used puppets of animals to stimulate children's interests in singing 'Little duckling has a flat mouth' in good rhythm whilst she ended her teaching with children acting out the narratives involved in the song. This put children in the context in which they were involved in singing. Teachers also involved themselves in supporting children-initiated arts activities. The role of teaching in child-initiated arts activities was similar to the teaching involved in the English setting as discussed in chapter three and four: teaching was more about providing a supportive environment both physically and emotionally; teaching was based more on small group interactions or individual child interactions; teaching was also a process of close observation of children's learning process. These were shown in the corner activities such as children's drawing, painting, craft work, music and dance activities within a small group, in which children were given support directly related to their needs. The role of the teacher claimed by the Chinese Ministry of Education (2001: 15) as 'supporter, co-operator, and guide' rather than instructor

were evident in arts activities in this Chinese setting. This certainly challenged Cox's (1997) argument that Chinese young children were given far more direct instruction on how to do art work correctly.

Compared with the taught language and maths activities in which children were involved in an intensive knowledge-based learning process, arts activities in this Chinese setting were a 'luxury' for children. They could engage themselves in doing things spontaneously, expressively and playfully. The playful manner involved in child-initiated arts activities enabled the children to enter an informal relaxing environment, actively participate in what they were doing, initiate talk with peers, provide suggestions and comments on their peers' work, and interpret their work with freshness, imagination, and originality. The links between play and creativity were detected although 'creativity' was a word not very often mentioned by teachers in the Chinese setting. In addition, children's voices were heard and individuality of each child was manifest in the process of playful arts activities.

5.42 The English setting

As some early years academics argue, starting from where the children are including an understanding of what children have already learnt and what children want to learn is the foundation for practitioners' teaching (Bruce, 1987; Anning and Edwards, 2006; Moyles, 2006). In this English nursery setting, starting from children really started from observations of children in order for practitioners to learn what children already knew and what they want to know and learn. Therefore, practitioners were in a position of 'stand by' by keeping eyes on children in order to learn about children's art creation and prepare for planning of the next stage. Practitioners put the idea of encouraging children's creative development at the centre of their planning for arts activities. This was represented in my interview with Frances:

> I hate 'draw this, put this here, put that there'… If the idea is to do with a creative picture, there's no point to copy or colour in…for a picture, I think you need to be creative. Children are enjoying a lot more, there is less chance of failure, there's a lot of appreciation. We try to get thinking on all about the process, but not the product. We do a lot of group pictures too…
> (field notes from 7th February 2006)

Frances' idea accords with the argument of Merry et al. (2006: 144) that in Britain 'the idea of a teacher directly instructing young children how to draw correctly could seem unacceptable and 'alien''. However, this does not deny the existence of teaching,

which was expanded into a much wider context in terms of helping children to feel comfortable in the learning environment, offering a hand to show how to cut paper properly with scissors, and even making a kindly comment on what children were doing. As was observed, children often fold a piece of paper and gave it to a practitioner as a present after the practitioner offered them some help.

It is hard to define whether it is play or work in terms of children's participation in arts activities. Children concentrated very much on their art work creation while there was flexibility for them to use the provided materials in their own way. As mentioned earlier, children's interactions with each other promoted the development of new ideas and imaginative thinking towards the completion of art work. It was observable that children's visual art work, music and dance activities would display a lot more dynamics when children engaged in them by a playful manner. For example, this was reflected in the example of Tom's drawing from 'tornadoes' to 'tigers' stimulated by John's playful conversation of two 'bleeding' aeroplanes; this was also echoed in the case of Kyllie's interpretation of dots on her drawing as 'belly buttons' to her mum.

5.5 Summary

There were more similarities than differences between the Chinese and English settings concerning arts activities. First, both settings shared common aims and goals – encouragement of children's spontaneity, originality, imagination, and expressiveness involved in representation via visual arts, music or dance performance (Bruce, 2006; Duffy, 2006; Huang, 2006; Wu, 2006) although 'creativity' was not frequently mentioned by teachers in the Chinese setting but a daily used reference in the English setting. Secondly, arts activities were the learning area with the least amount of adult-directed instruction or intervention but with children's most active self-engaged participation in initiating an independent learning process by means of a large variety of learning resources in both settings. Thirdly, children's individual dynamics, originality, imagination, freshness, especially created in visual art work in both settings, were revealed through the visible outcomes. The communication with children about their art work is argued by Coates and Coates (2006: 240) as of importance for practitioners to understand 'the quality and depth of young children's spontaneous and self-taught visual expression which provides evidence of their

conceptual and creative development as well as the richness of their fertile imagination'. However, the invisible side of children's originality and imagination involved in their visual art representations concerning the meaning children constructed in their work had seldom been discussed between adults and children in both settings. Fourthly, the roles of adults in both settings were more related to the set up of a learning environment, the provision of a supportive atmosphere, and the offer of support to individual child based on observations of those children. This brought about a two-way direction of adult-child and child-child interactions.

There were two most noticeable differences between the Chinese and English settings. First, the direct teaching still played an important part in art activities in the Chinese setting although much more two-way interactions occurred in the process; direct teaching was not welcomed in the English setting and there were more opportunities of non-structured arts activities initiated by children themselves. In the second place, the less positive consequences caused by commercialisation of arts activities were observable in the Chinese setting: children's negative responses to the special interest class and the dilemma existing among Chinese parents regarding their anxiety about the benefits as well as the stress caused by children's attendance at special arts activity classes. This did not occur in this particular English setting, in which much more focuses were put on children's creative development in a variety of playful ways, although it is widely known that young children in the UK do attend some after-school classes.

Chapter Six

Play activities in Chinese and English settings

> …
> Yu: I want to get married.
> Yi: I'm also getting married.
> Hui: But you should first get a bridegroom!
> Yu [pointing to Dong]: I want him!
> Yi: I want him too!
> Hui: We get only one bridegroom…
> Yu [asking Dong]: Can you marry me?
>   (field notes from 19th April 2006)

This episode happened at the home corner of the Chinese kindergarten class. Yu and Yi initiated an idea of getting married. They both wanted Dong to be the bridegroom. What followed next was that Yu suggested they use the 'scissor-cloth-hammer' method to get married in turn. The home corner had become a very popular area for children during corner activity times either in the mornings or afternoons since the introduction of corner activities in February 2006. Children got themselves immersed and interacted with each other in a way that had seldom happened in formal activities taught or directed by teachers.

Bruce (1991: 60) defines the crucial features of 'free-flow play' as 'wallowing in ideas, feelings, and relationships' and the 'application of developed competence, mastery and control'. This is very much manifest at the home corner in the Chinese setting in that children initiated their ideas spontaneously, developed them in depth, and made efforts to solve problems with deep concentration and strong motivation (Bruce, 2005). The process involved in children's play was like a river, which nurtured children's ideas and provided water force for the flow of ideas. The observational data from the English setting showed even more cases of children's free-flow play both indoors and outdoors. There is a lot of literature on the links between play and learning (Bruce, 2004; Liu, 2004; Miller et al., 2005; Moyles, 2005; Wood and Attfield, 2005). In addition, the role of play has been explored in the analysis of language, mathematics and art activities in chapters three, four and five. This chapter, therefore, will mainly compare children's free-flow play activities which mostly involve the development of ideas and imagination within a play episode in order to investigate the similarities and differences between the two settings. Free-flow play activities in this chapter, therefore, include role play and imaginative play

mainly occurring in the activity corners in the Chinese setting and in the clothes shop/dressing-up area and construction area in the English setting.

6.1 Play activity types

6.11 The Chinese setting

The biggest change occurring during the research period in the Chinese setting was the introduction of activity corners including the home corner, art corner, music corner, science corner, entertainment corner and construction corner. My observational data showed that the home corner and construction corner provided opportunities for children's free-flow play activities. Those corner activities were usually chosen by children but with permission from teachers in the mornings between 10:30am and 11:15am and in the afternoons between 4:30pm and 5:15pm. The home corner in the Chinese setting was a small space on the balcony separated from the main classroom by a wall. The place was refurbished with a plastic mat, some dolls, a small table, and several chairs during the main research period (see photography 6.1).

Photograph 6.1: The home corner in the Chinese setting

At corner-activity time, the home corner was always the first chosen by the children. Children who did not have the chance to choose the home corner usually sighed, 'Home corner is gone again!' Then the construction corner became the second choice for children. The construction corner was in the opposite side of the main classroom separated by the corridor. It was divided into three areas by plastic fence: small wooden block area, plastic construction materials, and mixed plastic material area with animals and domestic things. The construction corner offered the children an informal environment, in which children developed ideas spontaneously and got

themselves wholly engrossed in the process of working with the resources on offer. Children's free-flow play happened mostly in the activity corners as compared with children's outdoor play which was related to physical education by a combination of direct teaching and pre-planned games supervised by the teachers as a collective activity rather than in small groups. For example, morning exercises identified as important part of outdoor play by the teachers aim to 'develop children's physical health, cultivate the sense of collectivism, and learn to be disciplined properly', which was written in the teaching plan.

6.12 The English setting

Compared with the Chinese setting, children's free-flow play can be found either indoors or outdoors in the English nursery school class. In terms of the learning environment, there was no clear-cut distinction but continuity between the two. This was considered to be the common ground among the English nursery schools (Bilton, 1998; Bruce, 2004). For example, some indoor materials can be moved to the outdoor environment in order to provide children with a variety of opportunities to extend their learning. The water tray, sand pit, and construction blocks can be played with both indoors and outdoors in this nursery school. After the first hour of indoor activities in the morning children were seen everywhere indulging in different activities. There was flexibility in providing play materials in this English setting. For instance, the construction blocks sometimes were displayed indoors but sometimes put outside of the classroom; the water tray was filled with blue water, tea pots and cups today whilst with bubbles, brushes, and dolls tomorrow. The role play area inside the classroom was changed from a Chinese kitchen during my pilot study to a clothes shop and post office in my main research period (see photo 6.2).

Photograph 6.2: The clothes shop in the English setting

According to practitioners' points of view, these environmental changes offered children more opportunities for their learning experiences.

The clothes shop, which was addressed as 'dressing-up area' by some girls, for example, was one of the popular places for children's free-flow play. Clothes there functioned as a catalyst for children to develop their imagination whilst children were not restricted by the space. On the contrary, children wearing wedding dresses with high heels were seen to go through classroom and sometimes outdoors. Children were making up their stories in their play, 'Children, quickly, you are late for school', 'Mummy is going shopping now. You play nicely at home.' or 'Let's have a picnic here' and so on. The construction blocks in this setting including unit blocks and hollow blocks were sometimes displayed indoors and sometimes outdoors. What the children did with the construction blocks was not just about building up a house, a tower, or a bridge. Some narratives were made up and their ideas flew from one moment to another. The children joining in later could quickly fit into the existing context and integrate their ideas into the process. This will be discussed in the following sections.

6.2 Play sequences

6.21 The Chinese setting

6.211 Home corner play

As mentioned earlier, children chose to play at the home corner, in which they developed ideas in depth through discussions and negotiations with their peers. This made most of the children's home corner activities free-flow play by nature. At the first sight, children's free-flow play seemed to be random or haphazard. However, under the surface play sequences were most often linked by a series of play plots or narratives (Dunn and Dale, 1984; Holland, 2003). My observational data also showed that play sequences in children's free-flow play at the home corner were very adaptive to the context and current situations. For example, children made good use of the play materials at hand and developed a play sequence into new plots when new-comers joined in. Play sequences acted as a virtual environment for children's exploration and interactions. Therefore, the whole process of children's free-flow play was characterised as a wealth of play sequences.

In the following episode, Mei, Tong, and Dong were in the role of mum, daughter and daddy respectively. They were busy cooking for their child, a little bear, which was lying on the floor covered with a piece of blue cloth.

Tong: I'm making a cake for him!
Dong: I will boil a kettle of water for him.
Dong: How to cook this, mum?
Tong: Foolish person! You even don't know how to cook this? Just boil it in water!
Mei: Where are noodles?

(field notes from 21st March 2006)

The first part of the play sequence focused on cooking for the bear: Tong making a cake, Dong boiling water, and Mei cooking noodles. The second part was about getting ready for dinner when they put their dishes on the carpet. Dong suddenly realized that they should set a table for dinner and pulled a table from the left corner to the centre. They were busy setting the table for dinner, which was supposed to be for their child, the bear, whilst the bear was sleeping. Then, the conflicts between Dong and Tong became the focus of the third part of the play sequence when Dong tried to get a chair from Tong:

Dong [turning to Mei]: She doesn't allow me to take this chair!
Tong: Isn't there another chair near the window?
[Dong got his chair and they three sat at the small table]
Tong: Ooh, daddy, you didn't cook anything good at all!
Dong: Pass me the spoon!
[Tong gave him a spoon. Dong asked for a bowl from Tong again]
Tong: How can you be like this?
Dong: Am I not daddy?
Tong: But I only listen to mummy!
 …

(field notes from 21st March 2006)

We can see the conflicts between Dong and Tong: Dong did not allow Tong to take a chair; Tong complained about Dong's bad cooking; Dong asked Tong to do errands for him; they also argued about the wrestling between daddy's power and mummy's authority. However, Mei was a very quiet mummy, who was only smiling at their argument. Dong had to give in by saying, 'Our dinner became cold. Let's start to eat!'

6.212 Construction corner play

There was a difference between children's use of plastic materials and wooden blocks in the construction corner in the Chinese setting. Children used plastic materials as weapons, vehicles, and machines with magic power whilst wooden blocks were mostly used for constructing buildings. Children in the construction corner took clues from the play materials they were engaged in and initiated ideas spontaneously by a joint effort. The process of construction play was concerned with

the development of play sequences. For instance, three boys used small wooden blocks to build up three high buildings. The first part of the play sequence was a combination of the construction of three high buildings and composing a narrative – 55 dogs living in the basement under the high buildings. In the second part, Lou was afraid that their dogs would die of hunger but Yao guaranteed that they would look after the dogs properly. Then the play moved on to what name was good for their high buildings. Lou's suggestion 'let us call it 'little darling'', which was reflected by the story of dogs. This idea was welcomed by Yao and Shao. When the tidy-up time was announced by the teacher the three boys looked worried. Finally, they all looked happy when one teacher asked them to keep their buildings there. Shao said in excitement, 'So, our dogs will not die from hunger!'

The following episode happened when three girls were playing with plastic food in the construction corner. Zhu was the mum whilst Tong was the older sister. A third girl Ru acted as the younger sister, who was wearing a hat made of an instant noodle bowl. Zhu was busy cooking holding a plastic spoon and a plate which was used as a sauce pan.

> Tong: Mum, will you play with us together?
> Zhu: No. I am going to the toilet now.
> [Tong and Ru looked at Zhu when Zhu found a plastic blue basin and put it down at the left side of the corner]
> Zhu: This is the toilet.
> [Zhu pretended to sit down a bit and stood up and left the toilet. Both Tong and Ru were giggling.]
> Zhu [returning to the cooker and took some 'ma hua' (fried thin flour stick) out of the plate]: Mummy cooked ma hua for you, very nutritious! [Zhu put several pieces of ma hua directly into the plastic blue basin.]
> Tong [smiling]: This is the toilet, mum!
> [Ru was laughing too. Zhu looked a bit embarrassed. She quickly took ma hua out of the blue plastic basin and put them into a yellow basket.]
> Tong [took one piece of ma hua smiling]: Oh, ma hua is smelly!
> Ru [took a piece]: Mummy, this one is not cooked well!
> Zhu [still busy frying ma hua on the cooker]: How can ma hua be cooked well without a lid?
> Zhu [looked around]: Can we do it this way? This basin can be used as toilet but also can be used as lid…
> [Zhu then covered the sauce pan with the plastic blue basin…]
> (filed notes from 2nd April 2006)

The above episode revealed a three-part play sequence. The first part was a 'toilet' experience, which was initiated by Tong's question of 'can you play with us together'. The mum Zhu used 'going to toilet' as a reasonable answer to reject Tong's demand. The toilet sequence was created by using the plastic blue basin and Zhu's 'sitting

down' in a serious way, which was laughed at by the two sisters. The second part returned to cooking but moved on to cooking ma hua. Tong immediately pointed out, 'This is toilet' when Zhu put ma hua into the blue basin. Zhu then took out ma hua and put them into a basket. However, the two sisters were still very critical of Zhu's ma hua: 'smelly' ma hua argued by Tong and uncooked ma hua by Ru. The last part focused on how to solve the problem of uncooked ma hua by Zhu's idea of changing the toilet basin to the lid for the sauce pan. The whole process showed that children concentrated on what they were doing. They were arguing and challenging each other. At the same time, they were cooperating and making contribution to their problem solving too.

6.22 The English setting

Children's free-flow play in the English setting also unfolded with a series of play sequences, which were similar to the Chinese setting. Play sequences showed that children's play was rigorous and vibrant. Children created and developed play sequences, which were naturally based on the materials they were using and the context they were involved in. This enabled the new-comers to understand, share and even make further contributions to the original plot. In the following episode, Betty, Quate, Nania, and Tila were playing at the back of the classroom. It was a big area and there were some chairs piled up on the left side of the area next to a square table.

> Tila: Let's sit on chairs!
> Quate and Nania: Yes, mum!
> [However, Betty did not move.]
> Tila: Betty? Betty?
> [Tila turned to Betty. Betty then went to the chairs and sat there too.]
> Nania [hiding herself under the table]: What's the time, Mr Wolf?
> The other three girls: Ten o'clock now. I'm gonna eat you!
> (field notes from 22nd May 2006)

This was the first part of play sequence – playing 'What the Time Mr Wolf'. It was a joint effort: it started from Tila's suggestion 'let's sit on chairs' and Nania got the idea of playing Mr Wolf when she hid herself under the table. Then, the play sequence developed into 'would you be naughty' after some other girls Ellie, Jessica, and Natalie came to join them. It was initiated by Ellie, who suggested that they should go to stand against the wall.

> Ellie [to Nania and Tila]: Those people are all children.
> Ellie [pointing Natalie, one of the smallest girl in the class]: Would you be naughty?

130

Natalie: No.
Ellie [pointing to Jessica, a smaller girl too]: Would you be naughty?
Jessica: Yeah! [Jessica was trying to sit down on the floor]
Ellie [looking at Jessica]: It's not nice to be naughty, OK?...
(field notes from 22nd May 2006)

The play sequence of 'would you be naughty' was disturbed by Betty, who stood up and wanted to get a picture book. A new play plot of 'I'm your teacher' was created when Ellie asked Betty to sit down because 'I'm your teacher'. However, Betty argued, 'I'm your teacher. You sit down. I'll get a picture book!' Ellie did not argue with Betty any more whilst she turned to an idea of 'who's wearing blue shoes', which was actually a vivid imitation of what practitioners usually did in this setting before lunch time when they asked children to go to the toilet and wash hands. From the episode we can see clearly the series of play sequences: play Mr Wolf, 'would you be naughty', 'I'm your teacher', and 'who's wearing blue shoes'.

Children's construction play in the English setting revealed clear clues of play sequences too. In this setting there were a variety of construction materials including small plastic construction materials, unit wooden blocks indoors and large hollow wooden blocks. Construction play was one of the most distinctive play activities in this setting. There were many examples of children's construction work which showed the characteristics of free-flow play such as fluency in developing ideas and reflexivity in changing and adjusting their ideas. Compared with the Chinese setting, construction play showed much more dynamism, freshness, originality, and cooperation among children in the English setting. It was also likely that the outdoor environment seemed to be a much more inviting place for children's construction play in a way that a large space could attract more children to participate with enjoyment and cooperation.

The following series of 6 photos taken during the course of two boys' construction play indoors showed us the sequences involved in their play. Frau and Kyle started their construction from Frau's idea 'I want to make a white house'. With the development of their construction, Frau and Kyle began their negotiations. Kyle suggested in a very polite way, 'Frau, I think we are building a robot'. Both Frau and Kyle were very excited at the end of their completion of their construction, 'Yeah, we finished!' Practitioner Mary commented, 'What a magnificent building!' Then, she took a photo of their finished work. When I asked Frau whether they were building a white house or a robot, Frau told me seriously, 'It can be turned into everything. Can be everything!' Frau and Kyle spent 20 minutes building up this 'can be everything'.

6.3 The child-child interactions

6.31 The Chinese setting

6.311 Positive interactions

The observational data showed clearly that the corner activities provided children with more opportunities to initiate child-child interactions. The relaxing atmosphere in different activity corners stimulated children's interests and enthusiasm in playing freely. Child-child interactions in activity corners were different from those happening in activities through the formal teaching. Children in formal teaching activities were task-oriented focusing on how to answer the teachers' questions or how to complete the tasks given by the teachers. In free-flow play activities, children interacted with each other in a way that was dynamic, fluent, and participatory. Child-child interactions in play are not purely about play as the child's personality plays a part in his/her play activities (Berlyne, 1969; Rogers et al., 1987, cited in Reifel, 1998) as well as children's feelings and emotions (Paley, 1984; Smidt, 2004). The playful context allows for the development of children's positive interactions.

The following episode shows the process, by means of which children interacted with each other in the home corner:

> Yu: Yi is the real mummy of our little bear!
> Dong [the only boy in the home corner volunteered immediately]: I'm the real daddy of little bear!
> Yu: I'm the real older sister of little bear!
> [The three children were putting the bear onto the small bed…]
> Dong [sitting at the plastic cupboard on the floor]: I'm going to sleep now, good night!
> Yu [imitating the voice of a baby]: Mummy, mummy, help me wash my clothes…
> [Yi went to take off Yu's clothes, a piece of scarf wrapped around her waist]
> Yu: It's Friday again. I have to wear it in the kindergarten. Not wash it now, not wash it now! [Yu put on her scarf again]
> (field notes from 19th April 2006)

The next part moved on to the plot of 'getting married', which was initiated by Hui's participation and her new idea of wearing a scarf as 'a minority group member':

> Hui: I'm a minority group member!'
> [Yi went to get another scarf and wore it in the way as Hui did]
> Dong [waking up from the noises made by the girls]: It's difficult to go to sleep in the noises. What are you doing?
> Yu: I want to get married.
> Yi: I'm also getting married.
> Hui: But you should first get a bridegroom!
> Yu [pointing to Dong]: I want him!

Hui and Yu got an idea to use 'jian-bao-chui' method to choose the bridegroom for the winner by taking turns to get married. 'jiao-bao-chui', whose equivalent English translation is 'scissors-parcel-hammer', is a children's game used to decide which one will be the winner to do something first by showing hand gestures. For example, one person hands out two fingers in the shape of scissors ('jian') whilst the other one opens her/his palm to represent 'bao' (parcel). The winner is the one who did the scissors. However, when the scissors meet 'hammer', which is usually represented by a 'fist', the winner would be the one who did hammer. The winner would be the parcel when hammer meets parcel. The boy Dong looked a bit confused about this game. However, it was Yu that won the first round of playing 'scissor-cloth-hammer:

Yu [asking Dong]: Can you marry me?
[Dong slid down to the floor with a bit of laughter. Hui came to him and looked at him seriously.]
Hui: I'm a teacher!
Dong [rising up from the floor]: Am I not her uncle?
(Dong was then dressed up in a slice of red cloth around neck after he was confirmed that he was Yu's bridegroom.]
Hui and Yi: OK, you are going to get married now!
Yu [looking rather excited wearing her scarf with flowers]: Am I going to be covered by a scarf?
…

(field notes from 19th April 2006)

What followed was that Dong was pulled to the side of Yu, who was covered with a red scarf on the head. Dong and Yu were getting married… However, Yi and Hui missed their chances to marry Dong due to another boy Yang's 'intrusion' into the home-corner by offering a dance performance of Xinjiang people. They all looked very cheerful and excited by Yang's performance.

The whole episode gives us a full picture of children's interactions in a playful way. At the very beginning, children were bound to the choices of roles related to the little bear. Yu distributed the role of 'little bear's real mummy' to Yi. Dong volunteered to be the real father of the little bear whilst Yu chose to be the real older sister. Then, Dong's smart choice of going to sleep gave him a chance to escape briefly from the play. Yu asked Yi to wash her clothes but immediately changed her mind as she had to wear her clothes in kindergarten on Friday. Their interactions turned into a different case with Hui's participation, especially when Hui announced that she was a minority group member by wrapping a scarf around her waist. Dong's

sound sleep was disturbed and his 'annoyance' about what the girls were doing raised the girls' imagination – 'I'm going to get married.' There was tension among three girls when Hui reminded them they should first get a bridegroom whilst they only had one bridegroom at that moment. This stimulated the idea of using the 'jian-bao-chui' method to win the bridegroom. The tension between girls and Dong went to a climax when Dong slid down to the floor hearing what Yu said, 'Can I marry you?' Hui tried to solve the problem by pretending to be a teacher whilst Dong changed his role into Yu's uncle. However, Dong was persuaded to accept his role as Yu's bridegroom. We can see clearly here that each child played an active part in developing playful interactions with each other through negotiation, persuasion, and making adaptations.

6.312 Negative interactions

The observational data showed, however, that negative interactions were also evident in children's free-flow play in corner activities in the Chinese setting. For example, the engagement of children's negative feelings and emotions including bossiness, anxiety, disappointment, and jealousy was manifest in the child-child interactions. Negative interaction was the opposite to playful interaction. The Chinese setting revealed cases of children's negative interactions in their free-flow play mainly occurring in the construction corner. The first episode was about a case of 'Do you obey me' when some boys were playing with plastic materials in the construction corner. Qing was a boy who was younger and shorter than the other boys.

> Yang: Mine is an aeroplane.
> Bin: I made a knife. It can also be used as a bird with a sharp beak!'
> Qing [holding an aeroplane]: Ding ding ding, qiu qiu qiu, pia pia.
> Yang: Don't come here, don't come here!
> [Qing stopped]
> Gong: I have a word with you! Do you obey me?
> Le: No, you shouldn't obey him!
> Gong [coming closer to Qing]: Qing, won't you obey me forever?
> [Qing looked rather confused, but he nodded]
> Le: Then, will you obey Le forever?
> [Qing kept silent]
> Gong [coming to Le]: Listen, Qing obeys me!
> Yang: Qing, whom do you obey on earth?
> Qing: I obey…
> Yang: Hello, listen to me, Qing only obeys me!
> Gong: Didn't you say that you obey me?
> …
> (field notes from 12th April 2006)

Children's interactions above were complex. Their play with plastic blocks was intertwined with the intensively asked question 'do you obey me'. Gong was the first one to initiate the question and wanted to show off that Qing obeyed him but he was disrupted by Le, who told Qing not to obey Gong. The tension continued between Gong and Le when Gong asked Qing if he would obey him forever. Gong looked very confident after Qing kept silent at Le's question 'will you obey me forever'. However, their play did not stop there. The complexity increased when Yang asked Qing 'whom do you obey on earth' and when Yang declared that Qing only obeyed him. What happened in the end was that Qing looked rather confused not knowing how to answer Gong. We can see that there were unequal roles involved in the episode. Gong, Le and Yang played the roles of the stronger whilst Qing was as if trapped in the middle of the sandwiches: whom does he listen to? Is it Gong, Le or Yang? Qing got trapped in answering the other children's questions and could not actually play freely. This changed the nature of play into un-playful experience for Qing.

Another episode showed children's negative interactions in free-flow play activities occurring in the construction corner. Two boys Zeze and Sheng played monsters using some plastic blocks. Piao was watching them at the beginning. Then, she brought the boys a plastic bottle from the cupboard in the construction corner:

> Piao [passing the bottle to Ze: This is poisonous medicine!
> Zeze [took it without looking at Piao and said to Sheng]: Let's open it. Give it to these monsters. They will die after they drink it!'
> [They began to feed monsters poisonous medicine. They held their monsters in hand to fight against each other. Piao went to the classroom.)
> Piao [with two tooth paste cases in hand and said to Zeze and Sheng with a bit excitement]: This is bombing powder for you!
> Zeze: Smelly shit bombing powder!
> Sheng: We don't need bombing powder!
> Piao [looked rather sad holding her bombing powder without saying a word. She came to another boy Bin who was playing opposite to Zeze and Sheng]: Do you want to buy bombing powder?
> Bin [holding his Monkey King wand and looking at Piao]: What smelly doggy stuff! Aren't they just two old tooth paste cases?
> …
>
> (field notes from 22nd March 2006)

Being isolated from play pals can be a negative experience for children (Cullingford, 1991). Piao in the play above was first rejected by Zeze's response 'smelly shit bombing powder' when she offered him 'bombing powder'. Then, Piao was rejected by Sheng, who said 'we don't need bombing powder'. Piao still got a hope to offer her 'bombing powder' to Bin. However, she was even more hurt hearing Bin's reply,

'What smelly doggy stuff! Aren't they just two old tooth paste cases?' Piao's interaction with those boys ended in vain. She looked very sad and disappointed and left the construction corner without a word.

6.32 The English setting

6.321 Positive interactions

Similar to the Chinese setting, positive interactions among children unfolded in children's free-flow play in the English setting. Positive interactions were established when children played more equally, collaboratively, and were emotionally active in terms of their participation rather than passively controlled by other children. The observational data from the English setting showed that the process, in which children established positive interactions, was a process of voluntary joint effort from all play pals. This was usually marked as children's beaming smiles, full concentration, wisdom and sometimes sense of humour. The following free-flow play episode occurred in the clothes shop area. Jessica was putting on a white dress and then high heels while Kim was putting on a black waistcoat on top of his yellow T-shirt. Then he came for a straw hat. Jessica helped him put on the hat in front of a mirror. They looked at each other with smiles. Jessica then went to the wardrobe and got a handbag for herself.

> Jessica: Let's go to the holiday!
> [Practitioner Ulta was tidying up the table opposite to the clothes shop.]
> Jessica [facing Ulta]: We go to holidays!
> [Ulta made no response and Jessica told her again]
> Ulta: Ooh, you go to holiday?
> [Kim was still kneeling down next to the wardrobe searching bags]
> Jessica: Come, holiday man. I don't want to be late for the wedding.
> [Kim got a big brown bag but his straw hat fell down on the floor]
> Jessica: Put on your hat, you'll be handsome!'
> [Kim took the hat from the floor and put it on with smiles]
> Jessica: We don't want to be late for the weeding, ok?
> Kim: Yeah.
> <div align="center">(field notes from 26th May 2006)</div>

What followed was that Jessica and Kim went to the maths table with some in-set metal lines, which were lined up with colourful beads. Kim sat at the table and drove one metal line as a car.

> Kim: Dee dee dee dee deee…
> [Jessica seemed to enjoy the journey very much sitting next to Kim smiling all the time… Finally they arrived at the beach]

<div align="center">136</div>

Kim [opening his bag]: We had pasta. I got…
Jessica: I need some space for my shoes!
[She then took off her high heels and put them into Kim's bag]
Jessica: Let's do some castles!
[They sat down on the floor and pretended to make sand castle]
Jessica: We'll be tired when we get home.
Kim: Shall we get some toys?
…
Jessica: Shall we go to the car park now?
[They went to the maths table and Kim was driving home...]
(field notes from 26th May 2006)

Their happy holiday finished when they went back together to the clothes shop after Jessica gave Kim a big kiss on the cheek. The interactions between Jessica and Kim developed steadily and evenly with the creation of play sequences. At the beginning when they were preparing for their holiday journey in the clothes shop, Jessica seemed to be a dominant figure. She helped Kim to put on his straw hat and initiated the idea of 'going to holidays'. They did not publicise their identity whilst Jessica called Kim 'holiday man'. Kim was not so talkative as Jessica, but we can see that he agreed with Jessica very much in that he spent time in choosing a straw hat, which was really liked by Jessica as it would make Kim 'handsome'. Jessica and Kim made a good preparation for their holiday journey. Their interactions changed a bit on their holiday journey as Kim was more active as a driver whilst Jessica enjoyed Kim's driving. In addition, Kim created ideas for their play by offering 'shall we get some toys'. Their playful interactions ended perfectly well with Jessica's kiss on Kim's cheek.

6.322 Negative interactions

Observational data also showed that there were cases of negative interactions involved in children's free-flow play in the English setting. As discussed earlier, the unequal roles were involved in negative interactions. For example, some children dominated in playing the role of the 'stronger' whilst others were passively involved in the role of the 'weaker' player. The 'stronger' and the 'weaker' here refer to the roles based on stereotyped images in children's play such as 'mother' to 'child', 'teacher' to 'children', 'older sister' to 'young sister' and so on (Kalliala, 2006). In this English setting, children, especially some girls, acted in the role of the 'stronger' to control other girls in the role of the 'weaker'. Most often, children who acted in the role of the 'stronger' were those physically taller, vocally articulate and talkative, or quicker in initiating ideas for their play sequences; the 'weaker' seemed to fall into

137

those physically smaller, vocally quieter, or slower in initiating ideas. However, the roles of the 'stronger' and the 'weaker' were operated comparatively. For example, the role of 'mother' could become the 'weaker' when it encountered bossy 'older sister' or vice versa. The following episode happened outdoors when several girls and boys were setting the table for dinner. Sarah was mummy and all the others were her children. Sarah carried the dinner basket followed by her children.

> Sarah: Ok, stop here now! We are ready for dinner!
> [Sarah put down the basket with food and cutlery. The other children stopped with excitement. Sarah began to take things out of basket and displayed them on the ground in the sun.]
> [Dave stretched his hand to get knife and butter.]
> Sarah: Don't touch it. I'll do it!
> [Gabby took a big piece of bread from the basket. Sarah snatched it away from Gabby immediately.]
> Sarah: This is for mummy, small one for baby, ok?
> Liz: Mummy, I want to go that way! It's too hot here.
> Sarah: Shut up! We just got here!
> …
>
> <div align="center">(field notes from 15th June 2006)</div>

This play episode reminded me very much of Paley's (1984) story about an American boy Franklin, who did not allow other children to build blocks at their own will by bossing the other children: 'Wait! Don't put it there', 'Leave it alone! You are spoiling it' and 'This is the way. Do it like this' (Paley, 1984: 84). In the end Franklin was left alone in the block area. Sarah, just like Franklin, was carrying the basket alone wandering on the playground while all the three children left her. Unlike Kalliala's (2006) finding that 'love and care form the basis of the relationship' between mother and child in the Finnish children's play, the episode here showed that interactions between Sarah and other children were rather based on the roles of an 'authoritarian mother' and controlled children. Sarah did not publicize her identity as a mummy at the start of their play but she seemed to load the responsibility of a mummy on her shoulders since the moment when she carried the food basket in her arms. The two boys Dave and Gabby did not call her mummy but Sarah reminded Gabby of the relationship between them: she was mummy, who deserved a big piece of bread, whilst as a baby Gabby could only eat a smaller piece. Perhaps the girl Liz still hoped that mummy would like to accept her idea of going that way because it was too hot. However, she was rejected by Sarah's 'shut up'. No wonder Liz told me, 'She (Sarah) was too bossy. We can't do anything!' We can clearly see that interactions between Sarah and other children were not like the case of Jessica and Kim. Negative

emotions such as uncertainty, disappointment or even anger were involved in the process of the play episode above, which stopped Dave, Gabby and Liz continuing to play with Sarah.

The following episode of 'Who's doing faster? Who's eating quickly? Who ate all of them?' revealed more vividly how negative interactions developed in children's free-flow play. Three girls were sitting against the wall. Marian wearing a pink hat was carrying a pink bag in her arms; Natasha had a grey bag and a bear; Lynn was holding a blue paper bag wearing a pink hat. Marian opened her pink bag, took something out, and threw it onto the floor:

> Marian: They are all crisps! Take some crisps!
> [Natasha and Lynn immediately kneeled down and tried to take crisps from the floor]
> Marian: Sit down then, get all of the crisps and eat them! Eat them, quickly!
> [Natasha and Lynn did what Marian told them to do by speeding picking up crisps and putting them into their mouths]
> Marian [speaking in one breath]: Get it into your bag! Who's doing faster? Who's eating quickly? Who ate all of them?
> Natasha: I don't like it!
> [But she continued to pick up 'crisps' and put them into mouth]
> Marian: Open your mouth! Do you eat all of them? Yes, good. What about you? Not really, finish it…'
>
> (field notes from 11th May 2006)

Natasha and Lynn did not get a second to take a breath until they found something tiny climbing on the carpet. They were ants. The next part focused on Marian's demands of picking up ants.

> Marian: Somebody get this? Get them into your bag! Don't drop your bag, very naughty of you! Come on, quick, who's doing it? Get them! If you don't get them I won't let you play! Get them, more! Get them, more, more, more…
> Marian: You hold it, you stand there, we'll get them, ok ... You need to put them into your bag!
> …
>
> (field notes from 11th May 2006)

Both Natasha and Lynn were kept busy catching the tiny ants and getting them into their bags. The next part moved on to Marian's idea of 'going home and go to sleep'. Natasha was asked by Marian to lie down on the top of a writing desk at the back of the clothes shop area. Lynn first refused Marian's demand when Marian asked her to take off her shoes and put them into the drawer of the writing desk. However, she had to do what Marian told her when Marian said, 'You should. Because they are not your shoes, they are mine!' After the bedtime, Lynn left Marian and Natasha without informing them whilst Natasha said to Marian, 'I'm going to nursery.' The whole

episode ended when Marian told Natasha that she would go outside to climb the 'monkey bars', the wooden climbing frames, but asked Natasha to 'just stand there and watch me'. Natasha was standing at the door watching Marian running to the monkey bars…

The whole play lasted about 40 minutes. It was mainly controlled by Marian whilst Natasha and Lynn were barely heard. There was tension there from the beginning to the end. Marian initiated the idea of picking up crisps and eating them, which put Natasha and Lynn in a position of having to listen to her. Natasha did say, 'I don't like it' when Marian kept saying 'who's eating faster…' But she could not stop picking up and eating crisps because Marian did not listen to her at all. The process of picking up ants was also controlled by Marian, who even threatened Natasha and Lynn that she would not allow them to play if they did not do what she asked them to do. The next part of going home and sleeping was designed by Marian. Lynn showed her dissatisfaction by refusing to put shoes into the drawer. However, she was persuaded to do that by Marian. The negative interactions continued until the last minute when Marian asked Natasha 'just stand there and watch me' whilst she went out to climb the monkey bars. As an observer, I felt strongly that Natasha and Lynn were not happy at all but they had to keep doing what Marian asked them to do. This was free-flow play for Marian in some sense, but for Natasha and Lynn, it was totally the opposite. They did not have a playful and enjoyable experience at all. On the contrary, they were suffering from the beginning to the end.

6.4 The role of the teacher

6.41 The Chinese setting

The research data derived from the period of my pilot study and main research showed that teachers seldom intervened or provided support to children when they played in the home corner and construction corner. There were times when teachers watched children play but they didn't usually stay long. In this sense, the home corner and construction corner were real places for children's free play to flow and flourish. According to teacher Huang and Lu, children enjoyed their play in the home corner and construction corner, which made teachers feel it to be unnecessary to interfere. Teacher Hong argued that it would be better for the teachers to observe children in their play and provide support to meet children's needs. However, she showed

concerns over children's play that seemed entirely out of teachers' control. She insisted that 'children's free play cannot be totally free' and totally free play out of teachers' control was described by her as 'non-governmental'. 'Non-governmental' in Chinese context is used to refer to some situations, when things go freely without control from the government. Teacher Hong used the word here to mean children's free play without any control from the teacher. For her, being 'non-governmental' was not good for children. Teacher Hong's idea seemed to support what I found about children's negative interactions. Those children who suffered in free-flow play such as Qing and Piao did need teachers' support or intervention. Qing needed to escape from the intensive questions asked by the three boys 'do you obey me'; Piao wanted to participate in the boys' play and was eager to gain recognition from boys who accepted her first offer of 'poisonous medicine' but rejected her second offer of 'bombing power'. However, no teachers witnessed the process in which how Qing and Piao suffered. Unfortunately, Qing looked rather confused upon hearing the other boys' questions whilst Piao left the boys without saying a word but seemingly with disappointment and sadness.

The examples that teachers intervened in children's play at the home corner occurred when children were playing cheerfully. For instance, when a group of children were playing happily one morning, teacher Hong came by suddenly and questioned them, 'Look, what a big mess you are making! Pick this up…' Children's cheerful play, therefore, was suddenly stopped. The children looked embarrassed and confused, which seemed to suggest 'have we done something wrong?' However, there was no chance for children to get an answer from teacher Hong, who had already picked up some pieces of tools and thrown them into a box. The children had to stop their messy play and put things in order. Observing and documenting children's learning processes are an important means for us to know and understand in depth how children learn (Edwards et al., 1998; Anning and Edwards, 2006). This raised a difficult question: how could the teachers appropriately support children's play, especially when the status of play is justified in practice by adding more space and time for children's play in this kindergarten class? However, this is a question not just for this Chinese setting but also a question for many other kindergartens in big cities such as Beijing: 'the quantity and quality of teachers' facilitation and extension for the activities initiated by young children still need to be improved' (Liu et al, 2005: 110). As teacher Hong stated, 'I feel very confused about how to guide teachers to

observe children. But the practical issue is that children's initiated play is in a status of being out of control. Free talk, free play and teasing have brought teachers a lot more pressure and puzzlement…' Her talk again indicated a contradiction in that she herself emphasized the importance of observing children but at the same time she worried about children's 'non-governmental' play. This perhaps led to her intervention in children's play by asking them to tidy up the mess mentioned earlier.

6.42 The English setting

Practitioners in the English setting seldom intervened in children's free-flow play, especially occurring in the clothes shop area. For instance, none of the practitioners were present in the example of eating crisps and some other cases in which children were involved in negative interactions in free-flow play. This led to the situation that the negative interactions involved in these free-flow play were a 'secret garden' for practitioners. What was happening inside this secret garden, especially children's negative experiences, escaped the notice of the practitioners. Children's construction play was very often under the surveillance of practitioners. For example, what practitioners usually did was to make comments on children's construction work such as 'what a great job' or 'how wonderful, such a high tower'. However, it was very rare that practitioners asked children themselves what their construction was about or why they had planned it as they did. Practitioners' comments were based upon their own interpretation of children's construction rather than looking into what children were actually doing with blocks from children's perspectives. For example, in the episode of Frau and Kyle, practitioner Mary took a photo of their construction and commented 'what a significant building'. However, she did not hear Frau's statement 'it can be turned into everything'.

'Sustained shared thinking' between practitioners and children is identified as one of the most important factors for effective provision by the EPPE Project (Sylva et al., 2004). 'Sustained shared thinking' builds up a link between what practitioners think about children's learning and what children are actually doing, which helps practitioners to provide children with appropriate support. This 'sustained shared thinking' was evidenced in some examples, in which practitioners supported children based on their careful observations and shared understanding of what the children were doing. Regarding children's construction work, practitioners made suggestions.

Sometimes this happened when children encountered some technical issues such as how to manage big blocks properly. Practitioners reminded the children to avoid producing some dangerous situations such as creating unbalanced construction. Consequently, positive interactions between practitioners and children were developing in the process. The following photos were taken from children's construction play outdoors. The role of practitioner Marsha was to be involved in a process of observing children, providing support to children when they were in need, and documenting children's work. It was clearly observed that Marsha kept a distance from children in the whole process, which allowed for children's intensive construction of large blocks alongside an narrative of the builders' hard work. Children concentrated on their construction in the whole process. They selected different types of blocks, negotiated with their peers, came to Marsha when they needed additional support, and made decisions how to work better with their playmates by accommodating to others' ideas and the context they were involved in. This example was neither just about what kind of learning areas children involved themselves in nor just about whether their construction could meet the goals set up in practitioners' weekly plan such as how their language or mathematical development were being developed. It was rather a process for children to engage themselves in an activity and interact with each other in a positive way to gain happy experiences in an encouraging environment.

6.5 Summary

This chapter compared children's free-flow play activities in the Chinese and English settings by analysing the play sequences, the child-child interactions and the role of the adult. The comparison indicated a common ground shared by the Chinese and English settings. First, the observational data revealed that children's free-flow play in both the settings developed steadily with a series of play sequences, which were adaptable to the context and situations children involved in. Play sequences made children's play rigorous and vibrant enough for children's participation. At the second place, both positive and negative child-child interactions were involved in the process of children's free-flow play. Positive interactions were characterised as children's equal, collaborative, and emotionally active participation, wisdom and sense of humour whilst children's negative feelings and emotions were very much

involved in their negative interactions based on the unequal roles set up by the strong player.

At the same time, some differences between the two settings were detected. For example, the environment and display of play materials in the Chinese setting stayed fixed day to day and there was a clear-cut division between indoor play and play outdoors. The English setting, however, revealed much more flexibility and continuity in arranging play materials and activities indoors and outdoors (see section 6.12). The English setting showed evidence of practitioners' support for children's construction play whilst there was hardly observable evidence of teachers' support to children's construction play during the pilot study and main research period in the Chinese setting.

Chapter Seven

Teachers' perspectives in Chinese and English settings

> In some respects teaching is like lighting a fire. We bring heat to paper to enable it to start combining with oxygen in its environment. In the classroom our function is similar; we bring to bear various teaching devices with a view to producing a 'flash' between each child and some part of his environment.
>
> (Hughes and Hughes, 1965: 354-355)

Hughes and Hughes (1965) use the metaphor of 'lighting a fire' to refer to the function of teaching whilst they highlight the link between teachers' input and children's learning. This reminds me of the metaphor used by the Chinese teacher Lu in the Chinese research site. She used a Chinese idiom, 'pao zhuan yin yu' (抛砖引玉), to portray her views of teaching. 'Pao zhuan yin yu' literally means 'throwing out bricks in order to bring in jades'. In this way, teacher Lu argued that teaching acts as a catalyst to arouse children's learning interest and motivation. This chapter will analyse some issues underpinning the early years curriculum from the perspectives of Chinese teachers and English practitioners drawing upon the interview and conversation data related to the early years curriculum, teaching, early childhood, the ways for young children's learning, and the relationship between the early years curriculum and culture. This will offer opportunities to understand why the similarities and differences occurred in the process of the curriculum practice between the two settings regarding the language, mathematics, arts and play activities discussed in chapters three to six. For the purpose of conciseness, 'teachers' in the title of this chapter is used to refer to both teachers in the Chinese setting and practitioners in the English setting. However, the analysis in this chapter uses 'teachers' and 'practitioners' to refer to people working in the Chinese and English settings respectively.

7.1 The early years curriculum

7.11 The Chinese setting

7.111 The activity-based curriculum

The term 'early years curriculum' has never been used in formal government documents since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949

although there has been a lot of research on the early years curriculum, especially since 2000 (Sun, et al., 2003; Zhu, J.X., 2003; Zhu, J.Y., 2003; Tang, 2004; Tang, X.J., 2005). The *Kindergarten Education Guidance Outlines* does not use the term 'curriculum' whilst 'educational activities' and 'educational contents' are frequently cited (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001). In this Chinese setting, 'activity-based' curriculum seemed to be popular among Chinese teachers although there was sometimes inconsistency in using the term 'curriculum'. For example, the Chinese headteacher Ai briefly stated 'the curriculum is all the activities organised for children in the kindergarten' while she also regarded the 'curriculum' as a 'practice approach' in certain early years settings when she talked about the influences including 'multiple intelligences curriculum', 'constructive curriculum' and 'Reggio Emilia's project curriculum' upon the kindergarten curriculum. Teacher Lu's opinion that 'the curriculum is the activities we do with children' accords with the headteacher Ai's understanding of the curriculum. Meanwhile, teacher Lu expressed her confusion with the word 'curriculum' as 'it's hard to say what it means. In primary school, we can easily say 'the curriculum is the teaching content for pupils whilst it is not appropriate to say this in the kindergarten'. For teacher Lu, the meaning of the word 'curriculum' in the kindergarten is different from the primary school curriculum. However, she could not explain why.

This reminded me of my personal conversation with Professor Liu Yan in Beijing Normal University January 2005. When I asked her why the word 'curriculum' did not appear in the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outlines* (2001), She argued that it was mainly due to the understanding of the term 'curriculum' ('ke cheng' in Chinese): 'ke cheng' in a traditional sense refers to the content of teaching without addressing the role of students in their learning, which seems to be inappropriate to early childhood education. She held that 'we should not limit our understanding of 'curriculum' to textbook, teaching plans, teaching guidelines and so on'. This is akin to teacher Zi's critique of the idea that 'the textbook is the curriculum' by arguing that 'safety and emotional issues, which are not designed in textbooks, are integrated into daily kindergarten life and they are part of the curriculum'. In general, the understanding of the curriculum among the headteacher and teachers in the Chinese setting reflects Feng's (1997) definition of the kindergarten curriculum as, 'all kinds of activities for the young children in the kindergarten educational situations in order to promote children's overall and

harmonious development both physically and spiritually' (Feng, 1997 cited in Tang, 2004: 282). However, this has been criticised by some researchers. For example, Liu (1997) argued that the activity-based curriculum seemed to address more the visible curriculum such as the teaching plan, syllabus, and content but neglects the hidden curriculum underpinning the curriculum practice such as the context and people's values and beliefs.

7.112 The issue of the textbook

The textbook or teachers' reference book is of great importance in planning the curriculum and informing teaching in Chinese kindergartens (Wang, Y.Y., 2001; Zhang, H., 2006). The textbook adopted by the Chinese setting during the period of my research was *the Kindergarten Construction Curriculum Guidance: Teachers' Reference* (2004). It aimed to put 'children's development at the centre of the curriculum in order to serve the general goal of early childhood education that every child will develop wholly and harmoniously with individuality' (Zhang, H. et al., 2004: V). Children's life and direct experiences were considered as the most important resources for the curriculum whilst the co-construction of the curriculum from teachers and children and the flexibility of the pre-planned curriculum were very much emphasized by the textbook. The observational data on the language, mathematical and arts activities in the Chinese setting reflected a great deal of what has been included in the textbook. The discussions of how to implement the curriculum based on the textbook had been the main focus for teachers' professional development sessions in this kindergarten. The headteacher Ai recognised the importance of the textbook to the curriculum design for teachers. However, she acknowledged that not all of the curriculum content was taken from the textbook and that it was important for teachers to have autonomy in accommodating the pre-planned curriculum by paying attention to children's learning abilities and interests alongside the locality.

Several teachers expressed their understandings of the textbook in the following.

> Teacher Hong: Textbooks are very important. The collective activities are built upon the framework of the textbook. We can change something in teaching process in order to be in coherence with our local features and children's developmental levels. Textbooks are playing a guiding role, especially for the new teachers; they will get lost without the guidance of textbooks.

Teacher Bai: Textbooks provide a platform and theoretical guidance for teaching. We have not enough time to design curriculum content by ourselves. Textbooks are scientifically and systematically designed. It is not good if teachers are not guided by theories.

Teacher Zi: Our kindergarten textbooks are suitable for children and they are very helpful to new teachers. Textbooks' adaptation to locality is good. Teachers can choose (some contents) according to teaching goals and children's developmental characteristics. We can add seasonal activities into teaching plan, for example, the Tooth-Protection day (20th September) and the Mid-Autumn Festival activities. However, it is important to note that the textbook itself is not the curriculum as the curriculum includes some emergent contents such as safety and emotional issues whilst those issues have not been written into the textbook.

The clear message above is that teachers commonly sang the praises of textbooks as they helped them plan the curriculum systematically while new teachers relied much more upon textbooks than the experienced teachers. Discussion of the activities written in the textbook was also important part of teachers' professional training sessions at this kindergarten. Teacher Hong confirmed the importance of the textbook in terms of collective activities, especially for some young teachers who were not good at designing the curriculum. Meanwhile, teachers acknowledged the importance of flexibility in adapting textbooks for the curriculum according to children's developmental characteristics and the local culture. For example, teacher Zi added the Tooth Protection Day and the Mid-Autumn Festival into her curriculum plan. Teacher Zhu, as a team leader, pointed out that the textbook itself was not the curriculum as the real curriculum included some emergent themes based on children's learning interest and developmental level.

7.113 The localisation of the curriculum

The localisation of the early years curriculum as well as the autonomy of the kindergarten teachers in implementing the curriculum were emphasized by the headteacher and teachers in the Chinese setting. This was shown in the interview data with the headteacher Ai:

The design of the curriculum is mainly based on the textbook whilst we get our own kindergarten-based curriculum as supplementary to textbook-based curriculum. The curriculum should be in accordance with the local culture. For example, the spring outing, the visit to pottery and ceramics factories, the visit to the Zibo Football Museum and so on are all based on the Zibo local culture. Teachers have their own autonomy in implementing the curriculum.

The headteacher addressed the importance of including the local culture in the kindergarten curriculum by making good use of the community resources. In a similar vein, teacher Hong acknowledged that cultivation of children's love of motherland, hometown, and family as important parts of the curriculum should be implemented by means of children's hands-on experiences at kindergarten. However, teacher Hong was very critical of the knowledge-oriented activities, in which children's emotional involvement was neglected. In addition, teacher Hong argued:

> There is excellent partnership between Reggio Emilia and the local communities, which opens up much more opportunities for children's diverse learning experiences. However, we haven't established such wonderful system in our society of Zibo. This in some sense limits our development of local curriculum.
> (interview notes with teacher Hong on 31st August 2005)

In terms of the autonomy that teachers had in implementing the curriculum, they acknowledged that the headteacher Ai provided them much space for their interpretation of the curriculum in tune with the concrete situations. For teachers, they recognised the importance of following children's learning interests and giving children time and space to express themselves. For example, teacher Hong argued:

> Let me take for an example. It starts to rain when we have our lessons. What shall we do if children are attracted by the rain? We shall let them watch the rain and satisfy their interests in the rain which came in sudden. Let them talk about the rain. We shall then get them back to our lesson if we can; but just let them continue their talks about rain if we cannot stop them.
> (interview notes with teacher Hong on 31st August 2005)

Teacher Hong's argument above reflected somewhat what she did with her teaching in that she integrated playful methods such as acting out what children learned through role play in order to sustain their learning interest. However, the whole process of formal lesson activities focused much more on how to implement the curriculum according to the teaching plan rather than adapting the curriculum by following children's learning interests. This was reflected in teacher Bai's comments, 'In general, the teacher-designed curriculum is always carried out as planned. Most of the children concentrate on what we have planned. Therefore, our activities can continue.' (conversational notes from 4th September 2005)

7.12 The English setting

7.121 The functions of the curriculum

Practitioners' understandings of the term 'curriculum' in the English setting seemed to be more comprehensive compared with the Chinese setting. The interview data showed that their understandings focused on both the visible elements and the invisible elements of the curriculum. This is reflected most in the English headteacher Anna's viewpoints:

> A curriculum is something which provides a framework of learning opportunities for children. It defines the subject areas which are considered for children to be able to explore. It gives suggestions for teaching strategies and ways of engaging children effectively in learning process. An early years curriculum also includes the aspects of the hidden curriculum, in another word, things that are not necessarily defined as important for children. But nonetheless, the vehicles…., we can communicate, values, morals, attitudes. And there are things we teach unconsciously by the way we are with one another and children.
> (interview notes with the headteacher Anna on 23rd Feb 2006)

The headteacher Anna regarded a curriculum as 'something which provides framework of learning for children', which 'gives suggestions for teaching strategies' to 'engage children effectively in learning process'. This accords with Bennett's (2001) argument that a curriculum helps practitioners to clarify teaching aims and focuses on important aspects of child development by providing a structure to the child's learning experience. Meanwhile, Anna mentioned the importance of the hidden curriculum for young children, which she identified as 'things that are not necessarily defined as important for children' and 'things we teach unconsciously'. Her understanding of the curriculum echoed the argument made by HMI (1985) that a school's curriculum includes not only the formal programme of lessons, but also 'informal' programme such as school's ethos, teaching and learning style and so on. Anna agreed on the simple definition given in the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000: 2) that the curriculum is 'everything children do, see, hear or feel in their setting, both planned and unplanned' in that it is good for the right of practice by putting children at the centre of the curriculum.

7.122 The informality of the curriculum

The common ground shared by the practitioners in the English setting was the informal rather than formal nature of the curriculum. The headteacher Anna and the practitioners showed their concerns about the formal direct teaching of young children,

especially in a large group or a whole class. This was considered not suitable for three- or four-year-olds, who it was argued needed first-hand learning experiences. Practitioner Frances perceived the curriculum in the following:

> Curriculum is what you are doing with children. It's not about formal teaching, quite informal. How you break down subjects into different areas. Try to merge all areas. Quite informal, especially at this age. It's about developing a whole child, behaviours, social skills, emotions, and well-being. Teach them to be independent and build self-esteem. So, they feel confident to learn.
> (interview notes with Frances on 7th Feb 2006)

Frances argued that the curriculum was not about formal teaching whilst she addressed the informal nature of curriculum focusing on developing the whole child. Her understanding of implementing the curriculum by breaking down subjects into learning areas, which was based on the framework set up by the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (2001). By the same token, practitioner Mary confirmed the informality of the early years curriculum by following children's interests and providing opportunities for children's play. For Mary, the role of practitioners is more about setting up the learning environment to enable children learn through play.

7.123 The *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (CGFS)

In terms of the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (2000), the headteacher and practitioners in the English setting agreed that the guidance provided a good clear framework for practitioners' practice. The curriculum planning in this setting reflected the six learning areas prescribed in the CGFS whilst practitioners were not confined by the CGFS. The headteacher Anna argued:

> *The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* had a key influence upon the way we are working here. It's a good document. It is prescriptive. [But] It does allow us to be creative and flexible. We do welcome the guidance that it offers us perspectives in term of 'learning and teaching'. I deliberately put it that way around rather than 'teaching and learning'…The staff feel that at the same time as allowing them to be creative, it also gives them priorities within which to work. So, nobody will go so far away from it…'
> (Interview note with the headteacher Anna on 23rd February 2006)

For Anna, the CGFS has had key influences upon their work as it offers perspectives on 'learning and teaching'. The CGFS is prescriptive whilst it allows for the practitioners' interpretation and autonomy in planning and implementing the curriculum. This was reflected in the practice of the curriculum in this setting. For example, practitioners' curriculum planning was built upon children's learning

151

interest and through cooperation between practitioners rather than a rigid copy of the CGFS. Practitioner Mary mentioned that they could change their plan from builder's activity into policeman activities if the building work is not of interest to the children because 'You cannot decide on your own. Actually we change our plan according to children's interest… because that's what they want to do'.

The interview data also showed that the headteacher and practitioners became slightly concerned over the prescriptive nature of the CGFS, which potentially turned into constraints on the practitioners. Therefore, the headteacher Anna emphasized the importance of the practitioners' autonomy in implementing the curriculum. This is reflected in the following:

> I think there is a tension in describing a curriculum for young children between making such a vague statement that ends up meaning nothing and being over prescriptive to the degree that the curriculum becomes a constraint on people. A careful curriculum for young children must allow a lot of room for interpretation by the practitioners in their own context. Because the contexts differ from school to school, from country to country… They must also allow for interpretation in the local level.
> (Interview notes with the headteacher Anna on 23rd February 2006)

Having said that the CGFS was a good guidance, Anna carefully pointed out the tension between a vague curriculum and an over-prescriptive curriculum. For her, neither the vague curriculum nor the over-prescriptive curriculum is good because the former 'ends up meaning nothing' whilst the latter becomes 'a constraint on people'. Therefore, she defined a good curriculum as a curriculum that allowed for practitioners' own interpretation in their contexts. In the meantime, practitioner Mary shows her concern about the CGFS in terms of the detailed 'stepping stones', which seems to put children in a position of 'waiting to be assessed' rather than being treated as a whole child. Mary did not criticise the CGFS in a direct way whilst she mentioned several times that in her home country Norway they had a very brief curriculum document and early years teachers used it only as a broad framework to guide their curriculum planning.

7.2 The ways for young children's learning

7.21 The Chinese setting

7.211 The vagueness in the term 'children's learning'

The interview data concerning the ways for young children's learning showed us an interesting contrast between the Chinese and English settings. The question itself seemed to be a vague term for some teachers in the Chinese setting. For example, when I asked teacher Qing what she thought about how young children learn, she argued that there were no fixed models to educate children by telling me her experience of educating her child such as the importance of telling stories, modelling children's behaviour, and doing handcrafts. I did not know whether she did not understand the question of 'the ways for children's learning' or she interpreted that my question of 'the ways for children's learning' was equal to the question of 'the ways of how to educate children'. However, what was clear here was that she was overwhelmed by the roles of adults in educating young children rather than directly telling me about the ways for young children's learning.

7.212 Learning from books

'Learning from books', 'learning from lessons', and learning from corner activities were the mainstream in responding to the question of the ways for young children's learning in the Chinese setting. For example, teacher Hong listed several ways through which young children learn:

> Learning from books. Learning from books is more instructive than watching TV; or the combination of the two means. In terms of much younger children, parent-child reading is better. Corner activity is another way for children to learn. Children to explore themselves, to gain sense experience, and develop stuff like creativity. … To learn in nature. Children in the cities live very dull lives. There are no obvious changes of four seasons in the cities. While, in the countryside, the growth of crops, the weeds in the fields… Country children get different lives from city children… Peer's imitation and learning… Children's rhymes are popular among children…
> (interview notes with teacher Hong on 17th April 2006)

Book-based learning can be called a Chinese tradition, which emphasized the importance of learning from second-hand or indirect experience. There is a Chinese saying, 'There are beauties inside books, there are golden houses inside books', which seems to encourage generations of Chinese people in history to succeed in the society through reading books. This book-based learning concept, as is argued by Liu (2004),

is still influencing kindergarten practice in some senses. Meanwhile, teacher Hong mentioned that arts activities were one way for children's learning, which was also addressed by teacher Lu and teacher Huang. Teacher Huang also mentioned that 'exploration via lessons' was an alternative way for children's learning because children imitated and interacted with their peers in order to explore questions raised by the teachers in formal lessons.

7.213 Corner activities

The introduction of corner activities to this Chinese kindergarten was a result of visiting and learning from advanced early years approaches and experts. For example, the headteacher Ai and some teachers visited a number of kindergartens in Shanghai, which adopted the Reggio Emilia's project approach, whilst some Chinese early years experts had been invited to this kindergarten to give lectures about young children's development, pedagogy, and kindergarten management. In addition, the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outlines* (2001) highlights the major role of children in the process of learning. The strong message here is that children must be provided more space and time for active learning (Liu and Feng, 2005). All these brought about the introduction of corner activities. The impact of corner activities upon children's learning experiences had already been revealed in the chapters three to six. The first stage of the corner activity development in this kindergarten involved how to set up the activity corners for children while the second stage focused on how to properly deal with the relationship between teacher's direction and children's spontaneous play in the corner activities.

Teachers Hong, Lu and Huang agreed that corner activities were important means for children's learning. However, there seemed to be confusions about the relationship between children's play and teachers' support involved in corner activities. For example, teacher Lu expressed her concern that there was too much control from teachers over children's learning and argued that 'teachers should free children's hands, let them explore and discover'; teacher Hong showed concern about the out-of-control status of children's spontaneous play:

> Corner activities do bring children happiness and freedom. Children play freely, chase each other, and talk freely. This brings us stress and confusion too. How to put suitable materials into activity corners, how to avoid children's random play… worry us a lot. For example, the entertainment corner was proposed by some parents. However, it turns to this situation that children play there without purpose eating

snacks. This is against our original aims. Then, we have to change it into shopping centre.

<div align="center">(interview notes with teacher Hong on 17th April 2006)</div>

Teacher Hong's concerns here were related to how to balance children's spontaneous play and teachers' direction. Seemingly, she could not bear the randomness represented in children's spontaneous play she called previously 'non-governmental' (out-of-control) play. However, teacher Huang showed us another angle to look into the tension between corner activities and formal teaching activities:

> Children mainly learn from corner activities. Now parents pay more attention to corner activities. Children want very much to play since the introduction of corner activities. For example, on last Friday's 'Chinese Character Baby Fun Garden' lesson, many children asked, 'Teacher, shall we play corner or not?' Children like corner activities very much. It's the rule in our kindergarten that we have two 'Chinese Character Baby Fun Garden' lessons in a week, but many children said, 'Teacher, I don't want to read'. Teachers have to guide them, 'You cannot get access to university via exams if you are not learning characters'. Above all, I feel that children don't like to choose to study those things like Chinese characters…
>
> (interview notes with teacher Huang on 18th April 2006)

The strong message is that teacher Huang was impressed by children's enthusiasm in playing corner activities whilst she was aware of the pressure that Chinese character study had brought to children. However, this seemed to be a 'have-to' situation in this kindergarten class: they have to teach children to learn 'Chinese Character Baby Fun Garden' to prepare them for university exams in the long run.

7.214 The place of play

Play has been recognised as the basic activity for kindergarten children since the 1980s by the Chinese Ministry of Education (China Pre-school Education Research Association, 1999). There seems to be no argument against the importance of play in the development of the child in this Chinese setting. However, the conventional concept of play in China seems to address the negative meaning attached to 'play' as 'carelessness, no responsibility, and no seriousness' although it recognises the fun side of play for young children (Xin Hua Chinese Dictionary Editing Board, 2004: 984). In this sense, play is devalued compared with the values attached to knowledge-based study in the Chinese context (Liu, 2004). Similarly, 'play' as a concept was treated differently from 'activities' or 'educational activities' in this Chinese setting. For example, there were two major types of activities written down in the teachers' weekly plan – 'educational activities' and 'indoor/outdoor play'. This

<div align="center">155</div>

indicated that play activities were not included into the category of 'educational activities' and that play was not 'educational', which reflects the aforementioned conventional concept attached to 'play'.

The interview and conversational data with teachers showed that play was not independent but rather a supplementary element to educational activities. Play could seldom speak for itself in this Chinese setting. Rather, the voice of play was usually heard through topics on teaching and corner activities. Teachers emphasized the importance of integrating playful elements into formal teaching activities and the role of play was regarded as 'serving the purpose of collective teaching'. For instance, teacher Hong said:

> Collective teaching is not contradicting children's play. The principle involved in collective teaching is 'the combination of mobility and stillness'. 'Mobility' means children's play, gives children more chances for their own discovery. Children will become interested if play is integrated into collective teaching. Play in collective teaching serves the purpose of teaching activities. Some parents concern about children's play and argue that children's play is just play randomly without purposes. Do we need purpose for play? If we over-emphasize the purpose of play, play would be too much restricted for children. Play would become a mess if we don't emphasize the purpose…
> (interview notes with teacher Hong on 17th April 2006)

Teacher Hong first acknowledged the importance of integrating play into collective teaching for the interest of children while she pointed out that play 'serves the purpose of teaching activities'. Teacher Hong's notification of the non-purpose of play accorded with the argument of Moyles (1989), Bruce (1991; 2004) and Wood and Attfield (2005) about the purposeless or voluntary nature of play. However, she showed her concern about the consequences of purposeless play by saying 'play would become a mess'. This was reflected in her intervention of children's home corner play by telling off children 'what a mess you are making' (see chapter six). Teacher Huang regarded play as one means to improve collective teaching and promote children's learning interest, which was shown in her English teaching with the integration of children's play. Teacher Lu welcomed the idea of integrating play into collective teaching as it improved the teacher-child and child-child interactions whilst she drew our attention to the balance between children's play and teachers' direction in the process of collective teaching by addressing that teachers should keep an eye on children's play rather than having them play entirely on their own.

7.22 The English setting

7.221 First-hand experience

Regarding the question of 'how do young children learn', the clear message in the English setting is children's first-hand experience. For example, the headteacher Anna's immediate response is 'young children learn best by being allowed to experience first hand':

> Young children learn best by being allowed to experience first hand. They need to touch, hear, see, smell, and feel… In other words, they explore the world by using all senses… Nothing else would teach them. First-hand experience is fundamental and prime way for learning… We wish we were more careful. .. Some parents worry about children's dirty hands and clothes but do not worry about negative conversations or aggressive behaviours.
> (interview notes with the headteacher Anna on 23rd February 2006)

Anna argued that children need to 'touch, hear, see, smell, and feel' and that they learn best from first hand experience by using all senses. This seems to contrast the Chinese teacher's idea of 'learning from books', in which children are taught by adults through second-hand experience. Similarly, Frances pointed out that 'children at this age are really learning through seeing and doing'. Practitioners in the English setting acknowledged the importance of first-hand experience for children by providing children with opportunities to use their senses to be engaged in the real life experience of the language, mathematics, arts and other types of activities.

7.222 Learning through play

'Learning through play' was the immediate response to the question of 'how do young children learn' from the two practitioners Mary and Frances. Mary emphasized the importance of play in children's learning by saying, 'I don't see any other ways they can learn'. The following was Mary's response to the question:

> Learning through play. I don't see any other ways they can learn. Children get different abilities. If you sit on the carpet and do the same thing you will lose children. Do learn through play. Then you can teach them so much more and also they become interested. You then prepare them for school later. Plan the activities, you see child's interests, set up the environment. Obviously use the Foundation Stage curriculum guidance. Back in your mind is what you want them to achieve. Use six areas, we look at the whole picture.
> (interview notes with practitioner Mary on 7th February 2006)

Mary seemed to reject the idea of doing the same thing with all children. She also mentioned the role of practitioners in supporting children's learning by planning activities, setting up the environment, and keeping children's interests, which was also

mentioned by Frances. In addition, Frances also argued for a balance between children's play and practitioners' support.

7.223 Neither play nor work: children's desire to learn

In the meantime, the headteacher Anna's response to my spontaneous question on the relationship between children's play and learning indicated that she did not believe in children's play or work but believed in children's desire to learn:

> Anything children do is exploring the world, which is actually children's learning. I don't believe in children's work or play. For me, anything children do is associated with their desire to learn. That children's play is interpreted by adults. I believe that children are hard working trying to make sense of the ranges of experiences that come in its way.
>
> (interview notes with the headteacher Anna on 23rd February 2006)

Anna argued that work/play division was interpreted by adults whilst children are trying to make sense of their experiences initiated by strong desire to learn. Her opinion was different from the practitioners, who had strong belief in learning through play.

7.3 Views of teaching

7.31 The Chinese setting

7.311 'Pao zhuan yin yu'

'Teaching' is used widely in the field of Chinese early years. My literature review of contemporary early years research shows that the issues of what to teach and how to teach have been the mainstream (Wang, Q.X., 2003; Wang, X.L., 2003; Shanghai Education Research Cluster, 2004; Wu, 2004). Chapters three, four and five revealed that formal teaching dominated the process of the language, mathematics, and arts activities in the Chinese setting. Teaching rather than learning was the main focus in the teachers' professional development sessions in this setting. The Chinese setting depicted a culture of teaching rather than learning although some changes and reforms focusing on children's learning were happening. The interview data on teachers' views of 'teaching' were first shown in teacher Lu's use of the Chinese idiom 'pao zhuan yin yu':

> *Pao zhuan yin yu.* Teachers do a bit, children actively explore. Children's imagination and creativity can develop well. For example, in the art corner, some activities are too rigid. Only ask them to do some sticking, why not let them to create

their own work? … Teachers should be active and give children more freedom, let them actively explore problems. Sometimes, there are too many restrictions for children, which make children lose their interest and enthusiasm…
(interview notes with teacher Lu on 19th April 2006)

'Pao zhuan yin yu' literally means 'throwing out bricks in order to bring in jades', which is further explained as the 'offer of a few commonplace remarks by way of introduction so that others may come up with valuable opinions' (Beijing Foreign Language University English Department, 2004: 904). Teacher Lu used the Chinese idiom '*Pao zhuan yin yu*' to refer to the function of teaching as 'throwing out bricks' and aim of teaching as 'bringing in jades'. Namely, teaching is a process of 'teachers do a bit, children actively explore' in order to develop 'children's imagination and creativity'. Teacher Lu was usually in charge of art activities in this class. She addressed the importance of giving children more freedom to enable their active exploration. She also argued that it was very important for teachers to observe children in order to understand 'what they are really interested in'.

7.312 Quality-teaching

Quality education as one of the most important educational reforms was initiated by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2001. It addressed some issues such as the importance of cultivation of humanity to protect children's self-esteem and confidence, being creative, harmonious development of children's knowledge, ability, attitude and emotions, pedagogical shift from teaching to learning, and change of learning styles from book-based study to research-oriented learning via exploration of issues and problems involved in children's lives (Chinese Ministry of Education 'Quality Education Concepts Studying Guidelines' Editing Team (QECSG), 2001). This has been influenced by global educational concepts such as the goals proposed by the American National Educational Goals Panel (NEGP) in 1997 including learning to be, learning to do, learning to learn and learning to live together (Chinese Ministry of Education QECSG Editing Team, 2001; OECD, 2006). Quality-teaching has been part of 'quality education' arena.

In this Chinese setting, quality teaching is another hot topic among the teachers. The interview data revealed recognition of keeping children's interests and participation as primary indicators of quality teaching. The headteacher Ai argued:

> Teachers' quality-teaching unfolds in the process of children's learning rather than only in the results of children's learning. For example, pay attention to children's active participation in activities, to children's abilities in raising, finding out, and solving problems. 'with children at the centre', teachers should follow children, follow children's interests.
>
> (interview notes with the headteacher Ai on 2nd September 2005)

The headteacher Ai argued that quality teaching was most related to the process of children's learning rather than outcomes and teachers should follow children's interest in order to implement the concept of child-centredness. My casual conversations with Ai showed her admiration of the early years settings she once visited in New Zealand, in which children were given opportunities for a wide range of explorations. According to Ai, the introduction of corner activities was part of the child-centred reform in this kindergarten.

Ai's view of quality teaching was in accordance with other teachers' understanding. Ideally, teachers considered children's interest and active participation as primary criteria of quality teaching. However, they all showed concerns about how to keep children's interest in the process of teaching due to children's individual differences. For example, Teacher Hong said:

> Good quality teaching is mainly about keeping children's interests and participation: the children are not wandering but actively expressing themselves and perform. However, it is very difficult to satisfy each child's learning needs. There are many children who like performing. We should make sure that some passive children also get chances to perform as well. Teachers' care is very important (for those children). Teach according to children's characteristics and try to be responsible for every child. Also, make sure that our activities start from children's daily lives and put children at the centre of activities. It is not that teachers are teaching, rather, children and teachers are playing together.
>
> (interview notes with teacher Hong on 31st August 2005)

The importance of involving every child in participating activities was highlighted by teacher Hong. She noticed the individual differences among children and tried to be responsible for every child rather than just paying more attention to some active children. The starting point of educational activities, in the eyes of teacher Hong, was 'children's daily lives' and the process involved in educational activities was about 'children and teachers are playing together' rather than 'teachers are teaching'. In addition, teacher Hong criticised the fact that too much pre-planning in teaching decreased the chances for children's exploration and learning according to their interest.

7.313 Whole class / collective teaching

Another issue closely related to 'teaching' in Chinese setting is the teachers' views of whole class teaching. The big group teaching or whole class teaching is called 'collective teaching' in the Chinese context (Liu, Y., 1999; Zhao, 2006). Collective teaching can be called a feature of formal teaching in the Chinese setting. However, this does not exclude that there will be more opportunities for children's free play activities in the Chinese setting in the future. In addition, the comparison between the pilot study and the main research in the Chinese setting already showed the changes that more opportunities were given to children for their free play due to the introduction of corner activities in the main research period. The interview data on the teachers' perspectives of collective teaching show that they recognised the advantage of collective teaching on the one hand whilst they were aware of the danger of collective teaching with regard to children's development of individuality on the other. Teacher Lu looked at collective teaching in the following:

> Collective teaching activities are good at the cultivation of children's sense of discipline: they learn what they should do in lessons. 'Each home gets its own rules, each country gets its own laws'. The bad thing about collective teaching activities is that they are not good at cultivating children's individuality. In collective teaching activities some children are not noticed by teachers. They will lose their interests and become passive after his needs are neglected once or twice. It is understandable that each child gets to be restricted by some rules. But it would be frightening if their imagination and creativity are destroyed… I basically don't agree upon the usage of collective teaching activities. I hope to adopt small group activities such as corner activities…
>
> (interview notes with teacher Lu on 19th April 2006)

Teacher Lu pointed out the advantage of collective teaching in cultivating children's 'sense of discipline' by using another Chinese idiom '*jia you jia gui, guo you guo fa*' (家有家规，国有国法). This Chinese idiom literally means that 'each home has its own rules, each country gets its own laws'. She further addressed the issue of children's sense of discipline via teachers' management of balance between teachers' surveillance of activities and children's own exploration. For example, she said, 'Take for an example Yang. If we give too much freedom to him, he would be mad and most likely doesn't know how high the sky is and how thick the earth is'. However, the interview data showed that she seemed to be more critical of the disadvantages of collective teaching in terms of 'not good at cultivating children's individuality' and the danger of destroying children's imagination and creativity.

In the meantime, teacher Hong mentioned that collective teaching was good at the cultivation of children's habits of listening to others, which was recognised as 'very good quality for children's growth'. Teacher Huang listed more advantages of collective teaching. For instance, in collective activities children could imitate others easily and they got encouraged by others' active participation; collective teaching activities were good at the cultivation of the cooperation between children themselves; she addressed that collective teaching could guide children to learn properly by giving examples of musical, language, and English learning activities. Both teacher Lu and Huang argued that some playful elements should be integrated into collective teaching activities. Teacher Lu addressed that playful elements in formal teaching can shorten the distance between children and teachers, which enabled teachers to discover what children were really interested in.

7.32 The English setting

The importance of teaching was acknowledged in the English setting with regard to its roles in setting up the environment, keeping the children's learning interest and helping them to develop from one stage to another. This again showed the informality of 'teaching' in the English setting, which contrasted a great deal with the formality of teaching in the Chinese setting. In addition, 'teaching' seemed to be a contradictory word among the practitioners in this setting in terms of their understanding of the role of teaching and the influences of teaching upon children's learning.

7.321 A broad sense of 'teaching'

The headteacher Anna's view of 'teaching' offered a very deep and comprehensive understanding. Teaching was defined as 'an attempt to develop children's understanding of what they are doing or about the ways of doing things'. Observing and documenting children's learning was considered of great importance for teaching. She defined 'teaching' in a broad sense:

> Teaching is an activity that is usually carried out by adults. It is a form of instruction. It's an attempt to develop children's understanding of what they are doing or about the ways of doing things, maybe about a skill… it's deliberate. You cannot teach by accidents. As far as my belief is concerned, the far more important in the early years is the ability of practitioners to understand children's learning, is about what they want to teach the child. If the practitioner observes and documents a child's learning process carefully they will be in a position to understand when learning opportunities

might be valuable for that child's next phase of learning. Sometimes there are things which a child needs to learn which can be best learned at hand of a skilled teacher. For example, if a child does not know how to use scissors, a skilled teacher will help the child to gain the skill of using scissors at the right time with right resources. That can be described as teaching… Direct teaching is sometimes necessary, but should form a lesser part of an early years curriculum.

(interview notes with the headteacher Anna on 23rd February 2006)

Anna argued that teaching was deliberate and it could not be done by accident. She recognised the importance of understanding children's learning in carrying out teaching. She defined the action of showing children how to use scissors as part of teaching and highlighted the role of 'a skilled teacher' in supporting children. Similarly, practitioner Frances defined the role of teaching as 'to extend children's knowledge, capacities, experiences of the world around them' and to 'help them reach their potential'. The role of practitioners can be defined as 'just being there and give support when children need and bring them up to the next level all the time'. Interestingly, Frances tried to find the vocabulary to explain the role of 'teaching' and finally she got one, 'Oh, facilitate children with teaching'.

7.322 Whole class teaching?

In comparison to the Chinese setting, in which teachers were fond of whole class teaching or collective teaching, the English setting was not a place for whole class teaching. This was mostly reflected in the headteacher Anna's perspective:

Children are given opportunities to find out about the world and lead to their own learning. Young children are highly individual and they arrive at nursery schools with a wide arrange of different skills. Teaching them specific things in a whole class context is wrong. It just could not be like that. In some parts of the world it happens. In fact, in Italy some preschool settings children were taught in other ways. And I saw in their eyes of the children…, their faces looked vacant, they are not animated, not focused… It's much harder to teach in a context where children are given good opportunities to lead their own learning. Much easier if you get 30 children they all do the same thing at the same time.

(interview notes with the headteacher Anna on 23rd February 2006)

7.323 The contestable nature of teaching

However, the interview data also showed conflicts in terms of the practitioners' views of the term 'teaching'. This was particularly revealed in Mary's comments on my question of 'what do you think of the relationship between 'working with children' and 'teaching children''. She argued:

I don't know. I prefer to be working with young children. But it doesn't give a whole picture of it. If you just say working with children, you do nothing. You do more than

that. Actually you are teaching. If you are not teaching A, B, C, you are teaching social skills and how to see the world. We prepare them to be independent, believe in themselves. Especially, I don't really want to say 'work with young children', a kind of we are not doing anything. We do work with them, but also cope with all kinds of problems children encounter. However, teaching sounds really…

(interview notes with Mary on 7th February 2006)

The conflict was first shown in Mary's uncertainty about 'working with children' or 'teaching children'. For her, 'working with children' seemed to indicate 'you do nothing. However, their work was far beyond just 'working with children' in that they were actually teaching social skills, helping children to see the world, and preparing them to be independent. All these factors that were involved in the process of working with children were elements of 'teaching'. In this respect, teaching was considered as more important than 'working with children'.

As we mentioned earlier, Frances referred the role of teaching to extending children's learning experiences and helping children to reach their potential. However, she was very critical of the teacher-directedness of teaching, which she regarded as hardly had positive influence on children's learning. Frances seemed to be contradicting herself by addressing the importance of teaching one the one hand and by distrusting teaching on the other. This was also detected in Mary's last unfinished sentence 'Teaching sounds really…' Mary did not finish her sentence in expressing her opinion of 'teaching'. However, through her tones, expressions and hand gestures, I was impressed by the hidden meaning of what she left here: something like 'teaching sounds really dodgy' or 'teaching sounds really not nice to us'… It is hard to reach a conclusion here but it seems to show that 'teaching' is not a term that can be articulated easily by Mary.

As David (2001) argues, many early years teachers in the UK have a sense that early childhood should be a time of spontaneity and of exploration according to young children's individual interests, which leads to the rejection of didactic, teacher-planned instruction in the early years. This was evidenced in the interview data with Mary. It was hard for Mary to justify her role by merely using 'working' or 'teaching'. 'Working with children', as Mary argued, 'means doing nothing'. However, the term 'teaching' seems to be underpinned by the assumption that children are passive learners or not recognised as competent individuals full of learning potential and individual learning needs. The traditional sense of teaching with direct instruction at the centre was rejected in this setting whilst a broad sense of teaching was welcomed. This accords with the aspects of teaching defined by *the Curriculum Guidance for the*

Foundation Stage (QCA, 2000: 1) as the practitioners' roles including 'establishing relationships with children and their parents, planning the learning environment and curriculum, supporting and extending children's play, learning and development…'

7.4 Views of early childhood

7.41 The Chinese setting

7.411 The image of happy childhood

The teachers shared a view of happy childhood by recalling their own childhood, which was characterised as an intimacy with nature and free play. For example, teacher Hong said:

> … Let us imagine 'if you were a child': from my personal experience, I liked skip-roping, tickling traditional jian zi (a feather tool for children to tickle over the feet), playing with mud. When you were praised in the collective activities, you felt it was better than eating a candy. Perhaps the child would be hurt deeply even by a sentence said carelessly by an adult… Let children have a happy childhood.
> (interview notes with teacher Hong on 17th April 2006)

Teacher Hong was very influenced by her own childhood experience with exposure to nature and play and strongly recommended 'let children have a happy childhood'. Teacher Qing expressed her understanding of early childhood in a way akin to teacher Hong:

> Play without any burdens, play without any responsibilities. My childhood was spent in play. I played wildly in the brooks, hills, and woods. I did not know what danger was. My daughter had planted plants and fed small animals when she was very young. Playing with small animals and being close to nature are very important for children's growth…
> (interview notes with teacher Qing on 17th April 2006)

Teacher Qing's image of happy childhood was also framed by her own childhood experience of 'wild' play in nature. This perhaps enabled her daughter to grow up with experience of nature.

The image of a happy childhood was also revealed through the lens of children's emotional and social wellbeing. This was reflected in teacher Lu's interview, 'The most important thing in early childhood is happiness and good health', which is further supported by her emphasis of the importance of play for children: 'play as the source for children's happiness and cooperation and social development through play'.

7.412 Childhood pressure

The message of childhood pressure was also detected among the teachers. For example, the teachers' concerns about parents' over-protection of children were mentioned by the headteacher Ai and some teachers. Ai argued that the parents' over-protection of their children reduced opportunities for children to take risks and overcome difficulties. She mentioned that the wall designed for children's climbing on the playground was not used fully because of some parents' worries about the dangers of climbing. This, according to Ai, perhaps led to the situation that young children in today's world do less physical exercises than what they need. Teacher Hong also pointed out the tension between the parents and teachers facing children's minor accidents such as one child pushing another in play activities.

The impact of later formal schooling upon children's learning experiences formed a second part of childhood pressure. This indicated a paradox existing in the Chinese setting: the teachers valued 'a happy childhood' for children's own right while they felt the need to get young children ready for formal schooling. This indicated a two-fold image of early childhood in this setting – a happy childhood in its own right and an uneasy childhood as a preparation for adulthood. For example, teacher Hong argued in her interview, 'Let children learn the methods of study, then, they can become valuable assets for the society in the future'; teacher Lu argued that they should prepare children to lay a good foundation for the future in terms of knowledge accumulation and cultivation of personality and good habits although she was also a strong advocate of a happy childhood built on children's play.

There was a concern in the meantime that today's children might be pushed too hard. The teachers particularly showed their worries about pressures on children such as attending special activity classes. The negative impact on children have already been illustrated in the case of the girl Han that she was crying because she did not want to attend the special dance activity class (see the section of 5.241 in chapter five). The teachers did not like the idea of having young children attend special activity classes. For example, teacher Lu mentioned, 'I don't agree with the idea that kindergarten children attend special interest classes. Parents' expectations are too high, which brings children high pressure'; teacher Hong argued that children today were under stress by attending special activity lessons and she also criticised the teaching methods adopted in many special activity lessons , saying they were not suitable for young children. However, the reality was that most of the children in this class

attended different special activity classes and almost more than half of the children attended two different types such as English language learning and arts class.

7.42 The English setting

7.421 The image of happy childhood

The image of a happy childhood was strongly detected in the English setting. Similar to the Chinese setting, this happy childhood image was represented in the notion of exposure to nature and children's play and with children's emotional wellbeing at the centre. For example, the headteacher Anna mentioned her childhood experience by saying 'Where I grew up as a child, I could go out and play in the streets with children without adult restriction' and she showed her concern that 'it is impossible now'. Practitioner Mary addressed the importance of being young children for their own rights as 'it's only few years that they are children, they have chance to play'. My conversations with other practitioners also showed the happy childhood image was commonly portrayed. Like practitioner Iris said, 'Where else will they be playing if they are not playing in nursery?' while Flaura argued that play was the crucial feature for a happy childhood and sufficient time and space should be provided to children for play.

This happy childhood image was revealed in the practitioners' recognition of the importance of children's emotional wellbeing and children's potential in learning. The headteacher Anna argued:

> The most important thing in early childhood is that young children grow up with a real understanding of himself and those around him. That the child has a sense of being confident, belonging and that he feels comfortable with himself and others. We describe this as emotional wellbeing. Without this, learning is impossible. No doubt about this.
> (interview notes with the headteacher Anna on 23rd February 2006)

For Anna, healthy emotional wellbeing was the most important thing for children in early childhood. Developing children's understanding of themselves and people around them, positive interactions with others, being confident, and a sense of belonging were all crucial for children's healthy emotional wellbeing. In the meantime, Frances showed similar views:

> The most important thing is that they begin to want to learn. So they are confident in learning environment. They feel safe, and the key necessities so when they get to

school they are prepared that way. They are confident, being able to talk, vocabularies, they can understand… They can find their fun…
(interview notes with Frances on 7th February 2006)

7.422 Childhood pressure

There was concern about parents' over-protection of children in the English setting, too. For instance, the headteacher Anna criticised that young children today are 'very much watched, consistently under surveillance'. She argued:

> …the impact of that on children is that there less opportunities for them to create their own worlds, explore freely without adults' constraints to their action. Because of the watchfulness of parents, it is possible that parents have lost their sense of knowing how to help their children to be independent. And this sometimes leads to a distortion of parental relation. Some parents hugely over protect their children and no longer consider for them to take risks. The result of that is that we (nursery school) create a sanitised environment. It got to be always safe, clean. But life is not like that, the real world is not like that. The problem now is a sense of giving children opportunities to be involved in making decisions, problem solving. It is very important that early years curriculum expresses itself in a way that it takes account of that…
> (interview notes with the headteacher Anna on 23rd February 2006)

The data above indicates the headteacher's deep concern over the effects of parents' over-protection of children. It was considered to have reduced opportunities for children to take risks, make decisions and solve problems involved in the real world. Therefore, Anna strongly insisted that 'it is very important that early years curriculum expresses itself in a way that it takes account of that'. She also talked about her visits to Scandinavian countries, in which children's learning are greatly influenced by outdoor experiences. Anna's views were reflected in practice. Children were encouraged to engage in a variety of outdoor explorations both in their nursery garden and in the common where the forest school approach took place during the summer period.

Preparation for formal schooling was considered as part of the children's learning experiences by the practitioners in this English setting. This actually showed a contradiction between the practitioners' notion of a happy childhood based on children's play experiences and their argument about the need for preparing them for later formal schooling. For example, Mary said 'it is very important that they love to be children…We still want them to learn and get them prepared for school'; Frances, Iris and Flaura talked with children who were going to leave this setting for reception class in primary schools about the rules of their new schools. However, the headteacher Anna did not feel the pressure from formal schooling:

… Early years guidance's philosophy (a notion of child-initiated learning) is different from the national curriculum Key Stage 1. But the Foundation Stage is part of the national curriculum. They are not separate. We seek a balance between child-directed and adult-directed activity here. I don't feel pressure. In primary schools, early years practitioners class feel that pressure.

(interview notes with the headteacher Anna on 23rd February 2006)

7.5 The curriculum and culture

7.51 The Chinese setting

7.511 The traditional Chinese culture

There has been a growing awareness among scholars and nationalists of the values of Chinese traditional culture both for the nation and for the children: harmony between human beings and nature, respect of equilibrium and perseverance in terms of behaving, the principle of virtue rather than utility regarding ethics, loyalty and filial piety as moral standards, priority of collective rights over personal rights in dealing with the conflicts between individuals and organizations; and the dialectical thinking style (Chen, 2000; Li, 2002; Huang and Guo, 2003; Jia, 2004; Ren, 2004; Zhang, and Fang, 2004). In terms of early childhood education in China, there have been debates over how to deal with Chinese traditional culture and other cultures including those that have been identified as Western (Sun, 2003; Jiang and Yuan, 2004; LaRao and Zhou, 2004). On the one hand, some scholars insist on a combination of Chinese traditions with adaptation of Western cultures in the kindergarten curriculum (LaRao and Zhou, 2004). However, the voices which argue for the preservation of Chinese traditional culture through the kindergarten curriculum are much stronger (Sun, 2003; Tang, 2003; Yao, 2004).

This Chinese setting showed the tolerance of both traditional Chinese culture and Western culture from the perspectives of the headteacher and teachers. The interview with the headteacher Ai shows:

Chinese culture is the mainstream of our kindergarten curriculum. The content of loving hometown and motherland is very important part of our curriculum. Traditional Chinese culture especially the ethical issues should be embedded in the curriculum: the spirit of tolerance and being modest should be integrated into stories or rhymes. However, the fact is that our curriculum is often detached from the reality. As we know, the reality at the current time is that parents are obedient to children, which is behaviour emerging out of the whole society. Children do not realize that they should pay back their parents when they grow up. It is very hard to imagine if these people who don't pay attention to their parents can be cooperative in the society.

(interview notes with the headteacher Ai on 2nd September 2005)

169

From the above data, we can see that Ai was very sympathetic to the traditional Chinese culture in the kindergarten curriculum. This is in line with the debate over the importance of the traditional Chinese culture in the life and development of Chinese children discussed earlier. What Ai addressed here was the ethical principles valued by traditional Chinese society such as children's filial piety to parents. The teachers commonly recognised the importance of the traditional Chinese culture too. For example, they stated that stories, songs, clothes and food cultures that represent the traditional Chinese values should be included into the curriculum. Teacher Lu told me that the Chinese Spring Festival was very well received by children through multiple activities such as craftwork making, Chinese festival food making, and clothes display. Teacher Bai told me that her class adopted a special event of 'Mid-Autumn Festival' by making the moon cakes and singing folk songs, which were enjoyed by children.

7.512 Western cultures

The headteacher and teachers were aware of the necessity to integrate Western culture into curriculum practice whilst they admitted that they had not done enough. This was first revealed in the interview with the headteacher Ai:

> The inclusion of Western culture in the curriculum aims to help children learn about the diversity of the world cultures. For example, English language teaching is one aspect for children's learning about Western cultures; it helps children to know that the world is a world with diverse cultures and nations. If possible, we shall include Japanese and French language learning in our kindergarten curriculum. Children will learn about aspects of English culture through the English language lessons.
> (interview notes with the headteacher Ai on 2nd September 2005)

Ai was aware of the role of English language teaching in the promotion of children's understanding of the diversity of the contemporary world. She once went to New Zealand and Japan to visit early years settings, which obviously expanded her vision of the kindergarten curriculum. She even planned to provide French or Japanese teaching programme for kindergarten children in the future. Most teachers admitted that they had not done enough in terms of the Western culture although they emphasized the importance and necessity to include the aspects of Western cultures into the curriculum for children to learn about the world culture and open their eyesight by not confining themselves to Chinese culture.

7.513 The difficulty of integrating Western culture into the curriculum

The difficulty of integrating the Western culture into the kindergarten curriculum was detected in the following interview data with teacher Bai:

> We don't have sufficient connections with foreign cultures. Because Zibo is a small city and we don't usually have many people from other countries. This reduces opportunities for children to get in touch with foreign people. Children thus don't have direct experiences of knowing foreign people. Teaching children foreign cultures merely through pictures is not deep enough.
> (interview notes with teacher Bai on 31st August 2005)

Teacher Hong explained the reasons why there was a shortage of the Western cultures in the curriculum from a historical perspective:

> Our traditions, for example, the reserve and avoidance of taking risks embedded in the works of Laozi, are still influencing us in some respects. The nationalism that China has had a long history with variety of natural resources and huge space made us only concentrate on our own business. However, the bad experiences we encountered in the Feudal society and in the Anti-Japanese War had decreased our pride and belief. However, it made us wake up by reflecting upon our history. We have to catch up with the world. The problem is the conflict between the traditions rooted in our society and the necessity to change it. For example, we are still using the standard of 'obedience to the elder' as the standard to assess the children…
> (interview notes with teacher Hong on 31st August 2005)

Teacher Hong was very critical of the traditional Chinese culture regarding the reserve and avoidance of taking risks. She was particularly critical of 'obedience to the elder' as standard of assessment of today's children, which was contrasted very much by the headteacher Ai's viewpoint of the traditional Chinese culture.

7.52 The English setting

7.521 'The culture of the place'

The clear message from the interview data on the relationship between the curriculum and culture was that a good early years curriculum must reflect the culture of the place where the curriculum is implemented. For the headteacher Anna, 'the culture of the place' included both the cultures which practitioners belonged to and 'children's own culture':

> …It must be flexible enough to allow practitioners to express themselves in a way which is appropriate for their cultural tradition. If it doesn't, we deprive children of the important opportunities to learn about the society in which they grow up. And we hinder or delay a sense of belonging to that community and to that culture, which is really important for children. It's very important for us to develop at the same time a sense of children's own culture… the way children explore things, the way children interact with one another…
> (interview notes with the headteacher Anna on 23rd February 2006)

171

7.522 The learning cultures

The headteacher Anna made an interesting point about 'learning cultures' by saying, 'For me, I am deeply influenced by the learning cultures in Scandinavia countries and Reggio Emilia in Italy. And learning about their early years curriculum has enabled me to take aspects and use them for the children where I am teaching here.' What Scandinavia experiences meant to her was her understanding of the huge influence of outdoor activities on children's learning. This is further illustrated by her comment:

> How I see myself and the way it has shaped the early years curriculum have enabled me to ensure our own practitioners develop their own understanding about our needs. Provide children variety of learning opportunities both indoors and outdoors. Not just outdoors, go into forest on the regular bases and learning about different aspects of that world. At the deep level is an attempt to understand the ways in which the early years practitioners in other part of the world are working. We understand it and use it for our own practice.
>
> (Interview notes with the headteacher Anna on 23rd February 2006)

Her passion about outdoor, forest and nature was clearly reflected in their forest school during the summer period. Children were divided into different groups and took turns to go to the common guided by practitioners with forest school training experience to explore nature.

7.523 The English culture and multi cultures

The two practitioners I interviewed showed a confusing position regarding the relationship between English culture and the multi cultures represented in the curriculum. For them, it was hard to identify the aspects as English culture in their class because they defined their class quite 'multicultural'. This was reflected in the interview with practitioner Mary:

> Honestly, it's quite hard to do English culture. Because there are so many cultures here. English culture is based on other people's cultures: accept everyone. Our classroom is very much multicultural. We are open-minded to children's bringing in. wherever they come from, whatever their customs are. Take children out, to a kind of hearing about it. To be confident with whatever languages they speak. He is proud when going to school that he can speak two languages. It's very easy to do other cultures … For example, Chinese New Year and Diwali, they got a date. But many English festivals don't have a particular date…
>
> (interview notes with Mary on 7th February 2006)

The context in this setting regarding children's multicultural backgrounds made practitioners plan multicultural activities in order to let children feel valued. Their open-mindedness was fully revealed in Mary's comments of 'wherever they come

from, whatever their customs are' and 'accept everyone'. This was also reflected in the headteacher Anna's comments that integration of the world cultures into the curriculum practice provided opportunities for children to know the existence of other cultures and learn about how people in other parts of the world celebrate their lives.

In terms of English culture, Mary and Frances argued that their practice was not particularly about English culture although both the practitioners and children used English as the major language for their communication and learning. For example, practitioner Frances said:

> Very diverse, quite multicultural, isn't it? I don't think there is a stereotype that this is the English culture, this is the cultural thing to do, this is the traditional way that early years happens. This is definitely not happening in our classroom. English culture is taking on other cultures. You just display. When you read, you read bilingual books. Try to encourage children to feel valued. We do have a date, e.g. May Day and Bank holidays. But especially this community here, that wouldn't particularly work. Obviously, we do teach English the whole time.
> (interview notes with Frances on 7th February 2006)

For Frances, the English culture would not work with this particular setting as it was taking on other cultures, which children brought in. This showed that the practitioners used the multicultural practice to encourage children to feel valued and gain a sense of cultural identity. Referring to practitioners' celebration of Christmas in this setting, both Mary and Frances argued that Christmas was not particularly English culture because there were different ways that people celebrate Christmas in the world. Meanwhile, Frances argued that English culture was Christianity based whilst the celebration of Christmas in this setting was not particularly religious.

7.6 Summary

This chapter compared the Chinese teachers' and English practitioners' perspectives on the issues including the early years curriculum, teaching, early childhood, the ways how young children learn, and the relationship between the curriculum and culture. The analysis here revealed more differences than similarities between the two settings. The Chinese setting showed a teaching culture whilst the English setting indicated a learning culture. The teaching culture was evident in the Chinese teachers' perspectives on formal direct teaching, collective teaching, quality teaching and the integration of playful elements into teaching. The learning culture, however, was revealed in the English practitioners' views on first-hand learning experience, learning through play, and children's desire to learn. Therefore, 'teaching'

173

was the key element for the curriculum implementation in the Chinese setting while 'learning through play' performs the major role in the process of implementing the curriculum in the English setting.

In detail, there were more differences emerging between the Chinese and English settings. For example, the activity-based understanding of the early years curriculum in the Chinese settings was coupled with the comprehensive perceptions of the curriculum in the English setting. The relationships between the curriculum and culture revealed a contrast: there was a heavy emphasis on traditional Chinese culture but with a lack of Western cultures in the Chinese setting; the multicultural practice rather than a homogenous display of English culture was identified in the English setting. The ways how young children learn were also viewed differently: the Chinese setting showed a case of learning from books and the dependent role of play in children's learning whilst first-hand learning experience and learning through play were strongly voiced in the English setting.

The commonality between the two settings was their perspectives on early childhood. The strong message from the primary data in the Chinese and English settings was a picture of a happy childhood alongside an image of a pressurized childhood. The image of a happy childhood was first represented in a view taken on the Chinese teachers' and English practitioners' own childhood experiences with exposure to nature and occupation with play and then in a view with children's emotional and social well-being at the centre of the curriculum practice. Pressurised childhood was related to parents' over-protection of children and pressures facing children such as the impact of later formal schooling upon children's learning experiences.

Chapter Eight

Parents' perspectives in Chinese and English settings

> The society has brought some pressure to our children. We should help children to release pressure. Don't force children to go to the interest class. It will increase children's pressure. We should let children to develop their own interests… Nowadays children have no childhood, the happy childhood like we had in the past disappears. In addition, children have been influenced by some bad fashions in the contemporary society and lost the nature of being children. They try to please teachers. This is not good phenomenon at all…'
>
> (conversational notes with a Chinese parent on 9th September 2005)

The quotation above from a Chinese parent displays a world, in which young children are encountering all kinds of pressures. This parent showed his deep concern by saying, 'don't force children to go to the interest class' and 'we should let children to develop their own interests'. This parent was nostalgic about the happy childhood they used to have, which was similar to Chinese teachers' and English practitioners' views of early childhood discussed in chapter seven. This poses one of the important issues in relation to the practice of the early years curriculum. This chapter, therefore, is a follow-up discussion of what underpins the curriculum practice by analyzing parents' perspectives on early childhood, parent-child interactions, parents' expectations, and cultural influences in the Chinese and English settings.

8.1 Views of early childhood

8.11 The Chinese setting

8.111 A happy childhood

Parents in the Chinese setting considered children's play as a crucial element for children's happiness in early childhood. For example, Ming's father told me in a conversation:

> [Children] happily play. This is most important thing in early childhood. Of course, the child should be happy and parents try their best to meet their reasonable needs. [The child] interact with teachers and peers happily. Then, it is important to for them learn something.
>
> (conversational notes with Ming's father on 15th April 2006)

For the father, happy play and happy interactions were the basis of a happy childhood. He seemed to regard the existence of early childhood for the sake of children

themselves rather than as a preparation for adulthood (Liu, X.D., 1999). The notion of a happy childhood was also represented in some other parents' talk. For instance, the mother of Zhi said, 'Let him play. Play is the main thing for a young child, and eating and drinking well too. It is not late to learn formally in primary school'. The mother of Yi told me, 'Health and happiness should be the most important things in early childhood. If she is not happy, it is not important how much she learns. Learning should bring children happiness rather than worry and anxiety'. The message from these parents was that happiness together with children's play were recognised as the most important thing for early childhood.

8.112 Childhood pressure

8.1121 Formal learning

However, behind this strong notion of a happy childhood seemed to be a fear that adulthood was a world full of stress and work with less space for relaxation whilst early childhood was perceived as the harbour for the cultivation and promotion of happiness. The notion of a happy childhood, however, was also accompanied by the parents' anxiety about childhood pressure. For example, most parents showed concerns about the top-down influence of later formal schooling upon kindergarten children's education. Here is a message from the father of Na:

> To grow up healthily and happily is the most important thing in early childhood. It is important to provide opportunities for children to explore things and guide children's interests. Being happy is very important and what get her interested makes the child happy and concentrated. Being a parent, I spare some time to play with her… Don't force her to learn. She doesn't like to recognise Chinese characters. So, it's okay, she doesn't need to recognise now…
> (conversational notes with Na's father on 14th April 2006)

By emphasizing the importance of healthy and happy growth in early childhood, the father was tolerant of his daughter's unwillingness to learn Chinese characters. For him, the child's own interest was the premise for learning. However, his statement 'don't force her to learn' indicated his concern about his daughter's pressure from learning.

Yang's grandmother showed her sympathy with today's children, who have more pressure from study:

> Happiness should be the most important thing for a child in early childhood. There are a lot more pressure of study [for children] later on. A happy childhood is very important. Nowadays there are problems with children's personalities, which is not

176

good for children… I don't care if she learns more. It is okay whether he remembers what he learnt or not. Don't force him to learn. I'm very glad seeing him happy. I had a very happy childhood. However, it is a pity that children nowadays get so much more pressure'.
(conversational notes with Yang's grandmother on 18th April 2006)

The grandmother's notion of a happy childhood seemed to be motivated by a mixed feeling of her own happy childhood memories combined with the contemporary childhood pressures including formal study and problems occurring in children's lives. Yang's parents got divorced and she took the major responsibility to look after him. The most important thing for her was that Yang felt happy rather than how much he had learnt. 'Don't force him/her to learn' was emphasized both by this grandmother and the father of Na discussed earlier.

The only person I talked to emphasizing the important of learning over play was Jia's grandfather. He told me:

Children at this age should learn more things. Because they get good brains, they can memorize things easily. Play appropriately is ok but they should not play too much. Of course I hope to see her happy. Being happy is good for her. I care about her if she gets hurt…
(conversational note with Jia's grandfather on 18th April 2006)

The grandfather addressed the issue of learning by recognising the potential of children's learning abilities at an early age. Too much play was perceived as inappropriate for young children's learning. This contradicted the majority of parents I talked with, who considered play as one medium of learning.

8.1122 Special interest after-school classes

The top-down influence of later formal schooling was not just a fear among parents. Actually, it had already been put into force in this Chinese setting. For example, the majority of the parents in this kindergarten class had chosen some special interest after-school classes for their children such as piano lessons, drawing lessons, dance lessons and English lessons organised by some commercial companies. However, parents were very anxious when talking about this issue as they were not quite sure if they had done the right thing for their children. It is held by some researchers that Chinese parents have high expectations of their children's academic development (Tobin et al., 1989; Lin and Fu, 1994; Zhou et al., 2006). However, the situation here is not merely an issue of parents' high expectations but a have-to choice for parents. They would worry that their children were falling behind if they did not

177

choose extra lessons as all the others did. This revealed a dilemma regarding parents' ideal perspectives on early childhood and what they had to do in reality for their children. This was clearly shown in the talk with the mother of Xin:

> I wanted to let my child to develop herself according to her interests. However, other children go to different classes. How can you ignore that? You are afraid that your child will be left behind. So, I have to choose one class for my child… Parents now have so much pressure. We know we should give children some time for play…But what shall we do if they are falling behind others?
>
> (conversational notes with Xin's mother on 6th September 2005)

8.1123 Children's interactions and behaviour

Parents showed their concerns about some other issues such as their children's interactions with peers and teachers, their emotions, health issues, and behaviour problems. Most parents worried about whether their children were on good terms with other children and teachers in kindergarten. Those who had active children would worry if their children were naughty or hit other children whilst parents having children of introverted personalities would worry if their children could get on well with their peers in kindergarten. For instance, the mother of Le told me:

> I am concerned about whether he is naughty in kindergarten, he hit other children, he makes some mistakes… You know, the boys are naughty and very easily to make mistakes. For instance, they don't pay much attention to teachers' instructions in class…
>
> (conversational notes with Le's mother on 15th April 2006)

Dong's father also worried about whether Dong was patient enough doing things and whether Dong got something (such as toys) from others without being given permission. The mother of Hui showed her concerns in the following:

> Although she is not that reserved she is very sensitive. ..She has a strong sense of being successful. She wants to do what other children can do. However, she doesn't talk to others by herself, she is afraid of losing face. She keeps something in secret, she doesn't like to report to teachers… I hope she will be much braver later on…
>
> (conversational notes with Hui's mother on 18th April 2006)

Similarly, Han's mother showed concerns over her daughter's emotions and feelings in kindergarten:

> I always worry if she is happy in kindergarten. I communicate with her each day and say 'wish you happy' before she goes to kindergarten. Being happy is the most important thing, learn to be a person with good personality. Kindergarten activities are collective activities and children learn to cooperate.
>
> (conversational notes with Han's mother on 29th March 2006)

8.1124 Pressure from the society

According to parents, some other kinds of pressure in addition to learning are facing children too. For example, the mother of Wen told me:

> Children nowadays get pressure too. My child asked me why I didn't buy a car. Some children are taken to kindergarten in parents' cars. He wants what other children have got… Some children get some new toys or some new things to kindergarten… He will feel pressurized if he hasn't brought something new to kindergarten… All of these are high pressure for children.
> (conversational notes with Wen's mother on 6th September 2005)

This mother worried a lot about the influences of the complexity of the society upon her child. She seemed to prefer her child to live in a comparatively simple society in which there were not many temptations such as expensive cars and novel toys. This was echoed in the conversation with a father quoted at the beginning of this chapter. The father was critical of the pressure that the contemporary society has brought children, especially the learning pressure upon children. His tone was also very reminiscent of a happy childhood that he used to have by addressing that 'Nowadays children have no childhood, the happy childhood like we had in the past disappears'.

8.12 The English setting

8.121 A happy childhood

The strong voices of 'a happy childhood' in the English setting were supported by parents' emphases on the importance of play, well-being, security, and active learning. This accorded with the practitioners' views in this English setting as mentioned in chapter seven and also reflected the views underpinning the framework of parent support for young children from birth to three (Abbott and Langston, 2006). 'Happiness' was one of the terms most often used by parents in my questionnaire and conversational data. One parent wrote in their questionnaire, 'I think, a happy childhood is most crucial for young children. I believe that a stable happy environment contributes to the wellbeing of a child and enables them to grow up to be well grounded.' This parent recognised the importance of 'a stable happy environment' in children's well-being for a happy childhood. Howard's mother told me, 'Education is important for him, but he shall be happy first. Yeah, happiness then education, education with fun. You know, if he is not happy he can't learn'.

In the meantime, it showed that a happy childhood could not stand on its own without mentioning other factors including learning through play, stimulating

179

activities and children's interactions. For example, a parent wrote in the questionnaire, 'I think children should learn to play first and then they can learn to read, write. I think children learn more with play'. Another parent responded in a similar way and pointed out 'stimulating activities (water, sand, outdoor play) are very important for a young child'. Children's interactions with others were also considered as another important issue in early childhood in the views of parents.

8.122 Childhood pressure

8.1221 Pressure from learning

Owing to the diversity of children's cultural backgrounds in the English setting, parents expressed their concerns about a variety of pressures for their children. It is interesting to note that parents from minority ethnic groups seemed to pay more attention to children's learning progress whilst white parents showed less concerns about children's education. For example, Craig's mother, who was originally from Pakistan, told me in the classroom one morning when she brought in her son:

> I worry a bit about his learning. He came here last September, but it seems that he has done nothing, no drawing, no writing. He draws and writes at home. [she came to the children's drawer to look for her son's work in the classroom. Holding a piece of paper with some messy drawing, she looked a bit disappointed] Look, only this!
> (field notes from 5th June 2006)

This mother even spent an extra half an hour sitting next to her son. She asked her son to draw something at the table. At the beginning of the outdoor play, the mother went out with her son. Her son chose to ride a bicycle. She told me, 'Look, that is what he does everyday!' When I asked her what she expected him to do, she said, 'Learn something, not just play like this.' Similarly, the father of Sarah, who was from Africa, worried about Sarah's learning by saying, 'Being a parent, I think reading, writing, drawing and so on are most important for Sarah. I don't know if she does well at those. She was born in London. Her auntie is teaching her French. I hope she can learn it well.'

Pressure for learning, especially children's English language development, was common among the parents from India, Pakistan, Iran and Philippines in this class. Maria's mother, who was from India, worried a lot about Maria because their mother language was Urdu. Maria was one of the youngest children and only spoke a little English. Her mother told me that her only concern at the moment was Maria's English language progress. Noar's mother told me, 'My son learned Arabic from the

Qur'an. His father and I speak Arabic with him at home. A little bit worry about his English. He gets language therapy sessions. Five sessions so far.' This mother felt appreciation for the support she got from language therapists whilst she thought that her son had made much more progress in his English through interactions with other children in this nursery school. The primary data also showed that minority ethnic parents had low confidence in themselves regarding speaking English with their children. For instance, when I asked Harriet's mother, who was from Pakistan, why she did not speak English with her daughter at home, she told me, 'My English is not good. I just came here 6 years ago. Her father has been here for a long time. Her father likes to speak to her in English. He asked about what she did at nursery…'

8.1222 Special educational needs

'Special educational needs' (SEN) was not identified by parents in the Chinese setting although they did have concerns about their children's learning and behaviour as mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, it was considered as an important issue by parents in the English setting. There were four children in this nursery class identified as with SEN such as language learning difficulty and autism. Parents with SEN children expressed their anxiety and concerns. For instance, a mother with a son identified as a child with autism told me:

> The teachers are very good to Edam and we get extra support from outside too. But I'm still worried about him. He will be going to school this summer and I don't know if he can catch up with other children in school although I am told that that there is special support for children with special needs over there. But I am still not confident if he can do things like the other children in school later on…'
> (conversational notes with Edam's mother on 5th June 2006)

Edam's mother was satisfied with the support that her son received from school and outside. However, this did not ease her tension. Her anxiety about Edam's later schooling was clearly identified here. She had a strong wish that Edam would lead a normal life like other children, which seemed to be common among parents with SEN children (Swick and Hooks, 2005). Edam was usually looked after by a particular practitioner during group times but my observational data showed he was often running across the classroom randomly or being chased by some boys but paying no attention to the activities set up by practitioners during the free-chosen activity times.

Bob was identified as having language learning difficulty. Through several conversations with Bob's father, I learned about his attitudes towards SEN. He argued

that every child had its own pace in terms of learning and his child was slow in developing language but was picking up English day by day. For him, more time should be given to his child for him to improve his language rather than expect him to develop at the same level as the other children who were a bit older. He was pressurised by the contemporary view of the child based on the image of 'a perfect child', which seems to ignore the fact that every child is different. His attitude was different from Edam's mother as mentioned earlier. He seemed to doubt if his son should be identified as having a language learning difficulty whilst he was more critical of the contemporary image of 'a perfect child'.

8.1223 Children's behaviour

Similar to the Chinese setting, children's behaviour was another major concern among parents. Most parents worried if their child was having good relationships with peers and adults in nursery. For example, a father told me when he came to pick up his twin sons in the corridor of the nursery school one afternoon:

> Kilton and Kave are twin-brothers. For me, listening and respect for other children and teachers are very important. Oh, I'm concerned if they are swearing or hitting other children. You know, they are both quite active. Good behaviour is the most important thing although education is important.
> (conversational notes with Kilton and Kave's father on 5th June 2006)

The twin-brothers were trying to sneak into the staff room when we were talking. The father caught one of the boys by the arm, 'No, don't go in, don't go…' But the two boys succeeded in running into the staff room. The father looked a bit embarrassed, 'Look, that's what I'm worrying. That's…, they are … not listening! Just not listening…' Quite different from Kilton and Kave's father, Betty's mother worried if her daughter was pushed or hit by other children at nursery school. She told me:

> I worry about her [Betty]… if she was pushed over by other children in nursery. She once refused to go to nursery. She cried a lot when going to nursery… I felt so nervous and sad seeing her crying before I left her. I wanted to go but she was crying. That's why I usually spent some time with her in the morning at nursery. You know, there are many children but not enough adults in class…
> (conversational notes with Betty's mother on 13th June 2006)

Betty's mother was struggling when she saw Betty crying. She wanted to go but she could not. According to my observations, she indeed spent some time in accompanying Betty in the mornings in order to let her daughter calm down.

8.1224 Safety

Safety was considered as another important issue, especially for white parents. For example, Jeremy's mother told me:

> Being a parent, my main concern is his safety although I one-hundred percent trust this nursery. If he gets hurt or hurts others… That worries me a lot. Jeremy seems to have changed a lot since he came to this nursery last September. He becomes understandable and sensitive. I am very happy with that.
> (conversational notes with Jeremy's mother on 7th June 2006)

Similarly, Samuel's father told me:

> My major concern is my child's safety, not at the moment, but for a longer term. How he grows up, really, being a parent. I live together with my three children, he is the youngest one. Sometimes, it's stressful… Security, is the most important thing, I think…
> (Conversational notes with Samuel's father on 8th June 2006)

The white parents' concern about children's safety was reflected in the headteacher Anna's criticisms of parent's over-protection in chapter seven. The encouragement of children's outdoor learning experiences in this nursery school was welcomed by parents and they seemed to be happy when they saw their children play happily in the garden and when they knew their children had been taken to forest school. This indicated that parents' concern about children's safety was somewhat like a shadow over their heads. It was not about children's climbing the monkey bars in the garden; it was not about children's experiences of forest school; rather, it was like the comments from Samuel's father, 'not at the moment, but for a longer term', a fear about the appropriateness of the society for children's safe growth in the long run.

8.2 Parent-child interactions at home

8.21 The Chinese setting

8.211 Story telling at home

The open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix 7) data show that educational activities were the mainstream with regard to the parent-child interactions at home in the Chinese context. Some leisure activities such as play with children and casual talk with children were also mentioned by parents. However, home-setting leisure activities served as a supplementary means to those educational activities. In general, the parent-child interactions at home had an educational purpose focusing on children's moral development. Story telling, watching children's educational

programmes, and communicating with children at home were common among parents. It was acknowledged that stories with simple plots but instructional connotations were good for children's moral development. This was reflected in parents' responses to the questionnaire:

> Parent 1: I tell my child a story nearly every night. Stories can function well in educating children only if they are integrated into daily lives and combined with reality.
>
> Parent 2: Those stories which unfold righteousness, bravery, kindness and intelligence, and readiness to help others are effective in educating children.
>
> Parent 3: I think whatever stories are it is good if they can cultivate the sense of being active, social, and telling right from wrong. The forms of stories are not that important.

The educational functions of stories, especially in terms of moral cultivation for children, were highlighted. Stories helped children to have a sense of righteousness, bravery, kindness, readiness to help others, being active, social, and telling right from wrong. Those qualities are regarded as the crucial elements for the traditional Chinese culture (Zhang and Fang, 2004). This showed the tendency that the values of the traditional Chinese culture are being realized by the contemporary society (Sun, 2003; Tang, 2003; Yao, 2004).

At the same time, the questionnaire data showed signs of the impact from Western culture upon the Chinese families. For example, some parents mentioned that they read children some stories from the Western children's literature such as Andersen's Fairy Tales, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella* and *Snow White*. Compared with the teachers' perspectives on Western culture mentioned in chapter seven, the home settings seemed to be more tolerant of Western culture than the institutional setting.

8.212 Children's TV programme

In terms of TV programmes, most parents agreed that the traditional themes on the cultivation of good behaviour, being honest, generous, brave, kind and hard-working were good for children's development. For example, some cartoons on the traditional themes such as *Nuo Zha* and the *Monkey King* were regarded as top TV programmes for children at home because the cultivation of children's sense of telling right from wrong was highlighted in these programmes. A parent responded in the questionnaire, '*Nuo Zha* is a cartoon, which tells children that righteousness can

defeat evil at the end. This is good for children's development' while another parent considers that '*Nuo Zha* is a good child, bright, brave and strong-willed.' Some parents mentioned that historical TV programmes were good for children in terms of providing an opportunity for children to know about the past and treasure the contemporary life which was gained at the cost of many people's lives in the past society. There was also popularity among the children in terms of some original Chinese contemporary children's cartoons such as 'Big-head Son and Small-head Daddy' and 'Blue Cat Policeman'. This popularity as identified in the questionnaire lay in the fact that these cartoons could 'develop children's imagination as well as learn how to be a good person and how to interact with other people' and they can 'educate children from the small things in daily life'. It is strongly detected that the educational functions of TV programmes were highlighted by parents.

A dislike of violence revealed in children's programmes was detected in the questionnaire data too. Parents mentioned that their children liked watching cartoons imported and translated from foreign countries such as 'Tom and Jerry' and 'Lion King'. However, they showed deep concerns over the violence in some imported cartoons upon children. For example, in terms of the cartoon *Otman*, one of the Japanese cartoons popular among many Chinese young children, parents raised doubts:

> There is only one way to solve problems in this cartoon, that is, using violence and fighting. It does not aim to cultivate children's ability in thinking. Rather, it will reinforce the sense of violence if we are not guiding children.

8.22 The English setting

My questionnaire (see Appendix 10) and conversational data showed the major means involved in parent-child interactions at home settings included a variety of activities such as reading stories, painting or drawing, singing, computer games, counting numbers, play with children for fun and so on. However, there was a division between the white parents and those from minority ethnic backgrounds. For example, the former addressed the importance of playful non-education-driven activities for children at home whilst the latter emphasized more educational activities although parents in general recognised the appropriateness of nursery practice based on playful activities.

8.221 Playful activities

The white parents commonly mentioned the importance of playful activities for their children at home. For example, Samuel's father denied that 'that sort of thing' (his version for educational activities) were most important for children at the age of four to five. This was revealed in his talk:

> I usually talk with him a lot at home. I don't do much reading, counting numbers, or drawing. Some people may think it important how many words he can recognise or how many numbers he can write. I don't think that sort of thing are most important for a four-five-year olds…
> (conversational notes with Samuel's father on 8th June 2006)

The father with the twin boys (Kilton and Kave) expressed similar viewpoints in terms of parent-child interactions at home. 'They are boys. They love football. I took them to football matches. We go to swimming, museums, fun fairs… nearly every kind of activity. We are trying to be engaged. They both love it, a lot of fun'. Similarly, the mother Flaura, who was also a practitioner in this nursery school, told me that she engaged her child in reading stories, cooking activities, imaginative role-play, painting, dancing, watching children's TV, walks in the park, climbing hills, swimming, talking, and all sorts of activities at home. From her viewpoint, she did these in order to engage her child rather than emphasize the educational function of these activities.

8.222 Educational activities

Parents from minority ethnic backgrounds seemed to emphasize the importance of educational activities for children at home. Maria's mother replied in the questionnaire, 'I teach my children to read, count, paint, A, B, C and much more'. Kim's mother from the Philippines told me:

> You know we come from the Philippines. For this age, children were introduced a lot more things to learn. Here, it seems that children are only playing. But this is the way of all England nurseries. At home, I teach him to read and write. He [her child] can write his name in English… He wasn't born in London… When he first came here, he can't speak English at all. He learns English quickly when he came to nursery as there are so many children, he learns from them…
> (conversation notes with Kim's mother on 7th June 2006)

Jessica's mother, who was originally from Africa, showed her concern over the nursery school's play approach and hoped that her daughter could learn formally at nursery school. This was further reflected in her conversation with me:

> Jessica likes going to nursery school very much. I think she likes the garden there and she can play a lot in nursery. But I am a bit worried… She should learn something formally too. She is gonna to attend the reception class in primary school this summer. [Knowing that I am from China] I know Chinese people are working hard. Chinese parents do a lot more learning stuff for their children at home. Perhaps that's why they are very bright.
>
> <div align="center">(conversational notes with Jessica's mother on 15th June 2006)</div>

Sarah's father also told me that he tried to do some educational activities with his daughter, for example, a lot of story reading and sometimes a little counting.

8.223 The common ground: story reading

As a popular means for both white and minority ethnic parents to interact with children at home, stories functioned mainly non-educationally and 'for fun'. According to parents, action books with moving pictures, fun picture books, and some children's classics were favourites among their children. The stories such as *The Blue Balloon*, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*, *Dear Zoo*, *We're going on a Bear Hunt*, *Three Little Pigs* and so on were among the top lists for children. One parent argued in the questionnaire that those stories were interactive because 'children enjoy the plot / illustrations – he interplay between story plot and pictures'. Another parent responded in the questionnaire:

> My daughter likes *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and *Little Red Riding Hood*. I think the fact that *Goldilocks* had the choice of 3 beds to choose from and the fact that *Little Red Riding Hood* promises not to talk to strangers on her way to her grandma's house.

In terms of children's movies or cartoons, some programmes such as *Spiderman*, *Batman Superhero*, *Scooby*, *Boogie Bee-bees*, *Shrek*, *Postman Pat* and so on were very popular among children. One parent argued in the questionnaire that 'the reason why he likes these type of films because it has action and movement, a lot of fun, and exciting…' The mother thought that her daughter liked Shrek because Shrek ended up marrying a Princess and 'Postman Pat this particular video was the first one I bought for her but perhaps it was the ice cream spilling all over the place while he fell asleep.'

8.3 Parents' expectations

8.31 The Chinese setting

Most parents who responded to the questionnaire hoped that their children would be healthy, happy, independent, brave, kind to others, knowledgeable, and respectable people when they grow up. At the same time, some parents wished that their children could make contributions to the society. This was reflected in a parent's response to the questionnaire, 'I hope that my son will have great ideal, study hard, and become a person as the backbone of our country'. Yang's grandmother wrote in the questionnaire, 'I hope that my grandson will become a soldier when he grows up. He can then train himself, discipline himself, and become an independent and useful person to the society'. She also wrote earnestly:

> All teachers, I am old. Yang doesn't have a complete family. He has to grow up under my governance of narrowed education. I feel very anxious about this as I am not be able to educate him and don't know how to educate him well. So, I am very thankful to all teachers, thanks to your guidance and education of my grandson from all sides, thanks.

The grandmother was very grateful for what teachers had done with her grandson in terms of education. She felt anxious about her ability to educate her grandson but I could see that she was trying her best to help her grandson grow up well just like the other children living with both parents. Her talk with teachers also revealed her wish that her grandson would be able to have a complete family in the future living with both of his parents. This perhaps was what she wanted most for her grandson.

One passage from 'Parent Salon', a special column for parents to express their ideas about education on the wall of the classroom, constituted a slightly different case. It was written by Zeze's mother entitled 'On Self-disciplining':

> … I allowed my child to eat only one third of it when he first ate ice cream. He cried and wanted to eat up the rest of the ice cream. I persuaded him reasonably not to eat the rest. I asked him to eat another one third of the ice cream the next day. I would remind him to eat the last bit of the ice cream even though he might forget it… It happened one day that my friend took her daughter to visit me at home. I brought them candies. The little girl ate candies very happily while my son kept chatting with her as if there were no candies at all in front of his eyes. I think this is what I expected. Because he would feel at ease either at present or in the future when others own things but he doesn't. In addition, to face and resist all kinds of temptations for him will not be painful any more in the future.

The central message here is that this mother attempted to educate her son using the strategy of 'self-disciplining'. For her, this strategy worked well with the purpose to

help her son to 'face and resist all kinds of temptations'. However, some parents argued that this seemed a bit cruel for a child at the age of four or five. Zeze was a very good child in the eyes of all teachers in this class. He always actively participated in answering questions and all activities.

8.32 The English setting

Like the Chinese setting, parents in the English setting had expectations that their children would become independent, strong, confident and responsible persons in the future, which were necessities for a person in the contemporary world. For example, Bob's father told me:

> I want him to be independent when he grows up and responsible for what he does. Of course, he shall be happy first. What's the meaning of life for him if he is not happy? As a parent, I wish my child all the best and try to support him as much as possible.
> (conversational notes with Bob's father on 1st February 2006)

He considered 'being happy' as his primary expectation for his child while being independent and responsible were two major ingredients to make his child grow up well. This was also indicated by another parent, who replied in the questionnaire, 'I would like my children to be strong and to make the right decision and be decent human beings'. The twin daughter Nania and Tila's mother told me:

> I hope that my children will be very confident, independent, worldly…I hope they can express themselves well and they can cope if they get problems. Parents always hope their children will be managing everything very well when they grow up, don't they?
> (conversational notes with Nania and Tila's mother on 25th May 2006)

The parents' notion of religion as one expectation was the biggest difference from the Chinese setting as no Chinese parents mentioned religion at all either in their questionnaires or conversations with me. With many parents in this English nursery class from a religious background, their religious beliefs were, therefore, reflected in their expectations of children. For example, a mother wrote in the questionnaire, 'I want her to be a responsible, hardworking, honest, plus religious. By the way, she is Catholic. We go to church quite often.' This religious awareness was also reflected in some parents' talk. For example, Noar's mother told me, 'I want my son to be religious. Religion gives you space for a certain belief and you can become calm in heart. As Muslims, we learn the Qur'an at home with my children…' Quid's Christian father told me in a similar way:

I expect my son to continue to be a religious person when he grows up. We go to church almost every Sunday. He enjoys being there. Some other children are there too. Perhaps he doesn't understand what the priest talked about, but the religious atmosphere affects him. He was quiet as adults and I feel happy for my child. And I think in the future he will benefit from his church experience…

(conversational notes with Quid's father on 26th May 2006)

8.4 Cultural influences

8.41 The Chinese setting

8.411 Values of traditional Chinese culture

There was awareness of the values of Chinese traditional culture among parents on the one hand; parents would like to have their children approach Western culture and be educated in a way with a combination of the strengths from Chinese culture and Western culture on the other. Hu (2004) argues that this awareness starts from a fear of erosion of traditional Chinese culture in contemporary China. For example, girl Tong's father mentioned that his family paid more attention to traditional Chinese festivals including the Chinese New Year, Tomb Cleaning Day, and Mid-Autumn Festival and celebrated these festivals with children. He argued, 'Less and less people are paying attention to the traditional festivals. I'm afraid that one day my daughter will only remember festivals of foreigners whilst forgetting those beautiful festivals that originally belonged to her own nation'. This father, therefore, suggested that the first priority for him was to have his daughter to learn more about Chinese culture. However, he would not refuse Western culture if he got the opportunity to educate his daughter in a Western style.

8.412 'Only the appropriate is the best'

Parents seemed to look at the Chinese culture and Western culture in a dialectical way. For example, one parent wrote in the questionnaire:

Chinese culture has a long history, and very rich in content. Freedom is the centrality of Western culture. People can do whatever they like. Western culture pays attention to children's interest. I don't want to accept Western culture totally but I would like to get some good points to make up our weakness.

This parent also pointed out that 'it's very important for children to accept patriotic education, to learn about Chinese traditions including festivals and customs'. Another parent considered the relationship between Chinese culture and Western culture by

using a figurative speech. He used 'a pot of old wine' to refer to Chinese culture and 'genuine French grape wine' to Western culture in the questionnaire:

> I have a very shallow view of Western culture, but what I want to say about the traditional Chinese culture is that it has a long history, like a pot of old wine. But I don't refuse genuine French grape wine. They both have good points. If there is opportunity I would like my child to accept the Western culture. Because it will at least enlarge his insight and enrich his knowledge.

Another parent also pointed out the difference between Chinese culture and Western culture and attempted to choose the good ingredients from the West for children's education, which were written in the questionnaire:

> For me, Western culture attends more to children's individuality and personality according to the nature of the child whilst there are more dogmas in Chinese traditional culture. It is fine to accept some parts of Western culture but not the whole. Because of the advanced nature and humanistic nature of Western culture, we accept with selections but not the whole lot. The saying is 'only the appropriate is the best.

There was only one parent who seriously criticised the weakness embedded in Chinese culture regarding the education of children whilst he/she sensed the strength of Western culture in terms of developing children's individuality and independence. Therefore, this parent hoped that his/her child would have a chance to accept Western culture. This was clearly reflected in the questionnaire written by another parent:

> Western culture pays more attention to children's music, physical, and arts development, allows for children to develop their individuality and to be independent. The Chinese parents spoil children and educate children according to their own will. Children lose their childhood and they lose the opportunity of play. I would like to have my child to accept Western culture if there is an opportunity.

8.413 'Learn from the foreigners' skills in order to surpass them'

The sense of nationalism was identified in the parents' questionnaire responses too. This was revealed in the following passage written by a father in the questionnaire:

> There are different advantages in both the Chinese culture and Western culture. The traditional Chinese culture was once more superior than Western culture, but our science was left behind in modern history. However, Chinese culture will surpass Western culture as China develops. I also hope that my child can receive Western culture because there are no boundaries in the field of knowledge. We can use the old for the current, use the foreign for our own, surpass the old, and produce the new. This is called, 'Learn from the foreigners' skill in order to surpass them'.

This father has a strong belief that Chinese culture with a history of being more superior than Western culture would surpass it in the future although he admitted that

they both had their own advantages. The last sentence of 'Learn from the foreigners' skills in order to surpass them' is a famous sentence made by Wei Yuan, a reformist in the mid-nineteenth century in Chinese modern history, who used this sentence to encourage people to open up their minds to learn from Western countries to make the nation stronger (Chen, X.X., 2001). The use of this historical quotation indicated a strong sense of nationalism aroused in this father. We can see that he held high expectation not just for the sake of his own child but more importantly for the sake of the whole Chinese nation.

8.42 The English setting

8.421 Respect for the diversity of cultures

The cultural values underpinning parents' educational concepts in the English setting revealed a rich dynamic. Parents were aware of the diversity of cultures at nursery or around the community. They talked about their children's experiences in McDonald, Indian shops, Chinese restaurants, and theme parks, which were part of the contemporary English society. More importantly, parents talked about intangible cultural values which backed up their ideas about the child and childhood. This was most reflected in parents from minority ethnic backgrounds. These parents welcomed the idea of respecting other cultures in the contemporary English society. A parent wrote in the questionnaire:

> Yes, it is important for children to keep a sense of cultural identity. However, I appreciate that they/she was born in England and therefore must assimilate more with the country of her birth and my adopted country. I believe in diversity. My ethnicity is in the minority. The need to therefore get on with other people is crucial. Having lived in England for over 20 years I have almost gone colour blind and I encourage her to be the same and accept people for who they are.

This parent welcomed the idea of being integrated into the English society and had a strong belief in diversity. Therefore, this parent had almost 'gone colour blind' and encouraged her child to 'accept people for who they are' rather than anything else. Similarly, Sarah's father told me in a conversation:

> We live in a society with many different cultures. We should be open-minded and respect all the others. I think all people are equal, I don't like the idea that there are some higher nationalities and some lower status of nationalities. I like my children to respect other children whatever cultures they come from…
> (conversational notes with Sarah's father on 7th June 2006)

Sarah's father encouraged the idea of open-mindedness and equality among nationalities. He attempted to influence his own children to respect others whatever cultures they come from. This was reflected in some parents' responses to their questionnaires:

> I am Irish, my husband is half English half Ugandan. We are Roman Catholics. We live in London so it is mixed here. I and our boys have been to Uganda and Ireland. I encourage them to understand that there are different cultures, colour & creed that we are all individuals but that we are Irish Roman Catholics and in our house/family we do things this way!

> It is important for all children to have a sense of cultural identity, but it is important for parents to teach their children respect for others also. This will help them to mix with other cultures and not feel alone and scared.

The Irish mother encouraged her children to understand that all people are individuals whatever cultures they belong to and whatever colours and beliefs they have. She wanted her children to experience differences. The other parent above also welcomed the idea of respecting other cultures in order for children to feel at ease and mix with other children.

8.422 Preservation of the original culture

The central issue about cultural values among parents was the relationship between their original cultures and the contemporary diversity of cultures in the English society. Apart from the fact that they all welcomed the idea of respecting the diversity of cultures, they felt the need to preserve their original cultural values. Most minority ethnic parents told me that they celebrated their original cultural festivals with their children at home or went to communities in order for their children to gain a sense of cultural identity. For example, they read biblical scripts with children at home or at churches and visited their relatives at regular basis. In the eyes of those parents, this helped children to learn about the values and customs embedded in their original culture. For example, Ellie's mother told me, 'We are Africans. I want my children to learn how to respect elders. We are strong Catholics as well and we go to church on Sunday with my children.' Living in the English society with a diversity of cultures, those parents from minority ethnic backgrounds preserved and developed their original cultural traditions by celebrating festivals, keeping religious beliefs, and transmitting specific cultural values to their children.

8.5 Summary

Data on issues such as parents' views of early childhood, parent-child interactions at home, parents' expectations, and cultural influences suggested a complex picture in both the Chinese setting and in the English setting. This chapter reveals both similarities and differences between the two settings. The first similarity between the two settings was that early childhood was perceived as a contested period containing complexity. The contested childhood was interwoven with a reminiscent notion of a happy childhood, in which children's happiness was supported by children's play and positive interactions with others, and an image of a pressurized childhood related to some childhood pressures within and outside of institutional learning. A second similarity lies in parents' expectations in that independence, confidence, responsibility and competency are commonly considered as the necessary qualities for children's future by parents in the two settings. A third similarity shows us that parents in the two settings face an issue of preserving their original cultures and respecting cultures from the other parts of the communities or the world.

There were also some differences between the Chinese and English settings. For example, Chinese parents were more pressurized by the commercialised early learning activities whilst parents in the English setting had more pressure in terms of children's special educational needs and the issue of children's safety. In terms of parent-child interactions at home, there were marked differences too. For instance, Chinese parents concentrated on educational interactions through reading instructive stories and educational TV programmes focusing on moral cultivation; white parents in the English setting seemed to prefer non-educational playful activities for children at home, whilst minority ethnic parents in the English setting focused on the educational functions of interactive activities for children at home.

Chapter Nine

Visible and invisible pedagogy

This chapter is a macro-level analysis of the current study and it aims to theorize the micro and meso analyses mentioned from chapters three to eight. The previous analysis indicated that direct teaching dominated the curriculum practice such as the language, mathematics and arts learning in the Chinese kindergarten whilst learning through play was the mainstream in the process of the curriculum practice in the English nursery school. This is closely related to Basil Bernstein's visible/invisible pedagogy distinction (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 1996; Bernstein, 2001): the Chinese setting was associated with visible pedagogy – the preoccupation with formal direct teaching, the low status of play, the dominance of one way direction of teacher-child interactions; the English setting was linked to invisible pedagogy – indirect teaching, the centrality of play, the dominance of child-child interactions. A review of policies regarding the educational function of kindergarten and the position of play in the Chinese context alongside the principle of individuality and the whole-child perspective in the English context will then further backup the identification of visible and invisible pedagogy. The cultural influences in terms of the Confucian tradition in the Chinese context and the child-centred tradition in the English context also throw some light on the visible and invisible pedagogy identified in the Chinese and English settings.

9.1 Theoretical underpinnings

9.11 Bernstein's pedagogic theory

> (1) Where the control of the teacher over the child is implicit rather than explicit.
> (2) Where, ideally, the teacher arranges the context which the child is expected to re-arrange and explore.
> (3) Where within this arranged context, the child apparently has wide powers over what he selects, over how he structures, and over the time-scale of his activities.
> (4) Where the child apparently regulates his own movements and social relationships.
> (5) Where there is a reduced emphasis upon the transmission and acquisition of specific skills.
> (6) Where the criteria for evaluating the pedagogy are multiple and diffuse and so not easily measured.
>
> (Bernstein, 1975: 116)

Bernstein (1975) identified the pre-school pedagogy above as invisible pedagogy, which is characterised as the implicit control of the teacher over the child and the more opportunities for the child's own exploration and interactions with others. In addition, Bernstein (1975) argued that the concept basic to the invisible pedagogy in pre-school settings is that of play as play is the both the means and ends for the child to interact with others and achieve 'a personalized act'.

Bernstein (1996) uses the two concepts 'classification' and 'framing' as the means to understand the process of symbolic control regulated by different modalities of pedagogic discourse. The concept of 'classification' is used to 'examine relations between boundaries and the categories, whether these categories are between agencies, between agents, between discourses, between practices' (Bernstein, 1996: 20). 'Framing' is used to define the translation of control relations, which is called by Bernstein as the 'internal logic' of the pedagogic practice. Framing, in this way, regulates relations between transmitters and acquirers within a context by taking symbolic control over the selection of communication, its sequencing, its pacing, the criteria and the social base (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 1996).

Castells (2000) and Singh (2002) among others argue that Bernstein's theory is considered to be significant to an analysis of the production and reproduction of knowledge by taking up the challenge of the sociology of education by modelling the macro and micro structuring official, pedagogic, and local knowledge. Bernstein (1996: 27) argues that where there is strong framing 'the transmitter has explicit control over selection, sequence, pacing, criteria and the social base' while in the case of weak framing 'the acquirer has more apparent control over the communication and its social base'. Morais (2002) holds that Bernstein's theory provides concepts to define learning in social contexts where children are active learners. Morais (2002) discovers that strong classification brings about strong insulation between the categories such as unique identity and specialized rules of internal relations whilst weak classification leads to less specialized identities.

The modalities of classification and framing create different pedagogic practices. The strong classification and framing centralises *visible pedagogy* whilst *invisible pedagogy* unfolds in weak classification and framing (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 2001). In other words, the principles of power distribution and social control are explicit and overt in *visible pedagogy* but implicit and hidden in *invisible*

pedagogy (Arnot, 2002). Bernstein (2001: 32) distinguishes *visible pedagogy* and *invisible pedagogy* like this:

> … a visible pedagogy is distinguished by explicit hierarchical relations between teacher and taught and the sequence, pacing and criteria of the instructional discourse is explicit and controlled by the teacher. Whereas in the case of an invisible pedagogy the hierarchical relations are implicit and disguised by communication strategies, the taught appear to have considerable control over the selection, sequence and pacing of the instructional discourse.

According to Arnot (2002), Bernstein's perspective both reflects and affects social relations inside and outside the school, which thus integrates an understanding of the social conditions that generate pedagogic relations and consequences for social structures.

9.12 The relationship between my analysis and Bernstein's theory

In the light of Bernstein's pedagogic theory (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 1996; Bernstein, 2001), my data from the Chinese setting revealed a case in which strong classification and strong framing based on teachers' planning dominated the process of curriculum practice whilst children, the learner or acquirer using Bernstein's term, had less control over their learning process (Bernstein, 1996). In contrast, weak classification and weak framing took place in the English setting: the integration of different learning areas into play, which led to weak division between learning areas; practitioners' framing was most represented in their planning in terms of setting up the learning environment and providing spontaneous support to individual children; children had apparent control and autonomy over what to learn and how to learn, which clearly showed the signs of active learning (Moyles, 2001; Tang, 2006b).

In a report, the OECD (2006) identifies two different approaches to curriculum: the 'early education tradition' and the 'social pedagogy tradition'. The former tends to focus strongly on cognitive development such as early literacy and numeracy and a teacher-directed sequential learning approach on developmental areas is adopted tending to readiness for school. The social pedagogy tradition, however, favours more holistic learning by addressing learning through play and broad project work to encourage children's active learning and multiple experiences (OECD, 2006). France and the OECD English-speaking countries (except New Zealand) including UK and USA are classified as the early education tradition whilst the Nordic countries fit into the social pedagogy tradition. The early education approach identified by the OECD

197

(2006) is akin to visible pedagogy referred by Bernstein (2001) whilst the social pedagogy shows strong links to invisible pedagogy. The OECD's review defines the UK as the early education approach. However, I would argue that in comparison with the Chinese research setting, the case of the English nursery school in my research can be defined as social pedagogy tradition.

Bertram and Pascal (2002) in their INCA project identify an 'interactional pedagogy' as the consistent pedagogical approach in the review countries including Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, and USA. The interactional pedagogy is characterised as the reciprocal interaction between the children and adults in the provision with an encouragement of children's play-based, first hand, and exploratory experiences. In the meantime, children are provided with opportunities for self-managed and self-directed learning coupled with collaborative, peer group learning. The role of the adult is generally reviewed as being to 'facilitate and support learning through skilful and guided interaction, adopting a flexible range of teaching and learning strategies' according to children's needs. This interactional pedagogy defined by the INCA project accords with invisible pedagogy, in which weak classification and framing enable the interactive relations between the teacher and the child (Bernstein, 1996; Morais, 2002). Drawing upon their review, my research data showed that the English setting was located in the interactional pedagogy whilst the Chinese setting seemed to contradict the features described in this approach.

The comparison of the early years curriculum between the Chinese and English settings brought us a two-ended spectrum. This spectrum with visible pedagogy at one end and invisible pedagogy at the other can be first explained by examining the roles of teaching and play and the teacher-child and child-child interactions involved in the curriculum practice in the two settings. Then, the perspectives on policies and cultural influences will provide further explanation for this spectrum.

9.2 Visible pedagogy and invisible pedagogy

9.21 Visible pedagogy in the Chinese setting

9.211 Formal direct teaching

The dominance of formal direct teaching in the Chinese setting was the first key element involved in visible pedagogy. There was a goal-end relationship between

the curriculum and teaching: formal direct teaching was perceived and practised as a major avenue to implement the curriculum. This explains the process of the learning areas involved in the language, mathematical and arts activities, in which direct teaching was adopted in order to implement the prescribed curriculum. It was observed that much time was spent in discussing how to develop a good quality teaching lesson during the teachers' professional development sessions. The textbook was considered as most important for the curriculum planning by teachers whilst children's learning interests and needs were not particularly taken into account. This preoccupation with formal direct teaching revealed a situation characterised as strong classification and framing (Bernstein, 1996; Bernstein, 2001). For example, teachers' heavy reliance upon the textbook brought about little flexibility in practising the curriculum and in readjusting the teaching plan to children's learning needs; the process of curriculum practice was overtly controlled by the teacher rather than by the child, which made the power relation was overall manipulated by the teacher. In this way, teaching was explicitly carried out in the process of curriculum practice and what to learn and how to learn for children were predetermined by the teaching plan. Consequently, children's autonomy in learning was implicit.

However, this does not mean that child-centredness did not exist in the Chinese setting. There were examples showing that teachers felt frustrated when children did not pay attention to their teaching. Meanwhile, some teachers such as teacher Lu romanticized the idea that the curriculum should be developed by children themselves through their own active exploration. Similarly, teacher Hong criticised the prescription of the curriculum and addressed the importance of following children's interests in the process of curriculum practice (see the section 7.113 in chapter seven). Children's active learning revealed in the corner activities discussed in chapter six also showed signs of child-centredness. However, the conventional sense of teaching focusing on teacher-directedness (Liu, Y., 1999) surpassed teachers' child-centred concepts when they were engaged in teaching, which was evident in the data analysis of the teacher-child interactions and the role of teaching from chapters three to six (for example, see the section 3.31 and 3.41 in chapter three).

9.212 The low status of play

The centrality of play is considered as an essential element for invisible pedagogy (Bernstein, 1975). Play has been regarded as crucial means for children's

learning since at least Froebel's time and as an indispensable element for early childhood (Bruce, 1991; Bertram and Pascal, 2004; Liu, 2004; Moyles, 2005; OECD, 2006). More time and space were put into the Chinese setting for children's play, which showed a growing awareness of the importance of play among teachers. This change was influenced by external forces such as the teachers' visits to some kindergartens in bigger cities, invitations of early years experts to give lectures in kindergarten and teachers' professional development through theoretical studies. This also reflects the changes in contemporary China concerning the recognition of children's learning potential by active exploration, in which children's play is highly recommended (Chen, L., 2001; Early Childhood Curriculum Reform New Concept Committee, 2004). Children's free-flow play in the home corner and the construction corner revealed dynamic, concentration, cooperation and full participation of children in their learning and exploration.

Teachers recognised the importance of integrating playful elements into formal direct teaching such as English language teaching or story-telling. However, the teachers' efforts to make teaching playful were not acknowledged by all children because only some children fully participated in the so-called playful elements such as acting out what they learnt by the means of role play discussed in chapter three. Compared with children's free-flow play occurring in the activity corners, play did not work well within the formal teaching approach in the Chinese setting. This is argued by Tang and Maxwell (2007) that children were taught together to learn without fully engaging their own learning autonomy because of the fact that formal direct teaching rather than play was treated as the major means for children's learning in the Chinese setting. Therefore, the low status of children' play in the Chinese setting made the curriculum practice strongly associated with visible pedagogy (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 1996).

9.213 The dominance of the teacher-child interactions

Visible pedagogy was also evident in the teacher-child interactions, especially by the means of the language, mathematics and arts activities in the Chinese setting. Strong framing in terms of teachers' control over the interactive process (Morais, 2002) directed by formal teaching and with knowledge transfer at the centre dominated curriculum practice. This made the teacher-child interactions in the Chinese setting characterised as one-way knowledge transfer from teachers to

children, in which the children were required to answer the questions raised by teachers (see the sections 4.211 and 4.31 in chapter four). The process of asking-answering questions was mainly under the surveillance of teachers, which is quite common among the Chinese kindergarten practices (Zhu, J.Y., 2003). This was typically revealed in the example of the maths lesson of representation of quantity of objects in chapter four, where children could not cope easily with the fact that the quantity of things can be represented in the form of numbers. It showed the strong tension between teachers' planned teaching and children's actual learning interests and abilities. For example, the girl Piao knew that number 'six' could represent the quantity of the ladybirds but she could not write '6'. Ironically, Zhu could write the numbers from 1 to 6 correctly but she could not understand why only the number '6' rather than the numbers '1-6' represented the quantity of the ladybirds.

This indicated that the link between teaching and children's understanding was missing. This link was considered by Worthington and Caurrthers (2003) as 'bi-numerate' context, which addresses the importance of the transition or connection between children's mathematical learning at home and at school setting. Children's learning of mathematics at home was much more involved in the daily experiences related to counting numbers, matching, sorting, classifying and measuring via interactions between parents and children (Ye, 2006; Zhang, J. 2006) whilst children in the setting were engaged in the textbook-based knowledge learning, which led to incoherence between what teachers teach and what children can really take in (Zhang, J., 2006; Zhao, 2006). This link also refers to 'sustained shared thinking' between the practitioners and children (Sylva et al., 2004). We can still see that there was no shared thinking happening between teachers and children when the teacher wrote the number of '2' beside the two short lines to represent the quantity of teachers and '10' beside the ten short lines referring to the quantity of children (see the section 4.211 in chapter four).

9.214 Signs of invisible pedagogy

The process of curriculum practice in the Chinese setting showed some loose signs of invisible pedagogy. This was reflected in teachers' efforts to make their lessons more interesting and attractive to children by integrating some playful elements into their direct teaching. For example, teacher Hong encouraged children to make stories in her music teaching (see the section 5.212 in chapter five). This can be

called weak classification of knowledge transfer and weak framing of power relations between the teacher and child (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 1996). However, the most visible sign of invisible pedagogy was revealed in the child-child interactions unfold in their spontaneous activities, especially free-flow play activities occurring in the activity corners mentioned in chapter six. Children took the lead in initiating interactions with others in a relaxing atmosphere rather than being asked by the teachers. Children interacted with others based on two-way direction of communication rather than one-way: they raised questions, defended themselves, attempted to persuade others, and developed their argument (see the section of 6.212 in chapter six). Children's interactions with each other in the corner activities were full of dynamics, fluency, and full participation, which can be called playful interactions. The play scenarios such as 'getting married' (see the section 6.311 in chapter six) and multiple use of the plastic basin in the toilet play (see the section 6.212 in chapter six) showed us clearly that children enjoyed what they were doing and they engaged themselves through cooperation and problem solving in a way that could seldom be found in formal direct teaching activities. This is similar to Emilson and Folksesson's (2006) research finding that weak classification and framing promoted children's autonomy and active participation in their learning.

9.22 Invisible pedagogy in the English setting

9.221 Indirect teaching

Invisible pedagogy is strongly related to the curriculum practice in the English setting. The implicitness of pedagogy was first revealed in indirect teaching, which did not focus on how to carry out the teaching plan but rather how to provide support to meet children's learning needs by following their interests. Teaching was extended into the role of practitioners in supporting children's development and learning. For example, the headteacher Anna regarded teaching as 'an attempt to develop children's understanding of what they are doing or about the ways of doing things'; practitioner Frances argued that teaching is 'to extend their [children's] knowledge, capacities, experiences of the world around them' and 'help them reach their potential'. Under those circumstances, teaching happened when practitioners showed how to use scissors properly facing children struggling, when practitioners participated in children's activities to help them initiate more fresh ideas, when practitioners gave

children a clue seeing children get stuck in counting numbers or expressing ideas, and even when practitioners told off children who behaved terribly insensibly and asked them to think over what they had done… From the viewpoint of practitioners in the English setting, this makes teaching 'quite informal' and implicit but significant to children's development and learning.

9.222 The centrality of play

Invisible pedagogy in the English setting was then reflected in the centrality of children's play in the process of curriculum practice. 'Learning through play' was a motif among the practitioners and this enabled play as the major avenue for children's learning. The role of practitioners was to set up the learning environment indoors and outdoors based on children's previous learning experiences and their most recent learning interests and provide support to children when they are in need. This again showed that weak classification and weak framing in terms of practitioners' loose control of what to learn and how to learn for children prevailed in the English setting. This consequently led to the active role of children in the process of curriculum practice unfold in the language, mathematics, arts and play activities (see the sections 3.222 in chapter three, 4.223 in chapter four, 5.221, 5.222 and 5.223 in chapter five, and 6.22 in chapter six). For example, most of the time children chose to get engaged in different activities except the group times when practitioners organised children to do particular activities. The curriculum was pre-planned by practitioners through team discussion according to the day's observation of children and reflections on previous planning. Meanwhile, it was common for practitioners to readjust the curriculum to meet children's learning needs and interests.

As shown in the chapters three to six, the activities of language, mathematics, arts and free-flow play in the English setting were centred by children's playful explorations most related to their daily life experiences. The continuity between the indoor and outdoor play environment in this English setting also allowed for the fluency of children's free-flow play occurring either from indoors to outdoors or vice versa. In consequence, the play by Betty, Quate, Nania and Tila developing from play What's the Time Mr Wolf, 'would you be naughty' to play teacher and the play by Frau and Kyle from making a white house, building a robot to 'can be everything' discussed in chapter six revealed how much children could bring in to their free-flow play and how much they enjoyed their spontaneous activities. The centrality of play in

children's learning and exploration in this English setting made 'the child apparently has wide powers over what he selects, over how he structures, and over the time-scale of his activities' (Bernstein, 1975: 116). This is considered as one crucial element for invisible pedagogy by Bernstein (1975; 1996).

9.223 Informal two-way direction of practitioner-child interactions

The informal, two-way direction of practitioner-child interactions were another indicator of invisible pedagogy in this English setting. Chapter three to five related to the language, mathematics and arts activities in the English setting showed that most activities planned by practitioners were carried out by following children's learning interest and abilities and that it was children who decided what to do and how to do with these activities. This determined that the practitioner-child interactions represented in the process of curriculum practice were quite subtle and informal. The activities, in the meantime, were mostly related to children's daily-life experiences, which provided children with a relaxing and meaningful learning environment. This paved the way for active interactions between the children and practitioners. The practitioner-child interactions were more involved in a process, as argued by Anning and Edwards (2006), in which practitioners paid attention to children's learning needs, encouraged children to sustain motivation and interests, and offered aids to individual children. For example, even in formal taught activities such as story-telling, the practitioner-child interactions were involved in a process, in which each child was encouraged to discuss the questions with practitioners rather than answering questions raised by practitioners (see the sections 3.221 and 3.32 in chapter three). Compared with the Chinese setting, the control of practitioners over children in the English setting was more implicit whilst the children had more opportunities to regulate and maintain their interactions with practitioners.

9.224 The dominance of the child-child interactions

Due to the fact that most activities in this English setting were chosen by children themselves at an individual basis, it was the child-child interactions rather than practitioner-child interactions dominated the curriculum practice. This made another crucial element for invisible pedagogy, in which 'the child apparently regulates his own movements and social relationships' (Bernstein, 1975: 116). In another word, children took up a hierarchical position equivalent to the teacher (Singh,

2002). For example, the child-child interactions involved in table-top activities were individualized in that children themselves talked with each other, exchanged ideas, and cooperated with each other to solve problems. The dominance of child-child interactions was particularly represented in children's spontaneous activities. Positive playful interactions were established when children played more equally, collaboratively, and emotionally active in terms of their participation rather than passively controlled by other children. The observational data from the English setting showed that the process, in which children established positive playful interactions, was a result of voluntary joint effort from all play pals. It was marked as children's beaming smiles, full concentration, childish wisdom and sometimes sense of humour. Similar cases were found in the Chinese setting. However, the difference between the two settings was that the child-child interactions were subordinate to the teacher-child interactions in the Chinese setting while the child-child interactions in the English setting were the mainstream in children's social interactions.

9.3 Looking into policies

This part seeks to find out the links between policies and visible/invisible pedagogy identified earlier. A review of policies regarding the educational function of kindergarten and the position of play in the Chinese context alongside the principle of individuality and the whole-child perspective in the English context will back up the identification of visible pedagogy in the Chinese setting and invisible pedagogy in the English setting.

9.31 The Chinese context

9.311 The educational function of kindergarten

Visible pedagogy in the Chinese setting can be first connected to the continuous emphasis of the educational function of the kindergarten in Chinese policies. For instance, this educational function was first highlighted by the use of 'assignments' in the *Kindergarten Curriculum Criteria* (1932); the *Kindergarten Temporary Regulations* (1952) further reinforced the notion of compulsory assignment and selective assignment, in which 'teaching' first became a formal term to act as a means to implement compulsory assignment (China Preschool Education Research Association, 1999). The teaching of Chinese pinyin, Chinese characters, and

mathematics were put into the policy in 1960. 'Assignments' in the *City Kindergarten Work Regulations* (1979) referred to language, common knowledge, calculation, music, arts, and physical education. Assignments were considered as 'an important teaching form as planned to transmit basic knowledge, and skills to children and develop children's intelligence' (China Preschool Education Research Association, 1999: 127). The terms 'assignment' and 'teaching' were replaced by 'having lessons' in the *Kindergarten Educational Outlines* (1981). However, 'having lessons' was not the only means to carry out educational activities. A variety of means including play, physical education, observation, labour work, entertainment, and daily activities were regarded as important means for educational activities. Educational activities have replaced the terms including 'assignments', 'teaching', and 'having lessons' in the most recent policies such as the *Kindergarten Work Regulations* (1989) and the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (2001). This focus of education was reflected in parents' perspectives discussed in chapter eight. For example, parent-child interactions at home in the Chinese setting were mostly involved in educational activities such as story-telling and children's educational programmes (see the section 8.211 in chapter eight).

9.312 The position of play

Visible pedagogy can be also detected in policy review in terms of the position of play in the Chinese context. First, the importance of play was mentioned in the history of Chinese early years policies. For example, the *Mengyang Yuan Regulations and Family Education Law Regulations* (1904) and the *Kindergarten Curriculum Criteria* (1932) emphasized the importance of play in children's development and learning. Play was described as 'the basic activity for children' and 'an important means to implement children's overall-development education' (China Preschool Education Research Association, 1999: 127) in the *City Kindergartens Work Regulations* (1979). Both the *Kindergarten Work Regulations* (1989) and the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outline* (2001) considered play as 'the basic activity' whilst the importance of play was built upon the educational purpose for the sake of children's learning and development. However, there is still a huge gap between the importance of play emphasized in policies and the poor position of play in the kindergarten practice (ICKTPQ Project, 2002). This was reflected in the controversial situation of the Chinese setting that the importance of play was

recognised by the teachers whilst direct teaching reduced the space for children's play in the language, maths, and arts activities. The low status of play made the process of curriculum practice associated with visible pedagogy (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 2001).

9.32 The English context

9.321 The principle of individuality

Invisible pedagogy centralised as the implicit role of teaching alongside autonomy of the child in their learning (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 1996; Arnot, 2002) can be related to the principle of individuality addressed in the English context. The advocacy of individuality was regarded by John Dewey as associated with the Renaissance and the critique of established authority in pursuit of a democratic society (Brehony, 2000a; Chitty, 2004). The issue of equal opportunity was addressed by policies in the English context as discussed in chapter one. Chitty (2004) argues that equality as 'desirable aspect of a democratic society' provides opportunities for individual development (Chitty, 2004: 14). The child as an individual respected by the Western society was motivated by Romantic belief toward 'liberty, equality, and fraternity' (Edwards, 1967: 208-209), Rosseau's claim for child's natural development, Froebel's advocacy of child-centred play and learning (Bruce, 1987; Kwon, 2002), and Maria Montessori's (1879-1952) claim of individual child's work (Brehony, 2000a). Those are strong voices among many in an international network for the promotion of individuality in the English context. The most recent governmental documents such as *the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfES, 2007) promote the idea of individuality by addressing that each child is a unique child, who needs to be supported by means of establishing positive relationships in rich learning environment.

This principle was reflected in the process of language, maths, and arts activities in the English setting, in which children's individual needs were attended to by the practitioners. For example, practitioners took children's learning interests into account in their planning; activities were mostly carried out by small groups (see the section 3.222 in chapter three); and practitioners provided support to individual children (see the section 3.224 in chapter three and 4.221 in chapter four). This

revealed a contrast to the Chinese setting, in which a more collective approach was involved in the process of learning activities by means of the whole class teaching.

9.322 The whole-child perspective

The review of policy in the English context also reveals a shift from learning-oriented focus to the whole-child perspective. For example, the *Early Learning Goals* (DfES, 1999) and the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000) define the learning goals involved in the six learning areas for young children, especially the latter provides framework for practitioners to identify children's stepping stones and shows examples for practitioners to help children reach the early learning goals. The following policies including the *Birth to Three Matters* (2002), *Children Act 2004*, *Every Child Matters* (2004), and the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (2007) try to look at the child from a perspective of 'a whole child' based on 'a strong child, a skillful communicator, a competent learner and a healthy child' rather than learning-oriented vision. The *Children Act 2004* attempts to take account of children's interests and views and ensure children's 'physical and mental health and emotional well-being', 'social and economic well-being', and contributions to society. The *Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfES, 2007) introduces the vision of 'a unique child' by addressing the child's sense of belonging, resilience, confidence, healthy emotional social wellbeing through the establishment of positive relationships with peers and adults and the provision of play experiences and of creative activities.

This whole-child perspective puts the child at the centre of the early years education and care, which underpinned the curriculum practice in the English setting. No wonder children themselves rather than practitioners in the English setting played a major role in the process of curriculum practice. This again shows evidence of invisible pedagogy in the English setting. This principle was also reflected in practitioners and parents' perspectives. For instance, both practitioners and parents expressed their views of a happy childhood for young children with an emphasis on the importance of play, well-being, security, and active learning (see the section 7.421 in chapter seven and 8.121 in chapter eight).

9.33 The global concepts

In the context of globalization, the world is going into an era when similar policies and practices spread across political, cultural, and geographical boundaries (Dimmock and Walker, 2000). Influenced by some global bodies such as the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU), the contemporary world is embedded in interrelated policy technologies such as the market, managerialism and performativity (Ball, 2003). Countries look to each other to compare performance indicators aiming to understand the cultural and political similarities differences and reflect upon their own approach (McNess, 2004).

Under this climate, some issues are raised such as 'whether to support in young children creativity and openness to others in preparation for a world market by diversity, the explosion of knowledge and expanding opportunity' (OECD, 2006: 222). In terms of curriculum, the OECD countries and INCA countries share a core of established principles including child-centrededness, the importance of play, integration of learning into a holistic view of the child, the child as active and autonomous learner, working with parents, inclusiveness and equal opportunities (Bertram and Pascal, 2002; OECD, 2006). As the OECD member and the INCA country, England is under the impact of the principles shared by most of the Western countries. This was reflected a great deal in the English research setting characterised as invisible pedagogy by giving the child autonomy in their learning experiences.

The Chinese contemporary kindergarten practice has been influenced by some distinctive worldwide approaches such as Montessori, High/Scope, and Reggio Emilia through international communications and exchanges since the end of 1980s (China Preschool Education Association, 2003). There have been some collaborative efforts between China and international bodies. For example, the Preschool Education Teacher Training Programme through collaboration between the Chinese Ministry of Education and UNESCO involving more than 10 kindergartens, 17 normal schools, and 8 universities has improved teachers' professional academic development; funded by the Canada International Development Research Centre, the Improve Chinese Children's Overall Development project investigated 25680 young children covering 2500 villages, 70 towns, 88 cities in 10 provinces, which provided evidence for the improvement of young children's educational and living conditions (China Preschool

Education Association, 2003). In addition, international conferences and meetings have been held in China including the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP). All those international activities have brought new visions for Chinese early years policy makers. For instance, this has been reflected in Chinese early years policies such as the *Regulations on Kindergarten Work* (1989) and the *Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outlines* (2001), which address the notion of an integrated curriculum, the centrality of play-based learning, and the child as an active learner (Li and Rao, 2005). However, the division between what has been written into policies and what has been put into force is still wide, which was revealed in the Chinese setting discussed in chapters three to five.

9.4 The cultural influences

This part aims to find out the connection between visible and invisible pedagogy (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 1996) and the cultural influences in the Chinese and English contexts. Skilbeck (1976) held that the curriculum is cultural transmission, which is value-laden rather than value-free detached subject-matter. In addition, the curriculum decisions go through a socio-political action to select valuable knowledge and promising directions for individual development and social growth. As Duffy (2006) argues, what we believe is important for young children and why do we believe this are basic questions to support an early years curriculum framework. These questions related to aims and principles that the early years curriculum is based on are very much involved in values and beliefs, which are greatly shaped by cultures. This current study revealed that adults including teachers and parents in both Chinese and English settings were aware of the fact that the curriculum was one means of transmitting cultural values and beliefs whilst the curriculum practice reflected to a great extent what a society values most for children's learning and development. The following illustrates the association of the Confucian tradition with visible pedagogy in the Chinese setting and the child-centred tradition with invisible pedagogy in the English setting.

9.41 The Confucian tradition in the Chinese context

The Confucian tradition emphasizing moral development with filial piety and society-based concept at the centre has been the backbone of Chinese educational

philosophy (Chen, 2000). Children in the traditional Chinese society were supposed to behave and perform according to the standards set for adults. Meanwhile, children were supposed to be seen but not heard (Liu, X.D., 1999). The core of Confucian philosophy is argued as the idea of humanity with the cultivation of virtuous man as a whole (Jin and Dan, 2004). Reinterpretation of the Confucian tradition is considered important to education in general in contemporary Chinese society (Liu, 2001). Chinese pedagogical tradition stressing the importance of study alongside the Soviet Union's strong pedagogical influences have established the contemporary pedagogical norm that systematic teaching plays a major part in children's learning (Wang, 1999; Liu, 2004).

Teachers in the Chinese setting believed that cultivation of national identity was important for young children and this started from respect for the old, love of family, love of hometown and then extending to love of the mother land (see the section 7.511 in chapter seven). Teachers showed concern over Chinese traditional values regarding the images of the good child. For example, they attempted to challenge the idea that only a child who can listen to adults is a good child and a child who is keen on reading is a good child. It seemed that teachers were proud of being a Chinese with a long cultural history but simultaneously uneasy about the negative effects of Chinese traditions upon young children at present. This made them turn to the far-off Western ways of educating children in terms of encouragement of taking risks, curiosity, creativity, independence and emotional development. In the eyes of teachers, English language teaching contributes to the process of cultivating children's awareness of Western culture. However, this is far from satisfactory compared to the importance of Western culture itself in children's healthy development. They were aware of the fact that children nowadays are living in a world with different nations and cultures. This made it necessary to put foreign cultures, especially Western culture, into the curriculum in order for children to learn about the variety of world cultures (see the section 7.512 in chapter seven).

Similarly, Chinese parents were friendly towards traditional Chinese culture in terms of moral development and preservation of Chinese culture (see the section 8.411 in chapter eight). This was revealed their opinions of home activities for their children. They were fond of the values conveyed in the traditional Chinese stories and some TV programmes (see the sections 8.211 and 8.212 in chapter 8). But they were very critical when mentioning the rigidity and dogma of Chinese traditional culture

represented in the child's dependence upon adults and obedience of the child to adults. Comparatively, they preferred the concepts underlying Western culture in terms of developing the child into a child with curiosity, independence, and individuality, which was mostly indicated in the section 8.412 of chapter eight.

9.42 The child-centred tradition in the English context

The philosophical underpinnings for early years education and care in England are defined as individuality, free play, developmentalism and child-centredness based on a liberal society tradition (Kwon, 2002; OECD, 2006; Brehony and Nawrotzki, 2007). Individuality draws upon individual children's needs, interests, and differences whilst free play is considered an integral part of the early years curriculum underpinned by the belief that children learn through self-initiated play in rich environment (Bruce, 1987; Bruce, 2005). Child-centredness originated in the tradition that practitioners' role in the early years is not an expert or authority but an adviser or facilitator proclaimed by the early years pioneers such as Froebel and Montessori (Devereux and Miller, 2003; Bruce, 2005). The contemporary early years curriculum in the English context is perceived as made up of the three 'Cs' – the child, the content and the context (Bruce, 1991; Bruce, 2005). In another word, the child's development, the content of what a child is learning and understanding, and the context in which the child's development and learning are taking place are made up of the early years curriculum (Bruce, 1991; Bruce, 2005). As Bruce (2005) and Anning and Edwards (2006) argue, the early years curriculum starts from what children already know and extends to what children want to know. It is commonly recognised among the UK early years practitioners that early childhood should be a time of spontaneity and exploration according to young children's individual interests whilst teacher-planned instructions are not welcomed (David, 2001).

However, child-centredness does not mean that practitioners' planning should be driven out of early years practice. Some argue that good planning is crucial for young children's learning as it sets up the learning environment and encourages children to explore and learn by interacting with the learning environment and other people (Rodger, 1994). *The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* argues that practitioners need to plan learning experiences of the highest quality regarding children's needs and achievements and 'well-planned play is a key way in which learn

with enjoyment and challenge during the foundation stage' (QCA, 2000: 7). *The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education* (EPPE) project finds that a good balance of staff-initiated and child-initiated activities coupled with the awareness of the importance of staff members extending child-initiated interactions are clearly identified in the excellent research settings of the UK (Sylva et al., 2004).

My research data revealed that the English setting was strongly associated with child-centredness, which is linked to invisible pedagogy identified by Bernstein (1976; 1996). Children's autonomy unfold in the process of curriculum practice in the language, mathematics, arts and play activities whilst practitioners were mostly involved in providing support to children rather than controlling children over their learning. Both practitioners and parents in the English setting clearly expressed their child-centred views. For instance, practitioners emphasised the importance of children's first-hand experiences, their desire to learn, and documentation of their learning (see the sections 7.211, 7.223 and 7.321 in chapter seven). Parents' expectations focusing on children's independence, confidence and responsibility and their strong voices about a happy childhood, in which children's happiness, play, well-being and interactions were emphasised (see the sections 8.32 and 8.121 in chapter eight), were clearly child-centerd too.

9.5 Beyond the two-ended spectrum: the common ground

The previous discussion emphasised that the Chinese setting was strongly associated with visible pedagogy while invisible pedagogy was linked to the English setting. However, there were some aspects shared by the two settings. In general, my research data confirmed that the adults' views of early childhood as an image of a happy childhood together with the notion of a pressurized childhood reflected the curriculum practice in the Chinese and English settings. The image of a happy childhood was associated with children's healthy well-being and space for children's play. The adults' concerns including top-down formal schooling influences, children's special learning needs, interaction issues and family factors composed of the notion of a pressurized childhood. In addition, parents in the two settings acknowledged that being responsible, independent, honest, confident, and healthy well-being were necessary qualities for children's healthy growth.

In terms of curriculum practice, children in the two settings were given much autonomy in exploring arts activities and other spontaneous activities, in which teaching was carried out implicitly. Invisible pedagogy was, therefore, a feature of those activities in both settings. In addition, visible pedagogy and invisible pedagogy were not static, either. Rather, they were inter-changeable at some circumstances. The integration of visible pedagogy into invisible pedagogy was needed for the sake of children's healthy development at some circumstances. For instance, children's negative interactions concerning the engagement of negative feelings and emotions in some free-flow play activities discussed in both settings require adults' intervention (see the sections 6.312 and 6.332 in chapter six).

9.6 Summary

This chapter brings us a comparison of the early years curriculum between the Chinese and English settings through an in-depth macro analysis, which goes beyond the descriptive nature of the micro and meso analyses. Drawing upon Basil Bernstein's theory on visible pedagogy and invisible pedagogy, the curriculum practice in the Chinese setting showed a strong link to visible pedagogy whilst invisible pedagogy was closely connected with the English setting. Visible pedagogy characterised as strong classification and strong framing was identified by the formal direct teaching, the low status of play, and the one-way direction of teacher-child interactions in the Chinese setting. Indirect teaching, the dominance of play, the two-way direction of practitioner-child interactions, and the dynamic of child-child interactions in the English setting were indicators for invisible pedagogy with weak classification and weak framing at the centre.

The review of policy at the national and supranational levels also explain the case of visible pedagogy and invisible pedagogy in the two contexts: the emphasis of educational function of kindergartens through teaching in the Chinese context and the tenet of individuality and the whole-child perspective in the English context. The cultural influences further back up the identification of visible pedagogy and invisible pedagogy in the two contexts. The Confucian tradition focusing on society-based concept alongside the pedagogical emphasis on the role of teachers and teaching in children's knowledge-based study in the Chinese context are indicators of visible pedagogy in the Chinese setting. Invisible pedagogy in the English context is deeply

rooted in the liberal democratic tradition based on individuality coupled with the idea of child-centredness.

However, visible pedagogy and invisible pedagogy are not isolated from each other. The common ground shared by the Chinese and English settings reveals that there are overlapping areas. The dynamics of the child-child interactions involved in children's free-flow play activities, the adults' perspectives on contested childhood centralised as a notion of a happy childhood and a concern with pressurized childhood, and parents' expectations focusing on responsibility, independence, healthy well-being and confidence are clearly identified in both the Chinese and English settings.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion and implications

This concluding section aims to answer the research questions which guided the conduct of the research project: What and how are similarities and differences constructed in the process of the early years curriculum practice between the Chinese and English setting? And how can we identify this from the perspectives of the research participants? I will first bring together all the analyses and discussions from chapters three to nine. The micro-level analysis from chapter three to six compares the variety of activities such as the language, mathematics, arts and children's free-flow play focusing on the process, the adult-child and child-child interactions, and the roles of teaching and play involved in the curriculum practice between the Chinese and English settings. The meso-level analysis is a comparison of the adults' perspectives on issues underpinning the early years curriculum – views of early childhood; views of how young children learn; the relationship between the curriculum, teaching and play; and the relationship between the curriculum and culture. The macro-level analysis goes beyond the descriptive nature of the micro and meso analyses to arrive at the theoretical interpretation that curriculum practice in the Chinese setting is strongly associated with visible pedagogy whilst invisible pedagogy is clearly manifest in the English setting. The second part of this chapter will summarise the implications that this research project has for early years education and care in terms of theoretical development and practice. The limitations of the study and future research development will be illustrated in the final part of the chapter.

10.1 The micro-level analysis

10.11 Comparison of the Language activities

The Chinese and English research settings share similar learning goals for children's language-related development – to provide children with a wide range of opportunities for them to express themselves and gain literacy-related experiences with enjoyment, which was in tune with the curriculum guidance set up by the governments in Chinese and English contexts (QCA, 2000; Chinese Ministry of Education, 2001). This was reflected in the variety of both adult-planned and child-

initiated language activities in both settings (see the sections 3.11 and 3.12 in chapter three). Children's spontaneous talk in both settings revealed that children developed shared topics, got interested in talking with others, became curious to explore and solved problems in a relaxing environment (see the sections 3.214, 3.222 and 3.225 in chapter three).

However, there were marked differences in language activities between the Chinese and English settings. In general, teachers' direct teaching with the purpose of carrying out a teaching plan dominated the language activities in the Chinese setting. For instance, children were taught together for their language development in story-telling, formal reading of rhymes, and English language lessons (see the sections 3.211, 3.212, and 3.213 in chapter three), which is in tune with the argument made by Tang and Maxwell (2007). By contrast, in the English setting children played the major role in further developing practitioners' planned language activities whilst practitioners were more engaged themselves in observing children and providing support to individual children. This led to the differences in the teacher-child interactions between the two settings. In the Chinese setting, teacher-child interactions were driven by a linear routine of reading-listening and asking-answering questions focusing on the content of what children were taught. This restricted the possibility of two-way interactions between teacher and children on the one hand and it reduced the chances of child-child interactions on the other. The practitioners' observations of children in the English setting offered practitioners insights into the learning of children in order to offer support to children. This laid the foundation for the practitioner-child interactions in the English setting (see the sections 3.221 and 3.222 in chapter three). It was most often children themselves rather than practitioners who decided what to learn and how to learn in the English setting. This promoted robust child-child interactions in the process of language activities (see the sections 3.225 and 3.32 in chapter three). The roles of teaching and play revealed marked differences too: teachers' direct teaching played a major role in developing children's language in the Chinese setting, which made children's play a supplementary means for their language development; in the English setting, children's play dominated the process of 'communication, language and literacy' activities and teaching functioned more broadly related to supporting individual children (see the section 3.42 in chapter three).

10.12 Comparison of the mathematical activities

The observational data show that a variety of maths activities including special designed activities, maths games and children's spontaneous activities were adopted in the Chinese and English settings. Counting, classifying, matching, measuring, and sorting with reference to numbers, shapes, and space involved in these activities were identified as important for children's mathematical development in both settings (see the sections 4.11 and 4.12 in chapter four). This is argued by Barber (1998), Montague-Smith (2002) and Zhu (2003) as the impact of Piaget's developmental theory upon the early years mathematical curriculum across the world. In the meantime, children's mathematical learning was regarded by the teachers in both settings as an area that required considerable support from adults although children's spontaneous play-based activities provided them with opportunities for their mathematical development through peer interactions.

Differences, however, were observed between the two settings. There were more formal teacher-directed maths activities focusing on textbook-based knowledge in the Chinese setting whilst more informal activities related to children's daily-life experiences were provided in the English setting. This brought about the differences manifested in the adult-child and child-child interactions between the two settings. For example, teacher-child interactions in the Chinese setting were involved in one-way direction of asking-answering questions which were designed in the textbooks (see the section 4.211 in chapter four) whilst the English setting provided more relaxing two-way direction of practitioner-child interactions, in which practitioners turned to children according to their interests and needs rather than rigidly following the teaching plan (see the section 4.221 in chapter four). The formal maths activities directed by teachers in the Chinese setting did not provide much space for child-child interactions. In contrast, the child-child interactions were much more encouraged in practitioner-led maths activities in the English setting. The role of teaching showed a noticeable difference between the two settings too. For example, direct teaching focusing on instruction, demonstration and reinforcement by raising questions dominated formal maths activities in the Chinese setting; the English setting revealed that teaching was more related to the set up of learning environment, observations of children, and provision of support to individual children.

10.13 Comparison of arts activities

Compared with the language and mathematical activities, arts activities were the area revealing more similarities than differences between the Chinese and English settings. In general, arts activities in the two settings shared common goals – encouragement of children's spontaneity, originality, imagination, and expressiveness involved in representation by means of visual arts, music or dance performance (Bruce, 2006; Duffy, 2006; Huang, 2006; Wu, 2006) although the term 'creativity' was rarely mentioned by teachers in the Chinese setting but was used on a daily-basis among practitioners in the English setting. Arts activities form the most distinctive and dynamic part of the curricular practice in both settings.

In detail, arts activities were the learning area with the least amount of adult-directed instruction or intervention but with children's most active self-involvement and participation in initiating an independent learning process by using a variety of learning resources in both settings (see the sections 5.11 and 5.12 in chapter five). Secondly, the dynamics, originality, imagination, and freshness were revealed in children's art work in both settings (see the sections 5.211, 5.213, and 5.221 in chapter five). However, the observational data showed that adults seldom discussed with children the meaning and representation that the children themselves constructed in their art work either in the Chinese setting or in the English setting. This contradicts the argument made by Coates and Coates (2006) that practitioners need to understand in depth children's spontaneous and creative visual expression by means of participant observations and conversations with children. Thirdly, the role of the adult involved in arts activities in both settings was more related to the set up of the learning environment, the provision of supportive atmosphere, and the offer of support to individual children. This allowed for more opportunities for rigorous two-way directions of the adult-child interactions and child-child interactions in both settings (see the sections 5.212, 5.213, 5.221 and 5.222 in chapter five).

Differences were evident between the two settings. First, a direct teaching approach with a focus on what and how to create arts work still played a part in arts activities, especially music and dance activities, in the Chinese setting although much more two-way interactions occurred in the process; direct teaching was not welcomed by practitioners in the English setting but non-structured arts activities initiated by children themselves played a major part in the process. Secondly, the side effects

caused by commercialised arts activities were observable in the Chinese setting in terms of children's negative responses and the dilemma existing among Chinese parents about their anxiety caused by children's attendance of special arts activity classes (see the section 5.214 in chapter five). This was not detected in the English setting, where arts activities focused on children's creative development through relaxing playful activities.

10.14 Comparison of children's free-flow play activities

The observational data indicated that more similarities than differences emerged out of children's free-flow play activities between the Chinese and English settings. First, in both settings, children's free-flow play developed steadily with play sequences, which were adaptable to the context and situations they were involved in (Bruce, 1991; Holland, 2003; Wood and Attfield, 2005). Play sequences made children's play rigorous and vibrant enough for their full concentration and participation (see the sections 6.211, 6.212, and 6.22 in chapter six). In the second place, both positive interactions and negative interactions were involved in the process of children's free-flow play in both settings. Positive interactions were characterised as children's equal, collaborative, and emotionally active participation, child wisdom and sense of humour (see the sections 6.311 and 6.321 in chapter six) whilst children's negative feelings and emotions were very much involved in their interactions based on the unequal roles set up by the strong player (see the sections 6.312 and 6.322 in chapter six). Thirdly, adults' support or intervention was rarely observed in the process of children's free-flow play either in the Chinese setting or in the English setting, which made children's negative interactions escape from the adults. However, the provision of play materials in the two settings showed marked difference. For example, the play materials in the Chinese setting stayed fixed day to day and there was a clear-cut division between play indoors and outdoors. The English setting showed flexibility and continuity in arranging play materials and activities indoors and outdoors.

10.2 The meso-level analysis

10.21 Teachers' perspectives

Teachers' perspectives on some issues, such as their understandings of the early years curriculum, teaching, early childhood, and how young children learn, revealed more differences than similarities between the Chinese and English settings. In general, the Chinese setting showed a culture of teaching while the English setting indicated a culture of learning. The teaching culture was reflected in the Chinese teachers' perspectives on formal direct teaching, collective teaching, quality teaching and integration of playful elements into the process of formal teaching (see the sections 7.312 and 7.313 in chapter seven). The learning culture, however, was shown in the English practitioners' views on first-hand learning experience, learning through play, and children's desire to learn (see the sections 7.221, 7.222 and 7.223 in chapter seven). Therefore, 'teaching' was the key factor in the process of curriculum practice in the Chinese setting while 'learning' played the major role in the English setting.

In more detail, the first difference was revealed in Chinese teachers' and English practitioners' perceptions of the early years curriculum. The activity-based curriculum with a focus on the role of teachers was popular among teachers in the Chinese setting 7.111 in chapter seven). The English setting showed more comprehensive perceptions of the curriculum focusing on the functions of the curriculum, the nature of the curriculum, and the roles of adults and children in developing the curriculum (see the sections 7.121 and 7.122 in chapter seven). The second difference was shown in Chinese teachers' and English practitioners' perceptions of the ways how young children learn. Learning from books, corner activities and the dependent role of play in the Chinese setting (see the sections 7.212, 7.213, and 7.214 in chapter seven) contrasted with the first-hand learning experience and learning through play in the English setting (see the sections 7.221 and 7.222 in chapter seven). Thirdly, teachers' perceptions of the relationships between the curriculum and culture revealed a marked difference too: a heavy emphasis on traditional Chinese culture and lack of Western culture in the Chinese setting (see the sections 7.511 and 7.53 in chapter seven) coupled with multicultural practice but lack of English culture in the English setting (see the section 7.523 in chapter seven).

The commonality between the two settings is Chinese teachers' and English practitioners' views of early childhood. The strong message from the primary data

was a picture of a happy childhood mixed up with a notion of a pressurized childhood. The image of happy childhood was first represented in a view taking on their childhood experiences with exposure to nature and occupation with play and then a contemporary view of a happy childhood focusing on children's emotional and social well-being (see the sections 7.411 and 7.421 in chapter seven). The pressurized childhood was related to parents' over-protection of children and pressures facing children such as the impact of future formal schooling upon children's learning experiences (see the sections 7.412 and 7.422 in chapter seven).

10.22 Parents' perspectives

The data on issues such as parents' views of early childhood, parent-child interactions at home, parents' expectations, and cultural values suggested a complex picture in both the Chinese and English settings. There were more similarities than differences between the two settings. The first similarity was that early childhood was perceived as a contested period containing complexity in both the settings. This complexity was interwoven with a notion of a happy childhood, in which children's happiness was supported by children's play and positive interactions with others (see the sections 8.111 and 8.121 in chapter eight), and an image of a pressurized childhood related to some childhood pressures within and outside of children's learning and children's behaviours (see the sections 8.1121, 8.1221, 8.1123, and 8.1223 in chapter eight). The second similarity lay in parents' expectations that independence, confidence, responsibility, and healthy well-being were commonly considered as the necessary qualities for children's future by parents (see the sections 8.31 and 8.32 in chapter eight). The third similarity lay in the fact that parents faced an issue of preserving their original cultures and respecting cultures from other parts of the community or the world (see the sections 8.411, 8.412, 8.421 and 8.422 in chapter eight).

The differences first showed that Chinese parents were more pressurized by the commercialised early learning activities (see the section 8.1122 in chapter eight) whilst parents in the English setting experienced pressure in terms of children's special educational needs and the issue of children's safety (see the sections 8.1222 and 8.1224 in chapter eight). In terms of parent-child interactions at home Chinese parents concentrated on educational interactions by reading instructive stories and

educational TV programmes focusing on moral cultivation (see the sections 8.211 and 8.212 in chapter eight); white parents in the English setting seemed to prefer non-educational playful activities for children at home whilst minority ethnic parents in the English setting focused on the educational functions of interactive activities for children at home (see the sections 8.221 and 8.222 in chapter eight).

10.3 The macro-level analysis

The macro-level analysis aims to bring in the theoretical interpretation of the early years curriculum practice in Chinese and English contexts by means of a combination of Basil Bernstein's pedagogic theory (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 1996; Bernstein, 2001) with policy review and cultural influence perspective. Generally speaking, the early years curriculum practice in the Chinese setting was strongly associated with visible pedagogy whilst the English setting showed a close link to invisible pedagogy.

The early years curriculum in Chinese context was characterised as a process dominated by formal direct teaching, which is argued by Emilson and Folkesson (2006) as reduced the opportunity for children's autonomy and participation in the learning process. This made teaching most explicit, children's subordinate position in learning, and the clear division of power relations between the teacher and the child, which revealed the strong classification and framing of visible pedagogy (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 1996; Morais, 2002; Singh, 2002). The policy review in Chinese context indicated that the emphasis on the educational function of kindergarten by means of teaching was linked to visible pedagogy in the Chinese setting. Visible pedagogy can also be inferred from the cultural influence of the Confucian tradition focusing on filial piety and the Chinese pedagogical tradition addressing the importance of society-based concepts rather than individuality (Zhang and Fang, 2004; Huang and Guo, 2003).

The early years curriculum in the English setting, however, revealed a picture, in which children played the major role in the learning process and the informal nature of practitioners' teaching was related to provision of support of individual children. This revealed the implicit nature of teaching, children's autonomy in learning, and the loose power relations between the practitioner and the child, which were closely related to the core of invisible pedagogy – weak classification and weak

framing (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 2001). This was shown in the analysis of the relationships between the curriculum, teaching and play from practitioners' perspectives in English context (see the sections 7.12, 7.22 and 7.32 in chapter eight). Invisible pedagogy was also revealed in policies on the principle of individuality (Brehony, 2000a), the importance of play, and the whole-child perspective. The cultural influence from the liberal tradition, in which individuality, free play, and child-centredness were most valued (Bruce, 1987; Kwon, 2002), was also linked to invisible pedagogy in the English setting.

However, visible and invisible pedagogy were not isolated from each other. The common ground shared by the Chinese and English settings such as the dynamics of the child-child interactions involved in children's free-flow play activities, adults' views of early childhood, and parents' expectations indicated that there were overlapping areas between visible and invisible pedagogy. In addition, visible and invisible pedagogy were not static, either. Rather, they were inter-changeable at some circumstances. Invisible pedagogy worked well when children were engaged in positive interactions with others. However, visible pedagogy in terms of adults' intervention and support was needed in both settings when children involved in negative interactions occurring in their free-flow play activities as discussed in chapter six (see the sections 6.312 and 6.322).

10.4 Implications

This three-year research project focusing on the early years curriculum in Chinese and English contexts will illuminate theoretical development and practice in early years education and care. This research took on a new perspective to look deeply into the early years curriculum through three levels of analysis in two cultural settings using an ethnographic approach including participant observations (fieldwork notes, photographic and video data), semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and documentary sources. The three levels of analyses first illustrated a comprehensive picture of what was happening in the process of the early years curriculum practice in the Chinese and English settings and then attempted to look at what was behind the scene from the perspectives of the research participants (Denscombe, 2003; Gray, 2004). The macro analysis drew a conclusion at a theoretical level: the early years curriculum practice in the Chinese setting

characterised as a culture of teaching was strongly related to visible pedagogy with strong classification and framing (Bernstein, 1975; Bernstein, 1996; Bernstein, 2001); the English setting with prevalence of a learning culture was closely linked to invisible pedagogy characterised as weak classification and framing. In addition, the macro analysis was laid into a context intertwined with terminological connotation of 'curriculum', pedagogical sphere of 'teaching, learning and play', humanistic notion of early childhood, policy review and cultural influence perspectives.

This study will open up the possibility to locate the early years curriculum in a wider context by considering the pedagogical issues, policy views and cultural perspectives. It will bring about deep thinking about how to close the gap between the romantic notion of a happy childhood and the pressurised childhood reality, which were strongly voiced among the adults in the two cultural contexts. It also invites us to rethink the early years curriculum from the perspectives of those involved including children, practitioners and parents. The perspective of putting the early years curriculum in the comparative cultural contexts provides a platform for early years professionals to make joint efforts for the best interests of children by reflecting upon some theoretical issues involved in the curriculum, such as the relationship between the curriculum, teaching, learning and play and the relationship between the curriculum and early childhood. This is an alternative to the conventional approach to research the early years curriculum focusing on the learning areas or subject matters but neglecting the values underpinning the curriculum practice (Siraj-Blatchford, 1998; Zhu, J.X., 2003).

This comparative study attempts to display the early years curriculum practice in the two settings as they are. The observational data show that children's free-flow play in the two settings is both inspiring and worrying. There were dynamics, enjoyment, concentration, and fluency represented in children's free-flow play whilst anxiety, pressure, disappointment, and fear as features of children's negative interactions were also detected in their free-flow play activities. However, there was hardly observable evidence that teachers in both settings intervened children's negative interactions occurring in free-flow play activities. Another example, the Chinese setting was dominated by direct teaching approach whilst children's play was prevalent in the English setting. The perspectives of research participants provided some explanations for why that was happening: Chinese teachers' reliance upon textbooks and their beliefs in direct collective teaching; English practitioners' views

226

of children's learning through play and their complex attitudes towards teaching. Furthermore, this comparative study was based on my understanding of contrasting discourses embedded in the relevant culture rather than a literal translation of languages. For example, the concepts of teaching revealed a stark contrast between the Chinese and English settings. Chinese teachers' views of teaching were influenced by traditional pedagogy underpinned by Confucian ideology while English practitioners' views of teaching were a reflection of the child-centred tradition embedded in the English culture. However, this needs further reflection upon early years practice concerning whether our traditions are always appropriate for children by learning from others. Meanwhile, this comparative study provides space for early years professionals' critical thinking too: Is direct teaching totally inappropriate for young children's learning? Is the notion of 'learning through play' one hundred percent waterproof? How can we ensure children's happy childhood in practice under the circumstance of childhood pressures? How does our practice reflect children's and parents' cultural values and beliefs? These, perhaps, are most profound implications for early years education and care cross cultures.

10.5 Limitations of the study and future research development

This current study adopted an ethnographic approach to investigate the early years curriculum in Chinese and English settings. Denscombe (2003) and Troman et al. (2006) among some other researchers argue that the length of time to be spent in ethnographic fieldwork is a crucial element for any in-depth ethnographic research. My fieldwork spent in each of the research settings was two months respectively. Ideally, I would have spent more time in each research setting in order to develop a more in-depth ethnographic approach. However, because of the distance between China and England alongside the financial issue, I had to shorten the time to be spent in my fieldwork. However, I made full use of the time I spent in the two contexts by managing my timetable and organising my fieldwork in an effective way to collect as much data as needed. Meanwhile, the multiple methods of data collection used in this study helped me to gather a variety of data that could represent the perspectives of research participants (Robson, 1993). Consequently, my research questions were clearly answered and the purpose of my investigation was substantially achieved. The

quality of this study, therefore, was not essentially affected by the comparatively shorter time length.

.   Another possible limitation of my research is that there were not sufficient data on children's perspectives. One of my research questions for the study was 'how can we identify the similarities and differences in the process of early years curriculum practice between Chinese and English settings from the perspectives of research participants?' It is true that chapter seven and eight focused on parents' and teachers' perspectives on issues related to the early years curriculum in order for us to link what was observed in the two settings with what the research participants said about their work. A lot of data were describing what was happening in the language, mathematics, arts and free-flow play activities in the two settings, in which children's voices were strongly sensed. However, I feel that this study would have been much better if children's perspectives were included in a way similar to how I dealt with parents and teachers in Chinese and English settings. For example, I could have engaged children in informal conversations to talk about how they viewed their free-play activities and how they looked at their interactions with adults and peers. This would perhaps bring new insight into my analysis of issues that underpin the early years curriculum. The reason why I had not done enough informal conversations with children was a fear that it would disturb children and stop them from doing what they were going to do. But now, I realize that more in-depth data of children's perspectives would have been collected if I had managed to talk with them at the right moment.

This study has made me become interested in doing further ethnographic research. The rigour and dynamic involved in ethnography (Geertz, 1973; Tobin, 1999; Troman et al., 2006) will continue to engage me in investigating early years education and care by using an ethnographic approach. The limitations of this current study discussed earlier will throw light on my future research development. For example, sufficient time will be spent in fieldwork in order to gain in-depth understanding of the issue to be investigated and children's perspectives will be a priority for my future research project. This study also strengthens my interest in doing comparative research for the future. Without this study, I would not have been able to explore in depth the early years curriculum practice in Chinese and English contexts by identifying the similarities and differences from the perspectives of the research participants. This has enabled me to continue to think about the socio-cultural nature of early years education and care (Lubeck, 1985; Tobin et al., 1989;

Hartley, 1993; David and Powell, 2005; David, 2006), which will be better understood by doing comparative research in different cultural contexts such as the oriental and western cultures or even within the European cultural contexts.

Bibliography

Abbott, L. and Langston, A. (eds.) (2006) *Parents Matters: Supporting the Birth to Three Matters Framework,* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Ackers, J. (1994) 'Why involve me?' Encouraging children and their parents to participate in the assessment process, in Abbot, L. and Rodger, R. (eds.) *Quality Education in the Early Years*, Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Adams, J. (1994) She'll have a go at everything: towards an equal opportunities policy, in Abbot, L. and Rodger, R. (eds.) *Quality Education in the Early Years*, Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Alexander, R. (1999) Introduction, in Alexander, R., Broadfoot, P. and Phillips, D. (eds.) *Learning from Comparing: New Directions in Comparative Educational Research. Volume One: Contexts, Classrooms and Outcomes,* Oxford: Symposium Books.

Andreae, J. and Matthews, P. (2006) Evaluating the quality and standards of early years education and care, in Pugh, G. and Duffy, B. (eds.) *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years,* London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Anning, A. and Edwards, A. (2006) *Promoting children's learning from birth to five* (the 2nd edition), England: Open University Press.

Aries, P. (1962) *Centuries of Childhood: Social History of Family Life,* London: Jonathan Cape.

Arnot, M. (2002) The complex gendering of invisible pedagogy: social reproduction or empowerment? *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2002, pp. 583-593.

Baldock, P., Fitzgerald, D. and Kay, J. (2005) *Understanding Early Years Policy,* London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Ball, S.J. (1993) Self-doubt and soft data: social and technical trajectories in ethnographic fieldwork, in Hammersley, M. (ed.) *Educational Research: Current Issues,* London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Ball, J. (2003) The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity, *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 215-228.

Barber, P. (1998) Doing mathematics with young children, in Siraj-Blatchford, I. (ed.) *A Curriculum Development Handbook for Early Childhood Educators,* Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books Limited.

Beijing Foreign Language University English Department (ed.) (2004) *A Chinese-English Dictionary* (revised version), Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Bennett, J. (2001) Goals and curricula in early childhood, in Kamerman, S. (ed.) *Early Childhood Education and Care: International Perspectives,* New York: The Institute for Child and Family Policy at Columbia University.

Bennett, N., Wood. L. and Rogers, S. (1997) *Teaching through Play,* Buckingham: Open University Press.

BERA Early Years Special Interest Group (2003) *Early Years Research: Pedagogy, Curriculum and Adult Roles, Training and Professionalism,* http://www.bera.ac.uk/pdfs/BERAEarlyYearsReview31May03.pdf (accessed on 24 May 2008)

Berlyne, D. E. (1969) Laughter, Humour, and Play. Cited in Reifel, S. (1989) *Play & Cultures Studies,* London: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Bernstein, B. (1975) *Class, Codes and Control. Volume 3 Towards a Theory of Educational Transmissions* (revised edition), London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Bernstein, B. (1996) *Pedagogy Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory, Research, Critique,* London: Taylor & Frances.

Bernstein, B. (2001) Symbolic control: issues of empirical description of agencies and agents, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, January 2001, pp. 21-33.

Bertram, T. and Pascal, C. (2002) *Early Years Education: An International Perspective,* England: QCA.

Brehony, K.J. (2000a) Montessori, individual work and individuality in the elementary school classroom, *History of Education*, 2000, Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 115-128.

Brehony, K.J. (2000b) The Kindergarten in England, 1851-1918, in Wollons, R. (ed.) *Kindergarten and Cultures: the global diffusion*. New Heaven and London: Yale University Press.

Brehony, K.J. (ed.) (2001) *Origins of nursery education: Friedrich Froebel and the English System,* London: Routledge.

Brehony, K. (unpublished paper) (2004) Working at play or playing at work? A Froebelian paradox re-examined. Inaugural lecture delivered in University of Surrey Roehampton on 16th February 2004.

Brehony, K. and Nawrotzki, K. (unpublished paper) (2007) Neither Social Democratic nor Neoliberal: childcare and early years' education policies in England since 1945. Paper presented at the German Half-Day Model: A European Sonderweg? The 'Time Politics' of Child Care, Pre School and Elementary School Education in Post-War Europe, University of Cologne, 1st-3rd March 2007.

Brewer, J.D. (2000) *Ethnography,* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bilton, H. (1998) *Outdoor play in the early years: management and innovation*, London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

Broadfoot, P. (1999) Not so much a context, more a way of life? Comparative education in the 1990s, in Alexander, R., Broadfoot, P., and Phillips, D. (eds.) *Learning from Comparing: new directions in comparative educational research,* Oxford: Symposium Books.

Bruce, T. (1987) *Early Childhood Education,* Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton.

Bruce, T. (1991) *Time to Play in Early Childhood Education,* London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Bruce, T. (1997) Adults and children developing play together, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1997, pp. 89-97.

Bruce, T. (2004) *Developing Learning in Early Childhood,* London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Bruce, T. (2005) *Early Childhood Education* (3rd edition) London: Hodder Arnold.

Bruce, T. (2006) Creative development, in Bruce, T. (ed.) *Early Childhood: A Guide for Students,* London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Burgess, R. (ed.) (1982) *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual,* London: Allen & Unwin.

Cai, Y.Q. (2006) *Preschool Education Theory,* Wuhan: Middle China Normal University Press. (蔡迎旗 著《学前教育概论》，华中师范大学出版社，2006 年。)

Cao, X.N. (2003) Review of Chinese early years curriculum reform since the 1980s, in *Preschool Education Research*, 2003, No. 9, pp. 29-31. (曹秀能 '上世纪 80 年

代以来我国幼儿教育课程改革述评'。《学前教育研究》，2003 年第 9 期，第 29-31 页。)

Castells, M. (2000) *The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd edition) (Vol. 1), Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Chen, Ch.Q. (2000) *History of Educational Philosophy in China* (Vol.1), Jinan: Shandong Education Publisher. (陈超群 著：《中国教育哲学史》（第一卷），山东教育出版社， 2000 年。)

Chen, G.Q. (2003) From 'text-centredness' to 'child-centredness', in *Preschool Education Research*, 2003, No. 1, pp. 53-54. (陈国强 '从关注文本到关注儿童'。《学前教育研究》，2003 年第 1 期，第 53-54 页。)

Chen, H.Q. (1989) *The Collection of Chen Heqin's Writing*, Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press.

Chen, L. (2001) *Song Qing Ling Kindergarten Corner Activity Case Studies*, Shanghai: East China Normal University. (陈磊著《宋庆龄幼儿园区域活动案例》。华东师范大学出版社，2001 年。)

Chen, Q. and Pang, L.J. (2006) On young children's bilingual education, *Preschool Education Research*, 2006, No. 5, pp. 27-30. (陈琴、庞丽娟 '幼儿双语教育问题探析'，《学前教育研究》，2006 年，第 5 期，第 27-30 页。)

Chen, Q.H. (2005) Let young children's literature go into kindergarten, in *Preschool Education Research*, No. 6, pp. 57-58. (陈琼辉 让幼儿文学走进幼儿园。《学前教育研究》，2005 年第 6 期，57-58 页。)

Chen, X.X. (ed.) (2001) *China Modern Educational Collections*, Beijing: People Education Publisher. (陈学恂 主编 《中国近代教育文选》。人民教育出版社，2001 年。)

China Preschool Education Research Association (1999) *People's Republic of China Important Early Childhood Education Document Collection*, Beijing: Beijing Normal University. (中国学前教育研究会主编 《中华人民共和国幼儿教育重要文献汇编》，北京师范大学出版社，1999 年。)

China Preschool Education Research Association (2003) *The Centenary Chinese Preschool Education*, Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press. (中国学前教育研究会主编 《百年中国幼教（1903-2003）》，北京师范大学出版社，2003 年。)

Chinese Ministry of Education (2001) *Kindergarten Educational Practice Guidelines*, Beijing: MOE. （《幼儿园教育指导纲要》，中国教育部，2001 年。）

Chinese Ministry of Education Quality Education Concepts Learning Guidance Editing Team (2001) *Quality Education Concepts Learning Guidance,* Beijing: Life, Reading and New Knowledge San Lian Books. (中华人民共和国教育部《素质教育观念学习提要》编写组 编 《素质教育观念学习提要》。生活、读书、新知三联书店，2001 年。)

Chitty, C. (2004) *Education Policy in Britain,* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Coady, M.M. (2001) Ethics in early childhood research, in MacNaughton, G., Rolfe, S.A. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (eds.) *Doing Early Childhood Research: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*, Maidenhead and New York: Open University Press.

Coates, E. and Coates, A. (2006) Young children talking and drawing, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, Vol. 14, No. 3, October 2006, pp. 221-241.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education* (5th edition), London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Cong, L.X. (2000) *Curriculum Theoretical Issues,* Beijing: Science and Education Publisher.

Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (eds.) (2000) *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures,* London: Routledge.

Cox, M. (1997) *Drawings of people by the under-5s,* London: Falmer.

Cox, M., Perara, J. & Xu, F. (1999) Children's drawing in China and UK, *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 18 (2), 173-181.

Craft, A., Jeffery, B. and Leibling, M. (eds.) (2001) *Creativity and Education,* London and New York: Continnum.

Craft, A. (2003) Creative thinking in the early years of education, *Early Years*, Vol. 23, September 2006, pp.143-154.

Creswell, J.W. (1994) *Research Design: Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches,* London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Cullingford, C. (1991) *The Inner World of the School: Children's Ideas about Schools,* London: Cassell.

Dale, R. (1999) Specifying globalization effects on national policy: a focus on the mechanisms, *Journal of Education Policy*, 14 (1), pp. 1-17.

Dale, R. (2005) Globalization, knowledge economy and comparative education. *Comparative Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2005, pp. 117-149.

David, T. (2001) Curriculum in the early years, in Paul, G. (2001) (3rd edition) *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years: Working Collaboratively for Children,* London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Paul Chapman Publishing.

David, T. (2006) The world picture, in Pugh, G. and Duffy, B. (eds.) *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years* (4th edition), London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

David, T. and Powell, S. (2005) Play in the early years: the influence of cultural difference, in Moyles, J. (ed.) (2nd edition) *The Excellence of Play,* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

David, T., Raban, B., Ure, C., Goouch, K., Jago, M., Barriere, I. and Lambirth, A. (2000) *Making Sense of Early Literacy: A Practitioner's Perspective,* Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Demause, L. (ed.) (1976) *The History of Childhood: the evolution of parent-child relationships as a factor in history,* London: Souvenir Press.

Denscombe, M. (2003) *The Good Research Guide for Small-Scale Social Research Project* (2nd edition), Maidenhead and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1994) Introduction: Entering the Field of Qualitative Research, in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Devereux, J. and Miller, L. (2003) (eds.) *Working with Children in the Early Years,* London: David Fulton Publishers in association with the Open University.

Dey, I. (1993) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A User-Friendly Guide for Social Scientists,* London and New York: Routledge.

DES (1985) *The Curriculum from 5 to 16: Curriculum Matters 2* (An HMI series), London: HMSO.

DfEE (2001) *Early Years Development and Childcare Planning Guidance 2001-2002,* Nottingham: DfEE.

DfES (1990) *Starting with quality. Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Quality of the Educational Experience Offered to Three and Four Year Olds,* London: HMSO.

DfES (1999) *Early Learning Goals,* England: DfES.

DfES (2000) *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice,* Nottinghamshire: DfES Publications.

DfES (2002) Birth to Three Matters,
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/foundation_stage/9404
63/ (accessed on 2nd June 2007)

DfES (2004a) *Children Act 2004,* http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/40031--
b.htm#2 (accessed on 20th May 2007)

DfES (2004b) *Every Child Matters,* London: The Stationery Office.

DfES (2007a) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage,*
Nottingham: DfES.

DfES (2007b) The Early Years Foundation Stage,
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs/site/4/3.htm (accessed on 28th May
2007)

Dimmock, C. and Walker, A. (2000) Globalisation and societal culture: redefining
schooling and school leadership in the twenty-first century, *Compare*, Vol. 30,
No. 3, 2000, pp. 303-312.

Dowling, M. (2006) The learning environment: creating a learning environment
indoors and outdoors, in Bruce, T. (ed.) (2006) *Early Childhood,* London,
Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Duffy, B. (2006a) The curriculum from birth to six, in Pugh, G. and Duffy, B. (eds.)
(the 4th edition) *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years,* London, Thousand
Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Duffy, B. (2006b) *Supporting Creativity and Imagination in the Early Years,*
Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Dunn, J. & Dale, N. (1984) I a daddy: 2 year-olds' collaboration in joint play with
sibling and mother, in I. Bretherton. (ed.) *Symbolic Play: the Development of
Social understanding,* Orlando: Academic Press.

Early Childhood Curriculum Reform New Concept Committee (2004) *Early
childhood curriculum reform new concept,* Fuzhou: Fujian Education
Publication. (幼教课改新思维编委会《幼教课改新思维》，福建教育出版社，2004
年。)

Edwards, C., Gandini, L., and Forman, G. (1998) *The Hundred Languages of
Children* (2nd edition), New Jersey: Ablex.

Edwards, P. (ed.) (1967) *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Vol. 7 & 8), New York:
The Macmillan Company & the Free Press.

Eggleston, J. (1977) *The Sociology of the School Curriculum,* London: Routledge & Kegan Pual Ltd.

Emilson, A. and Folkesson, A. (2006) Children's participation and teacher control, *Early Child Development and Care*, Vol. 176, No. 3-4, May 2006, pp. 219-238.

Fairbrother, G.P. (2005) Comparison to what end? Maximizing the potential of comparative education research, *Comparative Education*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2005, pp. 5-24.

Feng, X.X. (1997) Construct kindergarten curriculum basing on activity theory, in Tang, Sh. (ed.) (2004) *The Basic Theory and Comprehensive Reform in Kindergarten Curriculum,* Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press. (冯晓霞："以活动理论为基础建构幼儿园课程"。唐淑 主编：《幼儿园课程基本理论和整体改革》，南京师范大学出版社，2004 年。)

Fumoto, H., Hargreaves, D. and Maxwell, S. (2004) The concept of teaching: a reappraisal, *Early Years*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 179-191.

Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures,* New York: Basic Books.

Gifford, S. (2005) *Teaching Mathematics 3-5: developing learning in the foundation stage,* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Gitlin, A., Segel, M. and Boru, K. (1993) The politics of method: from leftist ethnography to educative research, in Hammersley, M. (ed.) *Educational Research: Current Issues,* London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Glaser, B. and Strauss, A.L. (1967) *Discover of Grounded Theory,* Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Goodman, J. & Kuzmic, J. (1997) Bringing progressive pedagogy to conventional schools: theoretical and practical implications from harmony, *Theory into Practice*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 79-86.

Gray, D.E. (2004) *Doing Research in the Real World,* London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1989) *Fourth Generation Evaluation,* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hargreaves, A. (1985) The Micro-Macro Problem in the Sociology of Education, in Burgess, R.G. (ed.) (1985) *Issues in Educational Research: Qualitative Methods,* East Sussex and Philadelphia: The Falmer Press.

Hargreaves, A. (1994) Critical introduction, in Goodson, Ivor F. (1994) *Studying Curriculum,* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Hartley, D. (1993) *Understanding the Nursery School,* London and New York: Cassell.

Hawker, D. (2006) Joined up working – the development of children's services, in Pugh, G. and Duffy, B. (eds.) *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years,* London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Hodder, I. (1994) The interpretation of documents and material culture, in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Holland, P. (2003) *We Don't Play with Guns Here,* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Hopkins, C., Gifford, S., and Pepperell, S. (1999) *Mathematics in the Primary School: a sense of progression* (2nd edition), London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

Hu, Zh.F. (2004) Misfortune or fortune? In Yin, Shaochun. (ed.) *InSEA Art Education and Cultural Understanding,* InSEA Asian Conference held in Beijing, 19-21 December 2004, Beijing: Capital Normal University. (胡知凡："祸兮福兮—谈如何应对当今社会的视觉文化挑战"。尹少淳 主编：《艺术教育国际协会"艺术教育与文化理解"论文集》，首都师范大学出版社，2004 年。)

Huang, J. (2006) *Preschool Children Musical Education,* Shanghai: East China Normal University Press. (黄瑾编著 《学前儿童音乐教育》，华东师范大学出版社，2006 年。)

Huang, J. and Guo, Q.J. (eds.) (2003) *Research on Basic Issues in Chinese Educational Tradition and Modernization,* Beijing: Beijing Normal University. (黄济、郭齐家 主编 《中国教育传统与教育现代化基本问题研究》，北京师范大学出版社，2003 年。)

Hughes, A.G. and Hughes, E.H. (1965) *Learning and Teaching: an Introduction to Psychology and Education,* London: Longmans.

Hughes, M. (1986) *Children and Number. Difficulties in Learning Mathematics,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Hughes, C. (1994) From field notes to dissertation: analyzing the stepfamily, in Bryman, A. and Burgess, R.G. (eds.) (1994) *Analyzing Qualitative Data,* London and New York: Routledge.

Improve Chinese Kindergarten Teachers' Professional Qualification' (ICKTPQ) Project (2002) *Let Young Children become Active Learners,* Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press. （提高我国幼儿师资素质的研究课题组主编 《让幼儿成为主动的学习者》，北京师范大学出版社，2002 年。）

Isbell, R.T. and Raines, S.C. (2003) *Creativity and arts with young children,* Australia, Canada, Mexico, Singapore, Spain, United Kingdom, and United States: Thompson Delmar Learning.

Jackson, P. (1968) *Life in Classrooms,* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Jackson, P. (ed.) (1992) *Handbook of Research on Curriculum,* New York: Macmillan.

James, A. and Prout, A. (1997) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (2nd edition), London and Washington, D.C.: Falmer Press

Jeffrey, B. (2006) International background, in Jeffrey, B. (ed.) *Creative Learning Practices: European Experiences,* London: the Tufnell Press.

Jeffrey, B. and Troman, G. (2006) Time for ethnography, in Troman, G., Jeffrey, B. and Beach, D. (eds.) *Researching Education Policy: Ethnographic Experiences,* London: the Tufnell Press.

Jia, Zh.K. (2004) Exploration on Chinese and Western cultural values and construction strategy on global culture, in *East Asia's View on World Culture Symposium of Beijing Conference of Harvard-Yenching Alumni* in 2003 China, Beijing: Beijing University Press. (嘉正坤"中西文化价值定位于全球文化建构方略"。关世杰 主编：《世界文化的东亚视角》，北京大学出版社，2004 年。）

Jiang, J.H. and Yuan, A.L. (2004) Discussion on internationalisation and localisation in Chinese early childhood education curriculum research, *Early Childhood Education*, 2004, No. 10, p 5. (蒋俊华、袁爱玲："刍议我国幼教课程研究的国际化与本土化"。《幼儿教育》，2004 年，第 10 期，第 5 页。）

Jin, Sh.H. and Dan, J.W. (2004) The contemporary development of philosophy of education in mainland China and Taiwan, *Comparative Education*, Vol. 40, No. 4, November 2004, pp. 571-581.

Kalliala, M. (2006) *Play Culture in a Changing World,* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Kelly, A.V. (1999) *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice* (the 4th edition), London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

King, A.D. (1991) (ed.) *Culture, Globalization and the World-system: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity,* London: Macmillan.

Kraidy, M.M. (2002) The global, the local, and the hybrid: a native ethnography of glocalization, in Taylor S. (ed.) *Ethnographic Research,* London: Sage.

Kong, Q.Y. (2004) *Kindergarten Art Education,* Beijing: People's Education Publisher. (孔起英 著《幼儿园美术教育》。人民教育出版社，2004 年。)

Kong, Q.Y. (2006) On contemporary young children's art education, *Early Childhood Education*, 2006, No. 10, pp. 19-21. (孔起英 论当前幼儿美术教育的误区与对策——从两则案例谈起。《幼儿教育》，2006 年，第 10 期，第 19-21 页。)

Kwon, Y.I. (2002) Changing curriculum for early childhood education in England, *Early Childhood Research & Practice*, fall 2002, Vol. 4, No. 2.

LaRao, N. and Zhou, J. (2004) The cultural influences on policy and practice in early childhood education from the perspective of globalisation, *Preschool Education Research*, 2004, No. 7-8, pp. 9-11.

Lawton, D. (1975) *Class, Culture and the Curriculum,* London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Lee, L. and O'Rourke, M. Information and communication technologies: transforming views of literacies in early childhood settings, *Early Years*, Vol. 26, No. 1, March 2006, Pp. 49-62.

Li, H. and Rao, N. (2005) Curricular and instructional influences on early literacy attainment: evidence from Beijing, Hong Kong and Singapore, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, Vol. 13, No. 3, October 2005, pp. 235-253.

Li, L.M. (2001) Some basic understandings of the Kindergarten Educational Practice Guidelines, *Preschool Education Research*, No. 6, pp. 6-9. (李季湄 对《幼儿园教育指导纲要》中的几个基本观点的理解。《学前教育研究》，第 6 期，第 6-9 页。)

Li, M.H. (2002) Confucius tradition and human rights, in Huang, J. (ed.) *Discussions on Traditional Chinese Culture and Modern Values,* Beijing: Social Science Documents Publisher. (李明辉："儒家传统与人权"。黄俊杰 主编：《传统中华文化与现代价值的激荡》，社会科学文献出版社，2002 年。)

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry,* Newbury Park and London: Sage.

Lin, C. and Fu, V. (1994) A comparison of child-rearing practices among Chinese, immigrant Chinese, and Caucasian-American parents, *Child Development*, No. 61, pp. 429-433.

Li, Sh.L. (2003) *Research on the partnership between kindergartens, families and communities,* Shanghai: East China Normal University Press.

Liu, X.D. (1999) *New Concepts on Children's Education,* Nanjing: Jiangsu Education Publisher. (刘晓东著《儿童教育新论》，江苏教育出版社，1999 年。)

Liu, X.F. (2001) *The Origin of the Revolutionary Spirit of Confucianism,* Shanghai: Sanlian Press Company.

Liu, Y. (1997) Look into the kindergarten curriculum through the dialectical relationship between teaching and learning. in Tang, Sh. (ed.) (2004) *The Basic Theory and Comprehensive Reform in Kindergarten Curriculum,* Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press. (刘焱：'在教与学的辩证关系中看幼儿园课程'。唐淑 主编：《幼儿园课程基本理论和整体改革》，南京师范大学出版社，2004 年。)

Liu, Y. (1999) *Early Childhood Education General Theory,* Beijing: China Labour Society Welfare Publisher. (刘焱 编著 《幼儿教育概论》。北京：中国劳动社会保障出版社，1999 年。)

Liu, Y. (2004) *The general theory on children's play,* Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press. (刘焱著《儿童游戏通论》。北京师范大学出版社，2004 年。)

Liu, Y. and Feng, X.X. (2005) Kindergarten educational reform during the past two decades in mainland China: achievements and problems, *International Journal of Early Years Education,* Vol. 13, No. 2, June 2005, pp. 93–99.

Liu, Y., Pan, Y.J. and Sun, H.F. (2005) Comparative research on young children's perceptions of play – an approach to observing the effects of kindergarten educational reform, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, Vol. 13, No. 2, June 2005, pp. 101-112.

Livingstone, S. (2004) On the challenges of cross-national comparative media research. http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/festival2004/programme/Fri/am/BStheatre/documents/livingstone_000.doc (accessed on 9th August 2006)

Lowenfeld, V. and Britain, W.L. (1987) *Creative and Mental Growth* (8th edition), London: Collier Macmillan Publishers.

Lubeck, S. (1985) *Sandbox Society,* London and Philadelphia: the Famler Press.

Macintyre, C. (2003) Studying play from a developmental perspective. In Devereux, J. and Miller, L. (eds.) *Working with Children in the Early Years,* London: David Fulton Publisher in association with the Open University.

Maclellan, E. (1997) The importance of counting, in Thompson, I. (ed.) *Teaching and Learning Early Number,* Buckingham: Open University Press.

MacNaughton, G. (2003) *Shaping Early Childhood: Learners, Curriculum and Contexts,* England: Open University Press.

Madseon, U.A. (unpublished paper) (2006) Eduscape: ethnographic comparison of globalisation and schooling, conference paper presented to the Oxford Ethnography and Education Conference organised by the Open University, 4-5th September 2006, in St. Hildas College, Oxford University.

Marsh, Colin J. (1997) *Perspectives: key concepts for understanding curriculum,* London and Washington, D.C.: The Falmer Press.

Marsh, C.J. and Stafford, K. (1988) *Curriculum: practices and issues* (2nd edition), Sydney: McGraw Hill.

Marsh, J. (2005) Digikids: young children, popular culture and media, in Yelland, N. (ed.) *Critical Issues in Early Childhood Education,* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Marshall, C. and Rossman, G.B. (1995) *Designing Qualitative Research* (2nd edition), London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative Researching* (2nd edition), London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Matthews, J. (2003) *Drawing and Painting: children and visual representation* (2nd edition), London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Mause, L.De. (ed.) (1980) *The History of Childhood,* London: Souvenir Press.

Maxwell, S. (1996) Meaningful interaction, in Robson, S. and Smedley, S. (eds.) *Education in Early Childhood,* London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

Maykut, P. and Morehouse, R. (1994) *Beginning Qualitative Research: a Philosophic and Practical Guide,* London and New York: Routledge Falmer.

McMillan, J.H. and Schumacher, S. (1989) *Research Education: a Conceptual Introduction* (2nd edition), Glenview and London: Scott, Foresman and Company.

McNess, E. (2004) Culture, context and the quality of education: evidence from a small-scale extended case study in England and Denmark, *Compare*, Vol. 34, No. 3, September 2004, pp. 315-327.

Merry, R., Wei, Zh. and Rogers, J. (2006) What's got two heads and no nose? Young British and Chinese children's representations of unreality, *Early Years*, Vol. 26, No. 2, July 2006, pp. 143-158.

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis* (2nd edition), London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Miller, L., Cable, C. and Devereux, J. (2005) *Developing Early Years Practice,* London: David Fulton Publishers.

Miller, L., Devereux, J., Paige-Smith, A. and Soler, J. (2003) Approaches to curricula in the early years, in Devereux, J. and Miller, L. (eds.) *Working with Children in the Early Years,* London: David Fulton Publishers in association with the Open University.

Miller, L., Hughes, J., Roberts, A., Paterson, L. and Staggs, L. (2003) Curricular guidance and frameworks for the early years: UK perspectives, in Devereux, J. and Miller, L. (eds.) *Working with Children in the Early Years,* London: David Fulton Publishers in association with the Open University.

Ministry of Children and Family Affairs (1995) *Framework Plan for day care institutions,* Oslo, Q-0903 B.

Montague-Smith, A. (2002) *Mathematics in Nursery Education* (2nd edition), London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

Morais, A.M. (2002) Basil Bernstein at the Micro Level of the Classroom, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2002, pp. 559-569.

Moss, P. & Petrie, P. (2002) *From Children's Services to Children's Spaces: Public Policy, Children and Childhood,* London: Routledge Falmer Press.

Moyles, H. (2006) Supporting children's development and learning, in Bruce, T. (ed.) (2006) *Early Childhood: A Guide for Students,* London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Moyles, J. (1989) *Just Playing? The Role and Status of Play in Early Childhood Education,* Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Moyles, J. (2001) Just for fun? The child as active learner and meaning-maker, in Collins, J., Insley, K. and Soler, J. (eds.) *Developing Pedagogy: Researching Practice,* London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd in association with the Open University.

Moyles, J. (2005) Introduction, in Moyles, J. (ed.) *The Excellence of Play* (2nd edition), Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Oberhuemer, P. and Ulich, M. (1996) *Working With Young Children in Europe,* London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

OECD (2004) OECD *Country Note: Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in the Federal Republic of Germany,* Paris: OECD.

OECD (2006) *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care,* Paris: OECD.

Ofsted (2004) *Transition from the reception year to year 1: an evaluation by Her Majesty's Inspectors,* London: HMSO.

Paley, V.G. (1984) *Boys & Girls: Superheroes in the Doll Corner,* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Patton, M.Q. (2002) *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (3rd edition), Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Penn, H. (1997) *Comparing Nurseries: staff and children in Italy, Spain and the UK,* London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Pinchbeck, I. and Hewitt, M. (1969) *Children in English Society,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Phillips, D. (1999) On comparing, in Alexander, R., Broadfoot, P. and Phillips, D. (eds.) *Learning from Comparing: New Directions in Comparative Educational,* Oxford: Symposium Books.

Postlethwaite, T.N. (ed.) (1988) *The Encyclopaedia of Comparative Education and National Systems of Education,* Oxford: Pergamon.

Prentice, R., Matthews, J. and Taylor, H. (2003) Creative development: learning and the arts, in Riley, J. (ed.) *Learning in the Early years,* London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Pring, R. (2000) *Philosophy of Educational Research,* London and New York: Continuum.

Prout, A. and James, A. (2003) A new paradigm for the sociology of childhood? Provenance, promise and problems, in James, A. and Prout, A. (eds.) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (2nd edition), London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Pugh, G. (2001) A policy for early children services, in Pugh, G. (ed.) *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years: Working Collaboratively for Children* (3rd edition), London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Pugh, G. and Duffy, B. (eds.) (2006) *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years* (4th edition), London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

QCA (2000) *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage,* London: QCA/DfEE.

QCA (2003) *Foundation Stage Early Learning Goals* (England), London: QCA.

QCA (2004) *Foundation Stage Monitoring Report 2003/2004,* London: QCA.

Quicke, J. (1999) *Curriculum for Life,* Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Raggl, A. (2006) The Bridge School: Creative learning as community learning, in Jeffrey, B. (ed.) *Creative Learning Practices: European Experiences,* London: the Tufnell Press.

Rampton, B. (unpublished paper) (2007) Questions and procedure for investigating interactional data, paper presented in *Key Concepts and Methods in Ethnography, Language & Communication* held by University of London and Oxford University on 23rd March 2007.

Rasco, F.A, Sanchez, J.G., Arana, A.C., Cruz, E.G., Vallinas, E.G., Gil, M.L., Diaz, J.O., Vallejo, R.P., Gonzalez, C.P.R., Romero, R.R., Recio, R.V., and Chaza, R.V. (2006) Creative learning in an infant school, in Jeffrey, B. (ed.) *Creative Learning Practices: European Experiences,* London: the Tufnell Press.

Ren, J.Y. (2004) The historical contribution of loyalty and filial piety as moral standards to the Chinese Feudal society, in *East Asia's View on World Culture Symposium of Beijing Conference of Harvard-Yenching Alumni* in China 2003, Beijing: Beijing University Press. (任继愈："中国封建社会中小规范的历史贡献"。关世杰 主编：《世界文化的东亚视角》，北京大学出版社，2004 年。)

Riley, J. (1998) Language and literacy in the early years, in Siraj-Blatchford, I. (ed.) *A Curriculum Handbook for Early Childhood Educators,* England: Trentham Books Limited.

Rizi, F. and Lingard, B. (eds.) (1996) *Disability and the dilemmas of education and justice,* Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open Unviersity Press.

Robson, C. (1993) *Real World Research: a Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers,* Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.

Rodger, R. (1994) A quality curriculum for the early years: raising some questions, in Abbott, L. and Rodger, R. (eds.) *Quality Education in the Early Years,* Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Rogers, C.S., Meeks, A.M., Impara, J.C. & Frary, R. (1987) Measuring playfulness: development of the child behaviours inventory of playfulness, in Reifel, S. (ed.) (1998) *Play & Culture Studies,* London: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Rosenthal, M. (2003) Quality in early childhood education and care: a cultural context, *European Early Childhood Research Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 101-116.

Ross, A. (2001) What is the curriculum, in Collins, J., Insley, K. and Soler, J. (eds.) *Developing Pedagogy: Researching Practice*, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: The Open University.

Rowland, S. (1987) Child in control: towards an interpretive model of teaching and learning. In Pollard, A. (ed.) *Children and Their Primary Schools: A New Perspective,* London, New York and Philadelphia: The Falmer Press. (Chapter 8, pp. 121-132)

Schostak, J. (2006) *Interviewing and Representation in Qualitative Research,* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Schwandt, T. (1999) Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry, in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Shanghai Education Committee Research Cluster (ed.) (2004) *Kindergarten-based Curriculum: Theory and Practice Research,* Shanghai: Shanghai Education Publisher. (上海市教委教研室 编《幼儿园课程园本化理论与实践的研究》，上海教育出版社，2004 年。)

Shi, L.F. (1996) *Curriculum Theory: Basics, Principles, and Issues,* Beijing: Educational Science Publisher. (施良方 著《课程理论——课程的基础、原理与问题》，教育科学出版社，1996 年。)

Shi, Y. (2004) Several reflections from our kindergarten curriculum reform based on the Kindergarten Educational Practice Guidance, *Preschool Education Research*, 2004, No. 7-8, pp. 80-81.

Sidel, R. (1982) Early childhood education: the impact of political change, *Comparative Education Review*, February 1982, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 78-87.

Singh, P. (2002) Pedagogising Knowledge: Bernstein's theory of the pedagogic device, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2002, pp. 571-582.

Siraj-Blactchford, I. (1996) Language, culture and differences, in Nutbrown, C. (ed.) *Children's Rights and Early Education,* London: Paul Chapman.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (1998) Criteria for developing quality in early learning for 3-6 year-olds, in Siraj-Blatchford (ed.) *A Curriculum Development Handbook for Early Years* Educators, England: Trentham Books Ltd.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2006) Diversity, inclusion and learning in the early years, in Pugh, G. and Duffy, B. (eds.) *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years,* London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Clarke, P. (2004) *Supporting Identity, Diversity and Language in the Early Years,* Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Siraj-Blatchford, J. (2004) An ethnographic approach to researching young children's learning, in MacNaughton, G., Rolfe, S.A., and Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2004) *Doing Early Childhood Research: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice,* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Skilbeck, M. (1976) Ideologies and Values, in Skilbeck, M. and Harris, A. (eds.) *Culture, Ideology and Knowledge,* Milton Keynes: the Open University Press.

Smidt, S. (2004) Sinister storytellers, magic flutes and spinning tops: the links between play and popular culture, *Early Years*, Vol. 24, No. 1, March 2004, pp. 75-85.

Soler, J. and Miller, L. (2003) The struggle for early childhood curricula: a comparison of the English Foundation Stage Curriculum, Te Whariki and Reggio Emilia, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2003, pp. 57-67.

Song, Y.F. (2000) Put bilingual education into kindergarten curriculum. In Tang, Sh. (ed.) *Kindergarten Curriculum Research and Practice,* Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press. (宋跃方 将双语教育融入幼儿园课程之中。唐淑 主编 《幼儿园课程研究与实践》，南京师范大学出版社，2000 年。)

Spratt, J. (2006) Practical projects: birth to 5 years, in Bruce, T. (ed.) *Early Childhood: A Guide for Students,* London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1994) Grounded theory methodology: an overview, in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory,* Newbury Park, London and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Sun, C.M. (2003) Reflection on early childhood centenary history, in *Preschool Education Research*, 2003, No. 5, pp.36-37. (孙民从："幼教百年沉思录（三）"。《学前教育研究》，2003 年，第 5 期，第 36-37 页。)

Sun, H.J., Zhang, H., Han, K.Q., Chen, G.Q., & Xu, B.Zh. (eds.) (2004) *The Kindergarten Constructive Curriculum Guidance Teachers' Reference Book,* Shanghai: East China Normal University. （孙浣敬、章红、韩康倩、陈国强、徐蓓珍 主编 《幼儿园建构式课程指导教师用书（中班）》，华东师范大学出版社，2004年。）

Swick, K.J. and Hooks, L. (2005) Parental experiences and beliefs regarding inclusive placements of their special needs children, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 6, June 2005, pp. 397-402.

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., and Siraj-Blatchford, and I., Taggart, B (2004) *The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) Project: the Final Report (Effective Preschool Education),* London: the Institute of Education.

Tang, F.L. (unpublished paper) (2005a) The cultural features of the curriculum in two Chinese kindergartens. Paper presented to the Early Childhood Research Seminar, 14th December 2005, Froebel College, Roehampton University, unpublished paper.

Tang, F.L. (2005b) Communication with originality: a case study of Chinese young children's unsolicited drawings, *Early Years Practice*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2005, pp. 30-50.

Tang, F.L. (2006a) The child as an active learner: views, practices, and barriers in Chinese early childhood education, *Childhood Education: Infancy Through Early Adolescence*, International Focus Issue 2006, Vol. 82, No. 6, pp. 342-346.

Tang, F.L. (unpublished paper) (2006b) Be taught to learn together, learning through play individually: an ethnographic study of the early years curriculum in two Chinese kindergartens and two English nursery schools. Paper presented to the Oxford Ethnography and Education Conference, 4-5th September 2006, St. Hildas College, Oxford University.

Tang, F.L. and Maxwell, S. (2007a) Be taught to learn together: an ethnographic study of the early childhood curriculum in two Chinese kindergartens, *Early Years*, Vol. 27, No. 2, July 2007, pp. 145-157.

Tang, F.L. (unpublished paper) (2007b) Contested childhood: voices from parents of young children in Chinese and English contexts, paper presented to the Oxford Ethnography Conference 11th – 12th September 2007, St Hilda's College, Oxford University.

Tang, Sh. (2000) *Kindergarten Curriculum Research and Practice,* Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press. (唐淑 主编 《幼儿园课程研究与实践》，南京师范大学出版社，2000 年。)

Tang, Sh. (2000) Chinese Kindergarten Curriculum System Research. In Tang, Sh. (ed.) *Kindergarten Curriculum Research and Practice,* Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press. (唐淑 '我国幼儿园课程体系的研究'，选自唐淑主编《幼儿园课程研究与实践》，南京师范大学出版社，2004 年。)

Tang, Sh. (2003) Reflection on early childhood centenary history, in *Preschool Education Research*, 2003, No. 5, pp. 43. (唐淑：'幼教百年沉思录（三）'。《学前教育研究》，2003 年，第 5 期，第 43 页。)

Tang, Sh. (ed.) (2004) *Kindergarten Curriculum Basic Theory and Reform,* Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press. (唐淑主编 《幼儿园课程基本理论和整体改革》。南京师范大学出版社，2004 年。)

Tang, X.J. (2005) On the relationship of kindergarten curriculum and teaching from a cultural angle of view, *Preschool Education Research*, 2005, No. 1, pp. 14-16. (唐晓娟 '幼儿园课程与教学——文化视角的审视和考察'。《学前教育研究》，2000 年第 1 期，第 14-16 页。)

Tassoni, P. and Hucker, K. (2000) *Planning Play and the Early Years,* Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.

Taylor, I.A. (1975) An emerging view of creative actions, in Taylor, I.A. and Getzels, J.W. (eds.) *Perspectives in Creativity,* Chicago: Aldine.

Tobin, J. (1999) Comparative classroom ethnography, in Alexander, R., Broadfoot, P. and Philips, D. (eds.) *Learning and Comparing: New Directions in Comparative Educational Research,* Oxford: Symposium Books.

Tobin, J., Wu, D. and Davidson, D. (1989) *Preschool in Three Cultures,* London: Yale University Press.

Troman, G. (2006) No entry signs: educational changes and some problems encountered in negotiating entry to educational settings, in Troman, G., Jeffrey, B., and Beach, D. (2006) (eds.) *Researching Educational Policy: Ethnographic experiences,* London: the Tufnell Press.

Troman, G., Jeffrey, B., and Beach, D. (eds.) (2006) *Researching Educational Policy: Ethnographic experiences,* London: the Tufnell Press.

Tobin, J., Wu, D.Y.H. and Davidson, D.H. (1989) *Preschool in three cultures,* New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Vulliamy, G. (2004) The impact of globalisation on qualitative research in comparative and international education, *Compare*, Vol. 34, No. 3, September 2004, pp. 261-284.

Walford, G. (ed.) (1991) *Doing Educational Research,* London: Routledge.

Walford, G. (2001) Site selection within comparative case study and ethnographic research, *Compare*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2001, Pp. 151-164.

Walsh, G., Sproule, L., McGuinness, C., Trew, K., Rafferty, H. and Sheehy, N. (2006) An appropriate curriculum for 4-5-year-old children in Northern Ireland: comparing play-based and formal approaches, *Early Years*, Vol. 26, July 2006, Pp. 201-221.

Waters, M. (1995) *Globalization,* London: Routledge.

Wang, B.Zh., Guo, Q.J., Liu, D.H., He, X.X., Gao, Q. (eds.) (1999) *Concise China Education History,* Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press.

Wang, C.S. (1999) *The Draft on Pedagogy,* Beijing: People Education Publisher. (王策三 著《教学论稿》。人民教育出版社，1999 年。)

Wang, Ch.Y. (2003) *A Historical Research on Chinese Kindergarten Curriculum Development of one century,* Beijing: Education and Science Publisher. (王春燕著《中学前课程百年发展与变革的历史研究》，教育科学出版社，2003 年。)

Wang, Q. and Cai, P. Y. (2003) *Kindergarten Explorative Project Approach Case Studies,* Shanghai: Shanghai Science and Technology Education Publication.

Wang, Q.X. (2003) *Kindergarten explorative project approach case studies,* Shanghai: Shanghai Science, Technology and Education Press. (王阙轩 主编 《幼儿园探索性主题活动案例》。上海科技教育出版社，2003 年。)

Wang, X.L. (ed.) (2003) *Young Children's Social Ability Development Integration Curriculum Research and Practice,* Ningbo: Ningbo Publisher. (王秀玲主编《幼儿社会发展和课程研究与实践》，宁波出版社，2003 年。)

Wang, X.Y. (2004) From foreign country to China: an interview on Reggio Emilia's approach, *Preschool Education Research*, 2004, No. 12, pp. 52-54.

Wang, Y.Y. (ed.) (2001) *Four-Five-Year-Olds Educational Activity: Kindergarten Aims and Activity Curriculum Teachers' Reference Book,* Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press. (王月媛 主编 《四至五岁教育活动：幼儿园目标与活动课程教师用书》。北京师范大学出版社，2001 年。)

Wang, Y.Y. (2006) How to face each child in preschool music, *Preschool Education Research*, 2006, No. 5, pp. 19-21. (王懿颖 学前儿童音乐教育怎样面对每一个幼儿。《学前教育研究》，2006 年，第 5 期，第 19-20 页。)

Weinberger, J. (1996) *Literacy Goes to School*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Wells, G. (1986) *The Meaning Makers: Children learning language and using language to learn,* London, Sydney, Auckland, and Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton.

Whitehead, M. (2002) *Developing Language and Literacy with Young Children* (2nd edition), London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage.

Williams, R. (1967) *Culture and Society 1780-1950,* London: Chatto & Windus.

Wilson, R.A. (2003) *Special Educational Needs in the Early Years* (2nd edition), London and New York: Routledge Falmer.

Wong, Y.Sh. (2001) *Young children's creativity education,* Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press.

Wood, D. (1998) Aspects of teaching and learning, in Woodhead, M., Faulkner, D. & Littleton, K. (eds.) *Cultural Worlds of Early Childhood,* London: Routledge in association with the Open University.

Wood, E. and Attfield, J. (2005) *Play, Learning and the Early Childhood Curriculum,* London, Thousand Oaks, and Delhi: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Woods, P. (1990) *Symbolic Interactionism: Theory and Method,* Milton Keynes: the Open University.

Woods, P. (1996) *Researching the Art of Teaching: Ethnography for Educational Use,* London and New York: Routledge.

Woods, P., Boyle, M. and Hubbard, N. (1999) *Multicultural Children in the Early Years: Creative Teaching, Meaningful Learning,* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

World Bank Group (2002) Summary of gender profile, in http://devdata.worldbank.org/genderstats/genderRpt.asp?rpt=profile&cty=CHN,China&hm=home (accessed on 2nd December 2007)

Worthington, M. and Carruthers, E. (2003) *Children's Mathematics: Making Marks, Making Meaning,* London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Worthington, M. and Carruthers, E. (2006) Mathematical development, in Bruce, T. (ed.) (2006) *Early Childhood: a Guide for Students,* London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Wu, C.H. (2006) Dialogue – the soul of children's drawing creation, *Early Childhood Education*, 2006, No. 10, pp. 24-25. (吴采红 '对话——幼儿绘画创作的灵魂'，《幼儿教育》，2006 年第 10 期，第 24-25 页。)

Wu, H.M. (2004) *Kindergarten New Curriculum Teaching Activities,* Guangzhou: Guangdong Higher Education Press. (吴惠明主编《幼儿园新课程教学活动案例》，广东高等教育出版社，2004 年。)

Xinhua Chinese Dictionary Editing Board (2004) *Xinhua Chinese Dictionary,* Beijing: Shangwu Publishing International Ltd. (《新华汉语词典编委会》编 《新华汉语词典》，商务印书馆国际有限公司，北京，2004 年。)

Xinhua News Agency (1980) Minister on China's education, *Xinhua Weekly,* Issue 606, No. 3, 25th September 1980.

Xu, Y.Er. (2006) On playfulness in children's literature, *Preschool Education Research*, 2006, No. 6, pp. 34-36. (许央儿 '论幼儿文学接受的游戏性特征'，《学前教育研究》，2006 年第 6 期，第 34-36 页。)

Yan, F.Y. (2000) Kindergarten bilingual education experiment, in Tang, Sh. (ed.) *Kindergarten Curriculum Research and Practice,* Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press. (颜芳英 幼儿园双语教育尝试。唐淑 主编 《幼儿园课程研究与实践》，南京师范大学出版社，2000 年。)

Yao, D.Y., and Fang, Y. (eds.) (2002) *Let Environment and Materials Have Dialogues with Young Children,* Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press. (幺丹彦、方燕 主编 《让环境和材料与幼儿对话》，北京师范大学出版社，2002 年。)

Yao, Li. (2004) The procedure review of the integration of Chinese traditional festival culture into kindergarten curriculum, *Preschool Education Research*, 2004, No. 7-8, pp. 83-87. (姚莉：""中国传统节日文化与幼儿园课程整合性研究"过程概述"。《学前教育研究》，2004 年 7-8 期，第 83-87 页。)

Ye, Zh. (2006) Develop children's science activities via family-kindergarten partnership, *Preschool Education Research*, 2006, No. 1, pp. 42-42. (叶钟 '家园互动开展幼儿科学教育活动'，《学前教育研究》，2006 年，第 1 期，第 42-43 页。)

Yin, R. (1994) *Case Study Research,* London: Sage.

Yu, B.F. (2000) *Chinese Preschool Education History,* Zhengzhou: Elephant Press. (俞本伐著《中国幼儿教育史》。郑州：大象出版社，2000 年。)

Yu, Y.P. (2000) Look into the over-load of kindergarten curriculum, in Tang, Sh. (ed.) *Kindergarten Curriculum Research and Practice,* Nanjing: Nanjing Normal

University Press (虞永平 '幼儿园课程超载透视'，选自唐淑主编《幼儿园课程研究与实践》，南京师范大学出版社，2000 年。)

Zhang, B. (ed.) (2004) *Young Children's Quality Education Curriculum Design and Practice Guidance,* Guangzhou: Guangdong Higher Education Press. (张博 主编《幼儿素质教育课程设计与实践导引》，广东高等教育出版社，2004 年。)

Zhang, D.N. and Fang, K.L. (eds.) (2004) *General Discussion on Chinese Culture,* Beijing: Beijing Normal University (张岱年、方克立 主编《中国文化概论》。北京师范大学出版社，2004 年。).

Zhang, H., Sun, H.J., Han, K.Q., and Xu, B.Zh. (eds.) (2004) *Kindergarten Construction Curriculum Guidance: Teacher Reference,* Shanghai: East China Normal University Press. (章红、孙浣敬、韩康倩、陈国强、徐蓓珍 主编 《幼儿园建构式课程指导教师用书》。上海：华东师范大学出版社，2003 年。)

Zhang, H. (2006) On the values of kindergartens' teaching materials, *Preschool Education Research*, 2006, No. 4, pp. 21-23. (张晖 '试论对幼儿园教材的价值审视'。《学前教育研究》，2006 年第 4 期，第 21-23 页。)

Zhang, J. (1997) On early years curriculum theory, in Tang, Sh. (ed.) (2004) *Kindergarten Curriculum Basic Theory and Reform,* Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press. Pp. 274-284. (张俊 试论幼儿教育课程理论的研究。唐淑主编《幼儿园课程基本理论和政体改革》，南京师范大学出版社，2004 年。)

Zhang, J. (2006) On contemporary kindergarten science curriculum reform, *Early Childhood Education*, 2006, No. 6, pp. 11-13. (张俊 '对当前幼儿园科学领域课程改革的思考'。《幼儿教育》，2006 年第 6 期，第 11-13 页。)

Zhao, N. (2006) The concept of ZPD and its impacts on kindergarten teaching, *Preschool Education Research*, 2006, No. 6, pp. 5-9. (赵南 ''最近发展区'概念解析及其对幼儿园教学的启示'，《学前教育研究》，2006 年第 6 期，5-9 页。)

Zhou, Ai.B., Ma, X.Y., and Qing, L.Zh. (2006) Parental expectation of child education: the comparison between China, Japan and Korea, *Preschool Education Research*, No. 4, pp. 60-62. (周爱保、马小凤、青柳肇 家长对幼儿教育的期望：中、日、韩三国之比较。《学前教育研究》，2006 年第 4 期，第 60-62 页。)

Zhu, J.X. (2003) *Kindergarten Curriculum,* Shanghai: North East China Normal University Press. (朱家雄 著 《幼儿园课程》。上海：华东师范大学出版社，2003 年。)

Zhu, J.Y. (2003) *Kindergarten Curriculum Based on Ability Development,* Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press. (朱静怡 著 《幼儿园发展能力课程》。南京：南京师范大学出版社，2003 年。)

Zhu, M.J. (2006) Return to the basic elements – an opening speech at the second conference of *Implementing the Kindergarten Educational Guidance Outlines.* Early Childhood Education, No. 10, Pp. 4-5. (朱慕菊 回到基本元素去——在全国第二次实施《纲要》经验交流会开幕式上的讲话。《幼儿教育》，2006 年，第 10 期，第 4-5 页。)

List of publications

The following is a list of journal publications which are related to my PhD research:

Tang, F.L. (2005) Communication with originality: a case study of Chinese young children's unsolicited drawings, *Early Years Practice*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2005, pp. 30-50.

Tang, F.L. (2006) The child as an active learner: views, practices, and barriers in Chinese early childhood education, *Childhood Education: Infancy Through Early Adolescence*, International Focus Issue 2006, Vol. 82, No. 6, pp. 342-346.

Tang, F.L. and Maxwell, S. (2007) Be taught to learn together: an ethnographic study of the early childhood curriculum in two Chinese kindergartens, *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, Vol. 27, No. 2, July 2007, pp. 145-157.