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Early childhood art education in Hong Kong: Is any theory informing practice?

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Abstract

This paper examines the field of art education for young children in Hong Kong with a focus on the curriculum policy. A number of researchers have found that effects of cultures on the conceptions and understanding of art education for young children and its values are significant in their process of formation (e.g., Duncum, 2000, 2002; Freedman, 2000; Gardner, 2004; Green, 2000; Piscitelli, 1999; Piscitelli, Renshaw, Dunn & Hawke, 2004; Schirrmacher, 2001; Wright, 1991, 1997, 2003). This paper has applied the framework of the three orientations from Efland (1990), i.e. expressionism, reconstructionism and scientific rationalism in the analysis of Hong Kong curriculum policy documents and found that contradictions in terms of principles and practices are embedded. It is argued that these hidden but value-loaded assumptions about theories and

practices in early childhood education and art education should be made explicit both in the formation of the policies and their implementation in schools if success is expected.

Introduction: Theoretical Perspectives in Art Education

There are different ways of mapping the terrain of visual art education[1]. A range of views on art education have been developed according to various beliefs about art or teaching and learning. To gain a thorough understanding of early childhood art education in Hong Kong, it is essential to look into the current situation through a theoretical framework. Arthur Efland (1990) is renowned in the field for his comprehensive history of art education, a history notable for its qualities of thoughtful coverage and interpretation. Art education, according to Efland (1990), can be categorized under three major streams which are rooted in the education ideologies of American and European thought. Firstly, the *expressionist view of art* embraces creative self-expression as a method of education. Secondly, the *reconstructionist view of art* considers that the knowledge learned through art can benefit human understanding. Third, the *scientific rationalist* view of art generates different ways to test academic ability and achievement and applies scientific means to curriculum development in art. All three ways of considering arts education — expressionist, reconstructionist, and scientific — go some way to explaining teachers' orientations to arts education.

This paper bases its analysis on Efland's (1990) framework: the expressionist orientation; the reconstructionist orientation; and the scientific rationalist orientation. Each orientation is presented in some detail, according to Efland's categorization and its connection with contemporary art education. Efland's framework is considered as too narrow and limited by some researchers (e.g., Ashton, 1997; Burnaford, Aprill & Weiss, 2001; Duncum, 1999; Golomb, 2002; McArdle, 2001; Siegesmund, 1998), so current

[1] In this paper, the terms "art education" and "art" refer to visual art.

post-modern ways of thinking about art education are discussed. This dual framework provides a new platform for early childhood art education in Hong Kong.

Expressionist Approaches

Expressionist approaches to education are grounded in nineteenth-century romantic idealism and received scientific sanction from psychoanalytic psychology (Efland, 1990). In this view, children are born with special potentials which are slowly repressed by conforming to society and by mechanical teaching methods. Expressionist approaches to art education fit well with the kindergarten movement, where *child-centred* schools adopted creative self-expression as the ultimate goal of art education. Expressionist approaches call for pedagogical strategies with fewer overt social constraints and expanded possibilities for personal expression (Efland, 1990).

Viktor Lowenfeld's work is well known in the field of art education (Burton, 2001; Lowenfeld, 1968; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987). He was an advocate of the expressionist approach and devised a systematic framework of six main stages of art development (Lowenfeld, 1968). These age-based stages are viewed as a consequence of inherited developmental predispositions and are organised around affect as the dominating force in the qualitative aspects of change in schema. Lowenfeld developed his thinking from Freud's emphasis on art as an outlet for the repressed feelings of the individual (Burton, 2001). Lowenfeld (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987) also thought free expression was essential for mental health. The goal of art education, according to Lowenfeld, is the development of creativity and sensitivity in children (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987). Lowenfeld saw children as natural artists (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987). Many educators accepted this view and looked for ways to enhance children's creative self-expression without imposing overt instruction or intervention (Efland, 1990). This line of thought sits well with ideas that art is a form of play, because of the level of freedom it allows

(Siegesmund, 1998). Within expressionist approaches, art is seen as enjoyable, tension-releasing, physical engagement with media, and a means for creating forms which are symbolic of human feeling (Kolbe, 1992).

Lowery and Wolf (1988) note that early childhood classrooms in the United States emphasize expression. In Australia too, a number of early childhood teachers appear to work within the expressionist framework (Piscitelli, 1997; Piscitelli, Pham & Chen, 1999). Expressionists argue that the key role of art education is to "protect and nurture the autonomous, imaginative life of the child" (Siegesmund, 1998, p. 200). Programmes are mainly exploration-based and give priority to creativity, discovery, exploration, experimentation and invention. It is easy to see, within this framework, how art, creativity and early childhood have traditionally been closely associated, as many theorists and practitioners believe that art nurtures creativity (Olson, 2003; Pierce, 1981).

The expressionist approach to art education calls for a specific role for the teacher. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) describe the desirable preschool teacher as a facilitator, rather than instructor. In this approach, direct teaching of skills is discouraged. Rather, the teacher provides resources and the environment, and then stands back, leaving the children to express themselves "freely". In their own words, "probably the biggest role a preschool teacher can play is a supportive one in the children's development of self-awareness and in the joy and pleasure they get from their environment" (p. 132).

Thompson (1995) notes the teacher's role in art education can be viewed as active, reserved and responsive. Gardner (1982) interprets the role of teachers as preparing a supportive environment for children's exploration, and enabling children's creative potential to unfold, instead of criticizing children's work. According to the expressionist approach, teachers should encourage children to express themselves instead of teaching them how to make art (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987; Korzenic, 1990; Wright, 1991).

Within this framework, exploration is seen as the essential means for emerging aesthetic awareness and the nurturing of children's natural tendency to use symbolic languages (Kindler, 1992; New, 1990).

While the expressionist approach provided young children with a welcome reprieve from the strict instruction of the academic approach, there are those who point out its shortcomings. One critique is that it provides unclear epistemological justification for art education and underestimates the cognitive function of art (Siegesmund, 1998). When art is only considered as an outlet of feelings and creative potential, and does not lead to academic outcomes, then it is often regarded as non-academic or *frill* subject in school (Siegesmund, 1998).

Kindler (1996) also believes that this overwhelming focus on creativity and self-expression causes the teachers' underestimation or neglect of the crucial role which they can play in children's art-making process, and the necessity for children to be taught skills and techniques which will enhance their artistic capabilities. Kindler (1995) proposes that one reason for the enduring appeal of this interpretation of a *child-centred approach* is that it requires minimal training for teachers. *Hands-off* for the teacher, *self-expression*, and *the process are more important than the product* are phrases commonly associated with this approach to children's art activities (Kindler, 1996; McArdle, 2001; Wright, 1995). Teachers who adopt this approach are often reluctant to participate in children's artistic experiences, fearing that they might interfere with children's self-esteem and creativity (Wright, 1995).

Burton (2001) states "we sometimes forget that we are not born knowing how to get ideas into materials, or how materials can be manipulated to shape ideas and create meaning" (p. 41). She maintains that the critical role of teacher is to help children to reflect and express their experiences through visual images and through dialogue.

According to theories of learning and development through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), adults' subtle support is essential to flourish children's creativity and artistic development (Kindler, 1997; Matthews, 1999, 2003).

Whilst the children in expressionist classrooms may enjoy art-making activities, they may also be illiterate and inadequate artistically if teachers play no part in the children's art-making and exploration process (Kindler, 1995). Children need to have sufficient art concepts and skills in order to express themselves through art (Anderson & Milbrandt, 1998; Kolbe, 2001; Matthews, 2003; McArdle, 2003; Wright, 2003). One conclusion is that excellent teaching and learning in art should provide a balance between skills and concept attainments on the one hand, and creative self-expression on the other hand.

Re-constructionist Approaches

The re-constructionist approach to arts education has its roots in the progressive movement (Efland, 1990). Besides being seen as the fundamental means of expression and communication, art activity is seen by some as offering therapeutic benefit along with intellectual and social value (Efland, 1990; Siegesmund, 1998). In this view, art education can play an active role in the transformation of society. Both art and education have instrumental value, as vehicles to transmit messages. Dewey and his progressive approach to education emphasized art as an aspect of community experience, human knowledge and understanding rather than just a subject (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1996). Winslow (1939, cited in Efland, 1990) urged that art balances the curriculum and broadens children's social outlook. Accordingly, knowledge learned through art empowers children's understanding and reconstructs other new knowledge. Importantly for the re-constructionist, art is an apparatus for analysis that can be applied and

facilitated in other disciplines (Siegesmund, 1998, p. 203). The process of artistic inquiry is a way of seeing and knowing (Wright, 2003).

Rather than the expressionists' mantra "art for art's sake", re-constructionists propose shifting the role of art education away from art as a subject in and of itself (Siegesmund, 1998), and recognise *art for life's sake*, as a means of acquiring important life skills. Some re-constructionists believe that an integrated arts curriculum enhances students' personal creativity, character, involvement and cooperation in school, as well as the school's curricular and communal cohesion (Burnaford, Aprill & Weiss, 2001; Catterall, 1998; National Endowment for the Arts & U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Educators from this point of view advocate for the integration of art into other curriculum areas, as a vehicle for learning (Efland, 1990; Siegesmund, 1998). They see art as nourishing the learning of other subjects (Pierce, 1981).

Through this framework, an integrated curriculum can manifest in different forms, such as project-based, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary (Drake, 1993; Krug & Cohen-Evron, 2000; Ulbricht, 1998). Interdisciplinary components are found in the US-based *National Standards for Arts Education* developed by the Consortium of National Arts Education Association in 1994 (Ulbricht, 1998). Teachers with re-constructionist views organize learning through daily experiences and instructional resources for problem solving (Efland, 1995). The role of the teacher is to facilitate children's daily exploration (Cadwell, 1997).

The approach employed in Reggio Emilia, a city in northern Italy, embraces the re-constructionist rationale. Teachers here regard art as a language and seek to enable young children to express their understanding of the surrounding world, and thereby foster their intellectual development (Davilia & Koenig, 1998; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993). The Reggio approach is most appreciated for the successful linkage it

makes between children's intellectual capacity and creativity (Danko-McGhee & Slutsky, 2003; Kellman, 1994). Here, art is seen as one of the languages for communication, as a visual symbolic language. Visual and symbolic languages are seen as the central components of the curriculum for the preschools and nurseries in Reggio Emilia.

The *atelierista* (art specialist) plays an important role in implementing the Reggio Emilia approach. The *atelierista* supports both children's learning and teachers' daily teaching. There is a strong collaborative link among teachers, parents, *pedogagisti* and *atelierista* (Filippini, 1993; Vecchi, 1993). Reggio children are provided with plenty of time and opportunities to play and become familiar with a number of arts media (Cadwell, 1997; Tarr, 2001, 2003). Children are encouraged to examine the "rich combinations and creative possibilities among their different (symbolic) languages" (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 68). Through daily exploration, children are encouraged to represent their understanding through the use of different visual media, like clay and drawing tools. Children's sense of colours and observation skills are enhanced through teachers' thoughtfully designed activities. Children learn through their interactions with peers and teachers as a process of co-construction and cooperation (Malaguzzi, 1993).

Early childhood educators in other countries who have adopted the Reggio approach share the view of young children as individuals with rights and potentials to theorize, experiment and express their thinking in many different ways, especially through drawing, painting, three-dimensional construction, and other creative representation models (Gandini, 1993; Malaguzzi, 1993; Millikan, 1992; Tarr, 2001, 2003). Returning from a study tour to Reggio Emilia, Hertzog (2001) commented that Reggio was not about art alone. The curriculum goes beyond treating art as either a separate and discrete discipline, or a means to learn in other disciplines. Reggio children, according to Hertzog's account,

use art as a medium to tell their understandings about their lives. Reggio teachers focus on children's thinking and learning through the graphic languages.

There are those who criticize the re-constructionist approach. Siegesmund (1998) argued that the re-constructionist approach is a curricular rather than an epistemological rationale for art education. As art is viewed from a social concern, Eisner (1988) questioned the appropriateness of art becoming a device through which inquiry is carried out, rather than the subject matter of inquiry. Efland (1990) raised the concern that art becomes the servant of other learning domains and Eisner (1994) warned against art becoming a "hand-maiden to the social studies" (p. 190).

Smith (1982, cited in Ulbricht, 1998) noted that the integrated approach in *National Standards for Arts Education,* while making a space for the importance of the arts in the curriculum, failed to acknowledge the uniqueness of art such as its history, standards, and forms of evaluating art (p. 15). While the arts may well enhance learning in other discipline areas, Smith insisted that the arts remain as a unique discipline. Re-constructionists count on teachers' capability to be versed in all the subjects in the curriculum, or being part of a highly collaborative teaching team (Efland, 1990).

Scientific Rationalist Approaches

The third major orientation in art education Efland (1990) refers to is the scientific rationalist approach. Working in this framework, arts educators search for an empirical base for art education, and refer to the structure of discipline (Bruner, 1960, 1996). Scientific rationalists regard art as more than self-expression and creativity (Efland, 1990), insisting that art education involves teaching a discipline, "with distinct methods for conducting inquiry and forming judgement" (Siegesmund, 1998, p. 204). Here, discipline refers to "fields of study that are marked by recognized communities of scholars, and accepted methods of inquiry" (Clark, Day & Greer, 1987, p. 131).

This school of thought shifted the emphasis of art education from child-centred to studio-focused art curriculum (Efland, 1990; Marché, 2002). Rather than beginning from the notion that the child should be left to freely experiment, discover, and create, the scientific rationalist approach stresses the organized body of knowledge in art, either from a curriculum and content planning view, or developmental psychology aspects (Efland, 1990; Siegesmund, 1998). Smith (1982, 1983) was one such proponent, who encouraged an approach where children's self-expression through art-making be supported by an understanding of a range of concepts fundamental to the discipline of art. Eisner (1988, 1998) emphasised the content to be taught in art education and the contribution of art to cognition (Efland, 1990, 2004; Siegesmund, 1998, 2004). While the creative self-expression approach places greater emphasis on art activities over formal learning about content in art, discipline-based art education, in contrast, insists that alongside their being actively involved in making art, children should learn about art history, art appreciation, and aesthetics (Eisner, 1988).

In 1982, Eisner (1988) suggested that if art education was to move from the sidelines of instruction to a more central place in a balanced school curriculum, its content needed to be revised in line with views that treat art as an academic discipline, which involves a specific body of knowledge and specific skills. This Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) approach has had a lasting influence on curriculum planning in a number of countries, and has been more recently modified by discipline-centered reforms (Clark, Day & Greer, 2000). DBAE consists of four content areas: art production (processes and techniques for creating art), art history (contexts in which art has been created), art criticism (bases for valuing and judging art) and aesthetics (conceptions of the nature of art) (Clark, Day & Greer, 1987, 2000; Eisner, 1988, 1998; Greer, 1984). Each of these four areas are recognised as of equal importance, since each develops

knowledge and techniques that contribute significantly not only to children's artistic creations, but also to their ability to draw inferences about the cultural and historical contexts for art, and to analyze and interpret the powerful ideas that art communicates (Schiller, 1995). Using this framework for arts education, the Getty Center for Education in the Arts (1985, 1993) claims that art education is the best way for children to develop their mental capabilities and realize their fullest potential.

Teachers who use DBAE to inform their curriculum planning work to provide opportunities for students to learn basic skills, conceptual content and disciplinary inquiry skills in art. They believe that children can be more productive through free experimentation and exploration *after* proper instruction (Stevenson, Lee & Graham, 1993). Children are taught to develop knowledge about artistic concepts, skills and techniques, mainly through their learning experiences, which involve both engagement and reflection (Efland, 1995).

While the DBAE approach is recognized by many as bringing a richer approach to the teaching of art, there are critics. For instance, Efland (1990) raises the question of the appropriateness of scientifically driven accountability being brought to bear on the curriculum, and the epistemological shift that this entails:

> This shift to pre-established instructional objectives changed the view of knowledge. Knowledge became something already known by the teacher rather than something that can be the result of the student's own intellectual activity. (p. 262)

There are those who raise concerns that, in turning art into a discipline area like other school curriculum areas, the emotional, spiritual and more intangible qualities of art are lost to the cognitive (Clark, Day & Greer, 2000). Whilst it was never Eisner's intent to remove art production from his model for arts education, nevertheless it can be argued that this is how Eisner's model has been distorted or misinterpreted. The tendency is to make art learning a passive form of engagement, as has been evidenced in many arts

education institutions by their reduction in the time and importance assigned to studio work. Currently this is evident in tertiary art colleges, and may also be partly due to economic measures, which support the cost effectiveness of delivering classes in art history and appreciation over the cost of intensive studio teaching. Similarly, but perhaps for a variety of reasons, teachers of young children may find the art appreciation lesson a more attractive option than "messy" hands on art activities. DBAE is designed to be taught by art specialists, thus classroom teachers need further training or support to implement the curriculum. Marché (2002) considered art history and critique were difficult for teachers to understand and that this approach would not "serve as viable models for teaching young children" (p. 29).

Siegesmund (1998) critiques developmental psychology and its privileging of cognition intelligences over artistic or aesthetic intelligence (Gardner, 1982, 1993). In comparing Eisner's form of representations with Gardner's view on intelligences, Elfand (2004) noted that Gardner stressed the equal right of each intelligence while Eisner emphasised the interactions among conceptions arising in different sensory modalities. Furthermore, the Developmentally Appropriate Practice curriculum documentation (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1995) which is influential in the implementation of many early childhood programmes, gives very little space to any consideration of the arts.

This review of the three orientations of art education is not a search for the one *correct* orientation but, rather, a signaling of the possible traces which may be found in teachers' current approaches to arts education. Schools and individual teachers can and do vary their approach. This can also be contingent on time, place, culture, economics, and social factors. Teachers are not always aware of how their beliefs are shaped. Rather, their arts education strategies have become "taken for granted" practices. Siegesmund

(1998) highlighted that teachers select certain elements from the three orientations to form their own approach.

Early Childhood Art Education: Curriculum Policy in Hong Kong

The reviews done by Efland (1990) and Siegesmund (1998) on the orientation of art education focus only on art in American and European contexts which are firmly based on Western views of art and arts education. The following section will examine the field of early childhood art education in Hong Kong, for evidence of the three orientations influencing curriculum practice. It is important to note that early childhood art education is a largely unexplored area in Hong Kong with very few studies of the practices related to children's artistic and creative practice. Wong (1997) found that early childhood teachers have an ambiguous understanding of art education theories; in the absence of clear policy directions, teachers tended to affiliate their practices with re-constructionist strategies for delivering art experiences to children via projects and activity-based programs. Wong (2007) also found that teachers have two conceptions of art and art education: they believe art is "human nature" – i.e., something that is a natural part of children's daily life, and art is a "task" – i.e., a necessary activity to be completed as part of the school curriculum (Wong, 2007, p. 157). Such narrow conceptions of art education are puzzling – why do early childhood teachers have such limited understanding? The reasons may be found in various places including Hong Kong's official curriculum policy documents.

Hong Kong's early childhood education policy and practice is an eclectic mix of endorsed official policy with a considerable amount of locally taken-for-granted practice (or unofficial policy). The system of early childhood education for preschool aged children is managed by a network of privately owned and run centres. In recent years,

under Hong Kong education system and curriculum reforms, early childhood education has come to more prominent social attention and is seen as the foundation for lifelong learning (Education Commission, 2000). Attempts have been made to standardize and specify curriculum policy for all Hong Kong early childhood education programs, and in 2006 a guide to early childhood curriculum was published as the official policy document for Hong Kong preschools and kindergartens.

In the guide to early childhood curriculum issued by the Curriculum Development Institute (CDI), the focus of the overall curriculum is on a "learner-focused approach" (CDI, 2006, p.7). In this connection, child-centeredness is regarded as the core-value of early childhood education. Specific patterns and characteristics in children's development are seen as essential and children are believed to be capable of constructing knowledge. In the broad curriculum for young children, the expressionist orientation seems to inform the early childhood curriculum adopted and encouraged in Hong Kong. Certain key expressionist concepts are mentioned in the document: (a) a clear endorsement of children's innate ability and drive to learn (p. 8); (b) an emphasis on happy learning experiences (p. 12); (c) a focus on teaching and learning approaches that incorporate observation, exploration, thinking and imagination (p.12); and (d) a romantic notion towards learning which expects children's abilities and potential to be developed through integrated, open, flexible and developmentally appropriate programs (p. 10).

The guide recommends that preschools design their local curriculum based on the child-centred principles, and that they adopt play as a key learning strategy. Further, the guide stress that play is children's fondest activity and claims it is the most effective way for children to learn, as it "enables them to express their inner feelings and explore the real world" (CDI, 2006, p.41). Consequently, the guide stresses that preschools "should incorporate play activities into different learning areas and plan the curriculum through

an integrated approach" (CDI, 2006, p.41). With the highlight on child-centeredness, the notion of expressionist practice is deeply embedded in the Hong Kong early childhood curriculum framework. Even so, the guide also emphasizes important values towards integrated learning and project learning (CDI, 2006, p.45), thus affiliating with re-constructionist approaches towards pedagogy.

The curriculum guide categorises visual arts education under the learning area of "Arts". The Arts focuses goals and outcomes on enhancement of children's aesthetic development. Aesthetic development is described as providing options for children to show "expression of their inner thoughts, feelings, emotions and imagination through the language of different media" (CDI, 2006, p. 20). The aims of this area of children's learning are heavily driven by expressionist values: (a) to enjoy the fun of different creative works through their senses and bodies; (b) to enhance their expression and powers of communication through imagination and association; (c) to express themselves through different media and materials; (d) to appreciate the beauty of nature and works of art; (e) to experience different cultures and develop diversified visions; and (f) to develop creativity (CDI, 2006, p. 35).

Central concepts focus on children's expressive, hands-on, creative and appreciative qualities and characteristics. Specifically, the objectives of arts education for early childhood are:

i. to allow children to explore different art media and symbols in an aesthetically rich and diversified environment;
ii. to enrich children's sensory experiences and encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings;
iii. to stimulate children's creative and imaginative powers, and encourage them to enjoy participating in creative works;

iv. to enhance children's quality of life and foster their interests in life by guiding them to appreciate the surrounding environment. (CDI, 2006, p. 20)

Some anomalies and inconsistencies can be found when reading the official principles carefully. For example, early childhood teachers may be confused about how to conduct creative and artistic practices by these contradictory messages.

a. The guide claims: "In order to cultivate children's aesthetic sensitivity and appreciation capability, the teaching environment should embrace a creative and artistic atmosphere. Children's artistic works can be used for classroom decoration." (CDI, 2006, p. 35) Thus, we wonder: *Does this imply that children's artistic practice is merely decorative?*

b. The guide states: "Diversified activities which focus on the learning process rather than the acquisition of skills and knowledge are recommended, as children will find them enjoyable." (CDI, 2006, p. 35) Thus, we question: *Does this mean that teachers should only focus on expressionist process-based strategies, and not consider the knowledge accumulated through serious engagement with art practices?*

c. The guide explains: "Teachers should encourage children to use different senses, especially their sense of touch, and their gross and fine motor skills to explore and try things out, so as to develop their creativity and enhance the fun of creative activities." (CDI, 2006, p. 36) We ask: *Does this focus on sensory pleasure and fun give any credit to the key issues of problem solving, cognition and innovation that are part of creative practice?*

d. The guide directs: "Teachers should guide children to take the initiative to learn,

> and give them sufficient time and freedom to choose different art activities to express their life experiences, thoughts and feelings." (CDI, 2006, p. 36) Further, the guide states: "More opportunities should be provided for children to appreciate diversified arts, so as to broaden their knowledge of art and cultivate their appreciation ability. We question: *How do these statements sit alongside the earlier comments? Should teachers situate their practice in aesthetics instruction, in guided learning via self-expression or in playful fun activity?*

These CDI (2006) principles for art education are very broad but obviously very "expressionist" oriented. Teachers are directed to provide a creative and artistic physical environment decorated with children's artistic work. Stimulating daily lives, surroundings and objects which encourage visual awareness are not included. The psychological atmosphere in the learning area which encourages risk-taking is neglected. The CDI (2006) emphasizes art making which does not necessarily lead to any outcomes but fun. The development of creativity – one of the most highly valued qualities for 21st century education – is described in the document as an option for children's sensory engagement, and not as an opportunity for them to present and develop innovative ideas. The CDI (2006) guide is silent about how teachers might attempt to promote creative practice in the early years. Throughout the CDI (2006) guide, the teachers' role is seen as passive in the art-making process as they only have to provide children with sufficient time and freedom to make art, and to support children to further develop or expand their ideas. It is interesting to note that CDI (2006, p. 36) guide stresses that knowledge of art should be gained from appreciation instead of art-making process.

In the early childhood art curriculum, traces of expressionist orientations can be located, with the emphasis on an interpretation of creativity as fun. Expectations placed

on the teachers for art education are in stark contrast to the rest of the curriculum, with an expressionist *laissez faire* approach still dominant in the guidelines (CDI, 2006). On the surface, it might appear that the arts are positioned as important, as they are included in the curriculum guidelines, but their differences in aims, objectives, teaching approaches and outcomes form a point of difference which can be read as reinforcing the position of the arts as "outside" the more important, academic objectives of the curriculum. Paradoxically, while making space for art in the curriculum, these special directions for teachers can work to position the arts as not as important, or rigorous, as the more academic learning areas.

With the stress on child development and child-centeredness of the CDI (2006) guide, a set of developmental characteristics of children is provided as appendix to the guidelines. The appendix focuses on descriptions of areas of physical, intellectual, language, social and emotional development of young children, but nothing is said about aesthetic/creative/artistic development. There is no specific note to explain the omission of the references on aesthetic development and this reflects the minimal concerns in early arts education.

Even so, a review of the developmental characteristics information provided in the guidelines (CDI, 2006) indicates that some attention is given to children's artistic, aesthetic and creative learning. However, this shallow understanding of artistic, aesthetic and creative development in the early years actually discredits children's potential, awareness and understanding in this important area of learning.

Table 1

Activities and Outcomes for Children in Hong Kong Preschools: Excerpts about creative, artistic and aesthetic learning *(CDI, 2006, pp. 80-92)*

	Physical	***Intellectual***
4-7 months		Show interest in colourful pictures
1-2 years	Scribble with crayon	
2-3 years	Know how to play with clay with their hands. Gradually able to draw lines, circles, etc.	
3-4 years	Use scissors to cut paper strips. Use fingers to glue things. Begin to hold a pencil properly to do drawing. Try to fill color in a random manner. Able to draw a cross and inclined line by imitation.	Able to draw a person with head and some body parts.
4-5 years	Able to cut simple pattern. Able to fold a piece of paper along an inclined line. Able to stick several pieces of plasticine together. Able to draw quadrilaterals	Able to point out what is inconsistent in a picture Able to recall four things in a picture just seen. Able to draw a man with head, body limbs and features of the face.
5-6 years	Able to fill colour in an assigned area when paying attention.	Able to draw a rhombus and a triangle by imitation. Able to describe a picture

It would appear that the curriculum document view creative, artistic and aesthetic learning as a medium of learning and to support outcomes of children's development in other domains. Children's learning and performance in arts are only important as they are functional instead of for creative and artistic education itself.

Interestingly, another official document, the Performance Indicators (Pre-primary Institutions): Domain on Children's Development (Education and Manpower Bureau & Social Welfare Department, 2003), includes a section on aesthetic development. This document defines "outcome indicators" (p.6) for preschools which reflect the effectiveness and quality of teaching in preschools. Creativity and self-expression are strongly emphasized in this document and teachers are expected to look for five key outcomes of children's artistic and creative engagement, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2

Creative and Aesthetic Performance Indicators: Hong Kong Preschools (Education and Manpower Bureau & Social Welfare Department, 2003, p.9)

Aspect	***Items of performance***
Creativity and ability to appreciate various forms of beauty	Able to use and try different materials and ways to express personal experience and feelings
	Willing to participate in creative activities
	Appreciate his/her own and others' work or performances
	Able to use imagination and creativity in art and design, music, dancing, imaginative play, role-playing and story-telling
	Show interest in various forms of beauty, and appreciate the beauty of life.

The Performance Indicators emphasize scientific rationalist approaches to education, with emphasis given to a range of DBAE type outcomes where artistic and creative practice are endorsed and emphasized. Even so, the performance indicators stress a kind of playful engagement in artistic and creative practice that is rooted in expressionist approaches, and in that way shares some similar ground with the CDI (2006) guidelines.

Early childhood teachers in Hong Kong could be very confused about what to adopt as a valid and clear approach to early childhood art education. On the one hand, the CDI (2006) document shows low value for artistic cognition and aesthetic development, with little emphasis on the serious business of making, presenting and interpreting art in the early childhood years. Still rooted in the paradigm of developmental psychology, the CDI (2006) ignores children's artistic practice as valued learning outcomes and relegates artistic outcomes to minor mentions in linguistic and intellectual learning. So, an early childhood teacher in Hong Kong might think it is not at all important to teach art. Yet, on the other hand, under the push to improve performance in teaching and learning, the same teachers might wonder how to promote the valued components of creativity, imagination and artistic practice.

Conclusion

In the early part of the twenty-first century, the curriculum for early childhood art education in Hong Kong is in a confused and underdeveloped state. For the most part, the curriculum ignores artistic practice, but when mentioned, presents contradictory and confusing orientations for teachers to follow. The dominance of the modernist-expressionist orientation to art in Hong Kong's early childhood curriculum is evident, and traces of this approach can be located in the CDI (2006) guidelines and the Performance Indicators (Education and Manpower Bureau & Social Welfare Department, 2003). Even so, scientific-rationalist and re-constructionist approaches are stressed in official policies, and teachers are certainly free to select how they want to develop and promote art in the early years. At times, the various approaches sit side by side, and give rise to the possibilities for practices and outcomes which might either complement or contradict each other (McArdle, 2001). What forms should Hong Kong early childhood

art education take? There is no perfect or absolute answer. More important is whether teachers are aware of the problems in the current early childhood art curriculum, and whether teachers are able to recognize the inherent creative and artistic values regarding knowledge that are embedded in art education.

Early childhood art education in Hong Kong is at a crossroads and needs to look forward to find a new direction. With increasing emphasis given to creativity and cultural engagement in Hong Kong (Hui, 2007), there is a need to reconsider the place of art in the early childhood curriculum. Much has been written about the need for arts education reform in Hong Kong and many new strategic actions have been put in place to ensure the evolution of new arts education practices (Chan & Shu, 2006); but it would appear that the early childhood years have been forgotten and neglected as part of a comprehensive arts education renewal. While the past has been well served by the three key approaches to art education reviewed in this paper, these paradigms no longer suit early childhood curriculum. The time has come to develop a clear and new direction for early childhood art education in Hong Kong. A new approach to early childhood art education should consider contemporary theories, emergent practices and locally relevant issues in creative, cultural and artistic development for Hong Kong's young children.

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