

Thursday, 10 November 2011

13:00 – 14.30, Room 903

Concurrent Session 6 – Presentation 6-4

Facilitating the development of the under threes: Observations from Hong Kong

Carrie Lau is a PhD Candidate in Early Childhood Education at the University of Hong Kong under the supervision of Professor Nirmala Rao. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Child Development from Tufts University and her Master of Education in Human Development and Psychology from Harvard Graduate School of Education. Prior to pursuing a doctorate, she worked as a research assistant and a preschool head teacher in Boston and Hong Kong respectively. Her research interest includes second language acquisition, vocabulary development and bilingualism.

Diana Lee is a PhD Candidate at the Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong. Her current research interests are the implementation of trilingual (Cantonese, English and Putonghua) education in Hong Kong kindergartens and educational management in the early years. She has an MPhil in Research in Second Language Education from the University of Cambridge, an MEd in Early Childhood Education from The University of Hong Kong, and a Bachelor's degree in Commerce and Japanese Studies from Murdoch University. Diana is a qualified kindergarten teacher and has ten years of administrative and leadership experience in an international school in Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong government has always maintained that the primary responsibility for young children rests with the family and has a number of policies in place to support the development of young children. Hong Kong boasts of one of the lowest infant- and under-five mortality rates in the world and does well on other health indices. However, the territory is not without problems. For example, the high Gini coefficient signals inequality. Children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds have less stimulating home environments and less access to opportunities which promote early development. On the other hand, Chinese cultural values including the emphasis placed on education and the increasingly competitive world is associated with middle- and upper-middle class families "overscheduling" their young children and sending them to "stimulating" programmes by the time they are three years. The concern in this case is not whether children are "ready" for (pre) school but whether they are playing enough and not being pushed too hard.

Against the background of Chinese cultural values and Hong Kong's unique context, this paper introduces the Hong Kong context and critically evaluates the territory's status and challenges in terms of maternal health; child health; parenting programmes; early childhood programmes for the under-threes; equity; legal protection; and political commitment for the under-threes.