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CREATIVITY

Theories – Research – Applications

Vol. 9, Issue 1, 2022

Arts and Creativity in Hong Kong Kindergartens: A Document Analysis of Quality Review Reports

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ABSTRACT

In Hong Kong, the Education Bureau (EDB) regularly assesses the quality of services provided by publicly subsidized kindergartens to children aged 3 to 6. Quality Review (QR) reports are written by government officials and published on the EDB's website. This study analyzes the feedback pertaining to Arts and Creativity to better understand the role this learning area plays in Hong Kong kindergartens. Lexical and content analyses were applied on 164 QR reports published between 2017 and 2020. Findings showed that: (1) the role of Arts and Creativity in the QR reports is relatively minor, which suggests that this learning area is somewhat secondary in Hong Kong kindergartens; (2) presence of the various art forms differs significantly, with Music and Visual Arts being more frequent than Drama and especially Dance; and (3) classroom activities seem to be teacher-centered, product-oriented, and reproductive. Findings suggest that the Arts and Creativity pedagogies enacted in Hong Kong kindergartens are not fully consistent with the official kindergarten Curriculum Guide, which draws on a Western conceptualization of creativity in the arts. We argue that this curriculum/practice gap reveals the need for local stakeholders to embrace a "glocalization" paradigm. Limitations, future research, and implications are discussed.

KEYWORDS:

arts and creativity; kindergarten education; curriculum; pedagogy; educational policy; document analysis

Article history:

Received: February 14, 2022
Received in revised form: June 10, 2022
Accepted: June 21, 2022

ISSN 2354-0036
DOI: 10.2478/ctra-2022-0005

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Acknowledgments

This study was supported by the project, titled "Arts and Creativity in Hong Kong Kindergartens: Towards *Glocal* Pedagogies" (grant #04592), funded by the Department of Early Childhood Education at The Education University of Hong Kong. The views expressed herein are the authors' own and do not necessarily represent the views of their institution.

INTRODUCTION

In Hong Kong, kindergartens provide education services to children aged 3 to 6. Kindergarten education is not compulsory, but most children in the territory attend center-based programs (Rao et al., 2018). The Education Bureau (EDB) is the government agency responsible for formulating and implementing education-related policies. A minimal-interventionist approach has been traditionally adopted by the EDB, based on which kindergarten education is run by private operators, even though it is publicly regulated, monitored, and subsidized (EDB, 2020). The system provides freedom to private operators to adopt various educational approaches, while ensuring they meet certain basic quality requirements. In 2016, the EDB designed the Quality Review (QR) framework to assess the quality of services provided by publicly subsidized kindergartens (here referred to as local kindergartens) and to promote their continuous improvement. The QR reports are written by government officials and published on the EDB's website[1] for consideration of the various stakeholders (e.g., principals, teachers, parents, teacher educators).

This study analyzes the feedback pertaining to Arts and Creativity in the QR reports to better understand the role this learning area plays in Hong Kong's local kindergartens. We considered QR reports pertaining to a large number of kindergartens (N=164). The analysis of this dataset is meaningful because most local studies in the area have been qualitative and based on a small number of kindergartens at a time, as explained below. This section is structured into three subsections. First, the conceptual framework introduces Western perspectives on Arts and Creativity in contemporary Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings. More specifically, we define the key constructs involved in the study, highlight the benefits of various art forms on child development and learning, and illustrate Western pedagogical approaches where Arts and Creativity play a central role. Second, we examine Hong Kong's official curriculum vision for Arts and Creativity, showing how it has been influenced by Western discourses. This is followed by a review of the Hong Kong classroom-based research literature on specific art forms and a discussion on how local pedagogies are influenced by practical constraints, social mindsets, and traditional cultural values. The final sub-section describes Hong Kong's QR framework and further elaborates on the significance of conducting a systematic document analysis centered on this dataset.

1 Please visit: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/quality-assurance-framework/qr/qr-report/index.html

Conceptual Framework: Western Perspectives on Arts and Creativity in ECE

In Western ECE settings, it is widely accepted that children's full participation in the arts must include "music, songs, and dance; drama and theater; and visual arts and crafts" (Menzer, 2015, p. 5). These are known to foster self-expression of young children and consequently their creativity. Western ECE scholars have defined the notion of creativity in terms of "originality, imagination, divergent thinking, and the ability to create something new or to combine things in novel but meaningful ways" (Essa & Burnham, 2019, p. 214). Scholars focusing on different art forms concur in that fostering creativity in the arts requires three recursive components: (a) exploration and/or discovery of elements pertaining to the art form at hand; (b) experimentation and/or improvisation with said elements; and (c) creation, composition, and/or performance of original final products (Abdulla Alabbasi et al., 2020; Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2019; Fox & Schirrmacher, 2015).

Arts and Creativity is a powerful learning area to promote children's curiosity and flexibility, as well as their interest in investigation and exploration (Murillo et al., 2021). These are essential skills to prepare children for the future in an increasingly unpredictable world, where they will need to solve new problems, express themselves, invent, create, and innovate (Graham, 2021). For these reasons, many national and international organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC] (2019) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2019) have suggested that all children should be offered opportunities for creativity and artistic self-expression. In fact, Arts and Creativity is included in ECE curriculum frameworks around the world (e.g., Boletín Oficial del Estado [BOE], 2006; Curriculum Development Council [CDC], 2017; New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2019).

Four art forms are typically included in ECE curriculum frameworks: (1) Visual Arts (e.g., drawing, painting, printmaking, play dough); (2) Music (e.g., singing, playing musical instruments, listening, improvising, composing); (3) Dance (e.g., choreographed performances, creative movement, expressive dance); and (4) Drama (e.g., theatre, role-play, dramatic play, improvisations, animations; see Essa & Burnham, 2019). While contemporary ECE curricula advocate for the integration of multiple art forms and learning areas within larger curriculum units (Drake & Reid, 2018), research shows that each art form fosters specific cognitive, socio-emotional, and/or motor skills. For example, evidence shows that Visual Arts can help children develop their emergent literacy and communication skills (Phillips et al., 2010). Music activities support neurological growth, self-regulation, and socio-emotional skills (Henriksson-Macaulay & Welch, 2015). Dance activities contribute to reducing children's behavioral problems and improving their social competencies (Lobo & Winsler, 2008). Lastly, Drama enhances children's confidence, self-esteem, communication, interpersonal skills, and aesthetic awareness (Goldstein & Lerner, 2018).

Given the multiple benefits of Arts and Creativity, it is not surprising that Western pedagogues in recent centuries had designed curriculum approaches where this learning area plays a central role. For example, the Montessori approach focuses on developing children's artistic expression, problem-solving skills, and creative solutions (Lillard & Jessen, 2017). Educators design visually appealing learning environments equipped with sensory-based materials, which are offered to facili-

tate hands-on learning experiences and children's embodied understanding of abstract concepts. Fleming et al. (2019) showed that students educated in Montessori preschools perform better than non-Montessori students in the Evaluation of Potential Creativity assessment. Another example is Reggio Emilia, a child-centered approach based on the tenet of respect for children's originality. Children are viewed as creative constructors of knowledge, able to utilize 100 languages to express themselves (Vecchi, 2010). It is understood that learning occurs both individually and collectively, hence teachers are encouraged to provide space for children to pursue their own interests as well as opportunities for collaborative work, sharing, and discussion. Hanna (2014) showed that the strategies adopted by Reggio Emilia teachers contribute to further developing children's critical and creative thinking.

Arts and Creativity in Hong Kong Local Kindergartens

Due to its history as a British colony and the influences of globalization, Hong Kong's recent policy developments in the field of ECE have been strongly influenced by theories, pedagogies, and values from the Western world (Rao et al., 2018). This phenomenon can be clearly observed in the importance given to Arts and Creativity in official policy frameworks, including curriculum guidelines, licensing and quality assurance frameworks, and teacher education programs (Bautista et al., 2021).

Arts and Creativity is included in Hong Kong's Kindergarten Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2017) as one of the six learning areas regarded as essential for children's balanced development. Teachers in local kindergartens are expected to introduce children to the four above-mentioned art forms: Visual Arts, Music, Dance, and Drama. The Arts and Creativity learning area presents three main learning objectives: "1) to develop sensory abilities and accumulate art experiences; 2) to express feelings and unleash creativity through presenting and creating the arts; and 3) to develop creativity through active exploration in art activities" (CDC, 2017, p. 47).

The Curriculum Guide argues that children's imagination and creativity can be nurtured through diversified and engaging art activities that require appreciating, presenting, and creating. Notions such as child-centeredness, freedom, exploration, choice, and self-expression are frequently used in the rationale, learning objectives and expectations, and pedagogical approaches pertaining to this learning area. For example, teachers are expected to "give children sufficient time and freedom, and organize different art activities to encourage creative expressions and sharing of experiences, thoughts and feelings" (CDC, 2017, p. 48). Altogether, the EDB requires kindergartens to allocate at least 45 minutes (half-day programs) and 90 minutes (full-day programs) per day for arts and physical activities.

However, parental demands make it difficult for kindergarten teachers to put the recommended curriculum into practice, especially in areas such as Arts and Creativity, as the sector is run by private providers and subject to marketization influences (Rao et al., 2018). Hong Kong has one of the most competitive education systems in the world, with a society striving for "winning at the starting line" (Watkins, 2010). Most kindergartens offer 3-hour programs with packed teaching

schedules (typically 20- to 30-minute periods), and parents often put pressure on principals and teachers to prepare children for primary school (Chen et al., 2017). Parents are especially concerned with children's knowledge and skills acquisition in academic subjects such as Language (Chinese and English) and Mathematics (Rao et al., 2018). To satisfy parental expectations, teachers inevitably reduce the emphasis given to non-academic areas such as Arts and Creativity or Physical Education, alongside the time offered for free play (Bautista et al., 2021; Kim & Hua, 2019). In fact, Arts and Creativity has been found as one of the lowest-priority learning areas for kindergarten teachers in Asian societies such as Hong Kong (Leung, 2018) and Singapore (Bautista et al., 2016).

Several qualitative studies centered on specific art forms have shown that the teaching of Arts and Creativity in Hong Kong kindergartens reflects traditional Confucian values. For example, regarding Visual Arts, Leung (2020) found that teachers tend to pose reproductive arts-and-craft activities to showcase children's development and mastery of fine motor skills rather than to foster children's creativity. This approach reflects one of the main values of education in Confucian culture, which is knowledge and skills acquisition (Li, 2010). Children are expected to produce beautiful final products, aligning with the Confucian values of perfection and excellence (Niu & Kaufman, 2013). Another qualitative study focusing on Drama (Tam, 2016) found that child-centeredness and freedom are seen as inimical to and incompatible with what Hong Kong teachers believe and do when they introduce this art form to children. This reflects the moral foundations and principles of Confucian culture, where respect for authority and discipline are highly valued (Tan, 2015). Consistently, teacher-led approaches are widely adopted in local kindergartens, which may undermine the stimulus to children's imaginative and playful participation. These trends have also been observed regarding Music (Lau & Grieshaber, 2018) and Dance activities (Wong, 2015).

Arts and Creativity practices in Hong Kong kindergartens have also been found to reflect the values of collectivism, conformity, and interdependence, as described by Li (2010). In a qualitative study on teachers' perceptions of Visual Arts pedagogies, Leung (2018) found that while participants valued children's voices and autonomy, they provided limited opportunities for children to observe, associate, and think during activities. Children were often provided with limited art materials and resources, and were requested to copy and/or imitate the models offered, which restricted their creative possibilities. Teachers were the authority in the classroom and the hierarchy was apparent (Leung, 2018). While one may argue these pedagogical approaches may hinder children's creative development in the arts, Cheung (2018) claims that Hong Kong children are more creative when they are given lower levels of choice. Furthermore, Cheung (2017) found that Hong Kong children learn to draw satisfaction from conforming to teachers' expectations and show less willingness to depart from conventionally accepted thinking.

In sum, while the Hong Kong Kindergarten Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2017) endorses a Western educational vision for the Arts and Creativity learning area, research shows that the school conditions, parental expectations, and predominant socio-cultural values make this vision difficult to be enacted on the ground. Indeed, Arts and Creativity can hardly be nurtured when there is a lack of time for free exploration and investigation, limited or even null freedom of choice, restricted acces-

sibility to art materials, and when activities are predominantly teacher-led, product-oriented, and reproductive (Moravcik et al., 2013). For these reasons, Bautista et al. (2021) have recently advocated for "glocalizing" curriculum policies in Asian societies. This term was coined to describe the process of hybridization of global and local perspectives (global + local), in order to minimize the negative consequences of policy borrowing (Patel & Lynch, 2013). Thus, Bautista et al. (2021) argue that instead of uncritically adopting the global notion of creativity, which is heavily based on Western educational discourses, it would be more culturally appropriate to simply refer to Arts Engagement in official curriculum frameworks. Arts Engagement would be a "glocal" learning area because it does not take for granted that children's creativity can be possibly fostered in all center-based programs, thus responding to the actual conditions, limitations, and characteristics of local kindergartens in Hong Kong (Chen et al., 2017), and also to parental expectations and traditional cultural values (Li, 2010). In the Arts Engagement learning area, children would be exposed to the arts and hence develop the skills and competencies valued by parents and the society, but activities with varying levels of open-endedness would be accepted and respected. In sum, the curriculum would not assume that children's creativity and free self-expression will be fostered via the arts in kindergartens (Bautista et al., 2021).

EDB Quality Assurance Mechanism: The Quality Review (QR) Reports

As mentioned, all kindergartens in Hong Kong are privately run; however, most of them receive subsidies from the government, under the Kindergarten Education Scheme (EDB, 2016, 2021). To ensure quality and promote the continuous improvement of local kindergartens, the EDB put in place the QR mechanism (EDB, 2020), which is conducted according to the key Performance Indicators of kindergarten education (EDB, 2017). The Performance Indicators consist of four domains, namely Management and Organization, Learning and Teaching, School Culture and Support for Children, and Child Development. Each domain comprises several sub-domains. For example, Aesthetic and Cultural Development is under Child Development, in relation to the Arts and Creativity learning area. Readers can find more information about the QR procedures in the "Handbook on Quality Review for Kindergartens," including objectives, workflow, and review procedures.

Teams of QR assessors from the EDB regularly visit kindergartens for 2.5–3.5 days. During the visit, the team conducts lesson observations, scrutinizes children's work, interviews principals, teaching staff, parents and children, and reviews school documents to obtain a full picture of the kindergarten's performance. Then, the team writes a full report, assessing the kindergarten and offering feedback on the four Performance Indicator domains.

The result of each kindergarten in the QR exercise determines its eligibility for government subsidies. When a kindergarten fails the QR, the EDB may revoke its FQKES status and therefore cease the provision of financial assistance (EDB, 2016). To strengthen accountability and transparency, all QR reports are uploaded on the EDB's website and accessible to all ECE stakeholders, including researchers.

The QR reports constitute a highly valuable research database for multiple reasons. Kindergartens conscientiously prepare for the QR exercise in order to create a good impression in the EDB assessors and ultimately be eligible for subsidies. For this reason, the observations reported in the QR reports could be interpreted as the best possible practices within each kindergarten (Rao et al., 2018). This makes the QR reports a unique source of data. They describe the events, pedagogies, and environments observed in a given kindergarten, identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses and providing comments on how to improve further. The content represents the official voice of the EDB, as the reports are written by authorized assessors.

AIM AND RESEARCH GOALS

Existing studies in Arts and Creativity in the territory have focused on individual art forms and have focused on small numbers of kindergartens (e.g., Cheung, 2017, 2018; Lau & Grieshaber, 2018; Leung, 2018, 2020; Tam, 2016; Wong, 2015). However, Hong Kong lacks large-scale studies that provide a comprehensive overview of the quantity and/or quality of children's exposure to the various art forms. To fill this gap, the present study analyzes the QR reports with a focus on the Arts and Creativity learning area. The study has three specific research goals:

1. To examine the presence of Arts and Creativity in the QR reports, looking into aspects such as the relative proportion of art-related content and the lexicon used (i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives);
2. To analyze the presence of the various art forms (i.e., Visual Arts, Music, Drama, Dance) and illustrate the most typical activity types in each art form;
3. To identify the most common themes emerging from the coded textual segments pertaining to Arts and Creativity.

Drawing on the findings, we aim to better understand the role that Arts and Creativity plays in Hong Kong kindergarten education, as inferred from QR reports written by authorized EDB officials.

METHOD

Data sources

Document analysis has been defined as a "systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents [...]. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27).

Here, we present a document analysis of QR reports published after the 2017/18 academic year, in response to the FQKES policy (EDB, 2016). In total, we analyzed 164 QR reports published from 2017 until January 2020 (which include one report in 2017, 33 in 2018, 122 in 2019, and eight in 2020). These reports represented appropriately 22% of the total number of publicly subsidized kindergartens in Hong Kong (N = 763 in 2020/21), including kindergartens from all geographical areas, which provided a good representation of Arts and Creativity across the territory. All the reports included in this analysis were originally written in Chinese. When this study was conducted, only 164 QR reports had been translated into English by the EDB, which was approximately 44% of the total number of QR reports. The criteria utilized by the EDB to select reports for translation are unknown to the authors. To ensure language consistency, only reports in English were included in the analysis.

Procedure

Ethical approval was first obtained from the authors' University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). We downloaded the 164 QR reports from the EDB's website and imported them into MAXQDA Analytics Pro (VERBI Software, 2019), a program designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods text data analysis. We designed a series of analytic codes (presented in the following section), which allowed us to analyze all the content pertaining to Arts and Creativity in the QR reports. Two coders specialized in the field of Early Childhood Education were trained and coached by the second author in the usage of the various analytical codes. The coders first completed their coding independently using MAXQDA. Subsequently, they shared their respective codifications and discussed the disagreements until 100% of agreement was reached.

Data analysis

To address Goal 1, we adopted two methods. Using MAXQDA, we first calculated the percentage of text coded under the Arts and Creativity learning area, in relation to the total number of words in the QR reports. We conducted a lexical analysis of the coded textual segments, focusing specifically on 60 most common terms, to investigate their relative presence. Additionally, we produced a word cloud for these 60 terms to provide a visual representation of the most typical nouns, verbs, and adjectives used within the coded segments.

To address Goal 2, we designed four analytic codes using a top-down approach, drawing on the Hong Kong Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2017), namely: 2.1) Music, 2.2) Visual Arts, 2.3) Drama, and 2.4) Dance. The definitions and examples are presented in the Results section, including the most typical sub-art forms mentioned in the reports, as examples. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to examine the presence of these art forms in the QR reports. Literal excerpts are presented to illustrate the most common activity types alluded to.

To address Goal 3, three analytic domains were identified drawing on the literature reviewed in the Introduction, namely: 3.1) Learning Conditions & Environment (Fleming et al., 2019); 3.2) Teachers' Pedagogical Practices (Abdulla Alabbasi et al., 2020; Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2019; Fox

& Schirrmacher, 2015); and 3.3) Children's Behaviors and Reactions (Cheung, 2017, 2018). These domains were selected due to their direct influence on the quality of young children's education (Torres et al., 2022). Subsequently, based on a blended theory-driven and data-driven approach, we designed a series of analytic codes to account for the Arts and Creativity content identified in the QR reports. Because our research goal was to identify the most common themes emerging from coded textual segments, this paper only informs about codes that appeared in at least 50% of the reports. The names of the codes (i.e., themes) that satisfied this criterion are presented in the Results section, alongside literal excerpts from the reports with illustrative purposes.

RESULTS

Goal 1: Presence of Arts and Creativity in the QR Reports

The 164 QR reports contained a total of 2,225,589 words. Of these, 133,535 words (around 6% of the total) were coded as content focused on or related to Arts and Creativity. The presence of this learning area ranged from a minimum of 119 words (1%) to a maximum of 2,058 words (14%) in the reports, with an average of 814 words (6%) per report.

Table 1 shows the most common 60 terms included in the coded textual segments, excluding pronouns, prepositions, adverbs, and conjunctions. Terms are organized according to word types (i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives) and overall frequency (from highest to lowest). Note that nouns in singular and plural (e.g., school, schools) and verbs in different tenses (e.g., sing, sings, singing) were considered the same word. Table 1 also includes the average number of times each word appeared in the Arts and Creativity coded segments, the maximum number of instances per report, and the percentage of reports in which each word appeared.

Table 1. Most Common Words in Arts and Creativity Coded Segments: Descriptive Statistics

Word	Overall frequency	Average frequency per report	Maximum frequency per report	Percentage of reports in which word appeared
Nouns				
Child	1,505	9.18	17	98.7%
Activity	917	5.59	9	96.9%
Music	658	4.01	9	87.8%
Art	541	3.30	7	84.1%
School	405	2.49	10	67%
Teacher	356	2.47	6	79.2%
Corner	328	2.19	4	56.7%
Material	297	2.17	4	60.3%
Choice	272	2.00	2	60.3%
Peer	195	1.81	4	45.1%
Creativity	174	1.76	4	42.6%
Time	169	1.69	2	37.2%

Word	Overall frequency	Average frequency per report	Maximum frequency per report	Percentage of reports in which word appeared
Artwork	162	1.66	4	43.2%
Development	147	1.60	3	34.1%
Opportunity	146	1.39	2	35.3%
Game	129	1.29	3	35.3%
Schedule	129	1.26	1	29.8%
Balance	126	1.25	1	29.2%
Craft	126	1.19	4	28%
Movement	116	1.06	4	34.1%
Interest	114	1.03	3	32.9%
Imagination	112	1.00	4	33.5%
Creation	103	0.99	3	28%
Story	98	0.94	4	25.6%
Instrument	92	0.92	3	29.8%
Classroom	86	0.90	3	30.4%
Skill	79	0.89	2	25%
Group	71	0.84	2	18.2%
Ability	66	0.79	5	17%
Verbs				
Play	409	0.79	6	70%
Learn	277	0.79	7	62.8%
Create	263	0.77	4	54.2%
Engage	228	0.77	3	51.8%
Provide	207	0.77	3	46.9%
Work	164	0.76	3	39%
Arrange	154	0.71	2	43.2%
Design	137	0.70	3	40.2%
Participate	129	0.68	3	29.2%
Role-play	127	0.68	3	31.1%
Enjoy	125	0.63	2	37.2%
Draw	101	0.62	2	20.7%
Facilitate	100	0.61	3	21.3%
Diversify	98	0.60	3	25.6%
Express	93	0.60	3	25%
Encourage	78	0.57	4	26.8%
Observe	67	0.56	2	21.9%
Experience	66	0.52	4	15.2%
Guide	57	0.48	3	15.8%
Enhance	56	0.48	2	18.9%
Adjectives				
Physical	359	0.44	3	75%
Free	289	0.43	3	63.4%
Sufficient	211	0.41	2	48.7%
Daily	205	0.40	3	41.4 %
Imaginative	151	0.40	3	40.8%
Good	112	0.40	3	33.5%

Word	Overall frequency	Average frequency per report	Maximum frequency per report	Percentage of reports in which word appeared
Rhythmic	72	0.36	2	23.1%
Musical	65	0.35	5	18.2%
Adequate	59	0.35	1	13.4 %
Creative	58	0.35	2	17%
Individual	57	0.34	1	14.6%

As can be observed, the most common words in the coded textual segments were nouns (29 terms in total), followed by verbs (20 terms), and finally adjectives (11 terms). Child, activity, music, art, and school were the five most common nouns. With notably lower frequencies, the most common verbs were play, learn, create, engage, and provide. Finally, the five most common adjectives were physical, free, sufficient, daily, and imaginative. A word cloud (Figure 1) was produced to graphically represent the most common 60 terms. We used different colors to represent the different word types: red for nouns, green for verbs, and blue for adjectives. Note that the size of each term is directly proportional to its frequency in the QR reports.



Figure 1. Word Cloud Emerging from the Arts and Creativity Coded Segments

Table 1 and Figure 1 reveal that certain words strongly associated with Western perspectives of Arts and Creativity rarely appeared in the QR reports. These included nouns such as imagination (only appeared in 33.5% of the reports) and creation (28%), verbs such as express (25%) and experi-

ence (15.2%), and adjectives such as creative (17%). Furthermore, note the absence of other terms frequently associated with Arts and Creativity in Western literature, such as expression, exploration, experimentation, discovery, investigation, and invention.

Goal 2: Presence of the Various Art Forms in the QR Reports

We used four analytic codes which corresponded to the art forms alluded to in the Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2017). Table 2 presents their definitions, examples, and the percentage of QR reports that referred to each art form. Codes were not mutually exclusive, as the same report could allude to multiple art forms. Almost all QR reports (99.4%) alluded to one art form or more. More specifically, 87 reports (53%) alluded to three art forms, 60 reports (37%) to two art forms, 14 reports (8%) to one art form, and two reports (1.4%) to the four art forms considered. Finally, one report (0.6%) mentioned no art forms at all.

Table 2. Art Forms: Code, Definition, Frequency, and Percentage

Code	Definitions	Frequency (percentage)
Music	References to any activity involving work with sound in time (e.g., singing, playing instruments, natural sounds), potentially accompanied by physical actions (e.g., action songs).	145 reports (89%)
Visual Arts	References to any activity involving the production of artworks and/or media that are primarily visual in nature, be it in two dimensions (e.g., drawing, painting) or three dimensions (e.g., sculpture, clay).	139 reports (85.3%)
Drama	References to any activities involving fictional representations through dialogue and/or performance (e.g., role-playing, puppetry, dramatic play, theatre).	115 reports (70.1%)
Dance	References to any activity involving patterns of body movements performed with music background (e.g., choreographed songs, expressive movement, rehearsal for public performances).	4 reports (2.5%)

As shown in Table 2, the majority of QR reports (89%) alluded to Music. The activity most frequently mentioned was singing songs (e.g., "children feel the rhythms and melodies of music through activities such as singing), in some cases specifically action songs (e.g., "they perform body movements according to the lyrics and rhythms to convey the intensity of rainfall"). Other common activity types involved modifying the lyrics and/or actions of existing songs (e.g., "children improvise lyrics and movements during music activities") and playing musical instruments (e.g., "they manipulate various musical instruments to identify the tone of different instruments").

Visual Arts was mentioned in a slightly lower number of reports (85.3%). The activity types most frequently mentioned involved drawing (e.g., "children like to draw in the art and craft corner, so as to express their ideas through drawing"), painting using various techniques (e.g., "children collage and draw with different materials in the creative corners to unleash their creativity), and

producing arts-and-crafts to decorate the classroom (e.g., "producing artworks that can be visually displayed and presented").

The third art form in frequency was Drama, which was mentioned in 70.1% of the reports. These documents revealed that Hong Kong kindergarten teachers frequently ask children to role-play and/or act out different scenarios, for example during the free-play time (e.g., "during free choice activities, children pretend to be a barber to do hairstyling for customers in the simulated salon to unleash their imagination"). This art form is also reported to be used as part of integrated learning activities (e.g., "teachers use moral stories to design the activities and lead children to engage in role-playing"). In contrast, activities involving theatre and story drama appeared less frequently (e.g., "there is also a story-creation week for children to create story endings, take part in imitating the characters").

Finally, the art form of Dance was rarely mentioned, appearing only in 2.5% of the QR reports. The few instances identified focused on both choreographed dances (e.g., "children fully engage in the activities by singing and dancing the songs on the little stage") and freestyle dance performances (e.g., "children sing along with music and dance creatively").

Goal 3: Most Common Emerging Themes in the QR Reports

Table 3 presents the three analytic domains considered in the study, names of the various codes (i.e., themes) that appeared in more than 50% of the reports, and their corresponding frequencies and percentages. Note that less frequent themes have been excluded, as they did not meet our inclusion criterion.

Table 3. Analytic Domains, Most Common Themes, Frequency, and Percentage

	Analytic domains and themes	Frequency (percentage)
3.1.	*Learning Conditions & Environment*	
	Enough Time and Opportunities	111 reports (67.7%)
	Availability of Learning Environments	97 reports (59.1%)
	Provision of Materials and Resources	95 reports (57.9%)
3.2.	*Teachers' Pedagogical Practices*	
	Tangible Products	94 reports (57.3%)
3.3.	*Children's Behaviors and Reactions*	
	Positive Behaviors and Attitudes	85 reports (51.8%)

Regarding the domain 3.1) Learning Conditions & Environment, we found that 67.7% of the reports elaborated on the importance of providing children with Enough Time and Opportunities to engage in Arts and Creativity. Interestingly, this theme was mainly alluded to in relation to Music and Visual Arts activities (e.g., "the kindergarten offers adequate daily time for music, physical, visual arts and free activities for children"). In fact, some QR reports praised kindergartens for arranging

daily integrated activities involving Music specifically (e.g., "teachers provide integrated music and physical activities for children on a daily basis").

Another frequent theme was that of Availability of Learning Environments, which was found in 59.1% of the reports (e.g., "the school makes good use of space to make special arrangements for different art activities"). Many topics were discussed in connection with this theme. For example, some reports commented on how learning corners were being utilized by children to produce artworks (e.g., "Children could do collage and draw with different materials in the creative corner") and to engage in dramatic play (e.g., "act out the characters in the stories or create different scenarios in the imaginative play corners"). Certain reports also highlighted the importance of using physical spaces outside the classrooms to engage in Arts and Creativity (e.g., "teachers made use of the lobby, corridors and music room flexibly to design corner activities based on the teacher themes").

The third theme under this domain was Provision of Materials and Resources (57.9%), which highlighted the importance of providing children with adequate art-related supplies (e.g., colors, clay), musical instruments, or dramatic play props. The reports commented on how such materials and resources allowed children to explore their five senses and unleash their creativity while engaging in arts-and-craft activities, instrumental learning, and role-play. Some reports praised kindergartens for providing children with "re-used materials" and "unwanted materials including newspaper, plastic bottles and so forth."

In domain 2.1) Teachers' Pedagogical Practices, Tangible Products was the only theme that appeared in more than half of the reports. The importance of having children complete artworks (collaboratively and/or individually) to make their learning visible was mentioned in 57.3% of the QR reports (e.g., "they also draw greeting cards to express care to peers and teachers"). Both skills being acquired by children (e.g., "children demonstrate their fine motor skills while using scissors") and the final outcomes being produced (e.g., "children produce beautiful artworks for display in class") were mentioned explicitly in many reports. This theme was predominately associated with Visual Arts (in relation to activities such as drawing, painting, collage, designing, and knitting), but not with the other art forms. This suggests that Hong Kong kindergarten children are seldom required to create new products in Music, Drama, and Dance.

Finally, regarding domain 3.3) Children's Behaviors and Reactions, the theme Positive Behaviors and Attitudes was mentioned in 51.8% of the QR reports. The reports described positive emotions (e.g., happiness, excitement, appreciation, interests) shown by children during Arts and Creativity activities. For example, one report explained how "children enjoy the fun of art activities, particularly in music, and show a lot of enthusiasm." Another report explained that "children love to share with peers and appreciate each other's work, showing satisfaction and joy." Overall, existence of a positive classroom atmosphere was described as both pre-requirement and outcome of Arts and Creativity activities.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to better understand the role that Arts and Creativity plays in Hong Kong local kindergartens, as inferred from QR reports written by government officials. We have presented a document analysis of 164 reports pertaining to kindergartens from all geographical areas across the territory, which provides an overview of how this learning area is being enacted on the ground.

Goal 1 was to examine presence of Arts and Creativity in the QR reports. Findings suggest that this learning area plays a relatively marginal role in kindergartens, as the proportion of the text written about it was rather low (6% on average). In fact, the proportion was as low as 1% in some reports. Additionally, we found that the lexicon utilized by the EDB assessors in reference to this learning area was somewhat generic. Terms and notions strongly associated with Western perspectives of Arts and Creativity – as utilized in the local Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2017) – were either infrequent or absent.

We interpret these findings as a reflection of multiple factors, including socio-cultural mindsets, practical constraints in kindergartens, and teacher training. Hong Kong has been characterized as an academically oriented society, with parents overly concerned with preparing children for a competitive school system (Chen et al., 2017; Watkins, 2010). In the same vein, the reports implicitly convey the idea of Arts and Creativity as an area of low importance. This is inconsistent with the official Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2017), which states that all the learning areas are equally important for children's balanced development. The low attention given to Arts and Creativity in the QR reports may also reflect practical constraints in local kindergartens, characterized by short programs (3 hours long) with overly packed curricula (Bautista et al., 2021). Teachers tend to spend relatively little time in non-academic areas to meet parental demands for drill and practice in Language (Chinese and English) and Mathematics (Rao et al., 2018), which are seen as central areas for primary school. Furthermore, teachers might feel ill-prepared to teach Arts and Creativity to young children, given their limited formal training (Bautista & Ho, 2021), which could also contribute to reducing the time spent on this learning area in the classroom. These various factors may have resulted in relatively low emphasis put on Arts and Creativity in the reports.

Goal 2 was to examine presence of the various art forms. We found wide differences: while Music and Visual Arts appeared in most reports (89% and 85.3%, respectively), the presence of Drama was lower (70.1%), and Dance rarely appeared (2.5%). As reviewed in the Introduction, each art form nurtures specific skills and developmental domains in young children (e.g., Goldstein & Lerner, 2018; Henriksson-Macaulay & Welch, 2015; Lobo & Winsler, 2008; Phillips et al., 2010). Consequently, unequal exposure to the various art forms could affect the balanced and holistic development of Hong Kong children, as they seem to be provided with fewer opportunities to engage in Drama and virtually no opportunities to participate in Dance.

Similar patterns have been identified in other Asian societies, such as Singapore (Bautista et al., 2018), and also in Western countries, such as Slovenia (Zupancic et al., 2015). This global trend

could be due to the differing levels of preparation offered to early childhood teachers in the various art forms, as Music and Visual Arts courses are typically more common in teacher preparation programs than Drama and Dance courses (Reynolds & Valerio, 2017). Nevertheless, this unequal level of exposure to the various art forms is inconsistent with Hong Kong's Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2017) and with international organizations (NAEYC, 2019; OECD, 2019), which recommend giving equal importance to all forms of artistic expression.

Finally, Goal 3 was to identify the most common themes emerging from the Arts and Creativity coded textual segments. We found that the QR reports tended to elaborate on the importance of:

1) Teachers providing children with enough time and opportunities to engage in Arts and Creativity;
2) Kindergartens having learning environments specifically devoted to this learning area;
3) Teachers offering adequate materials and resources;
4) Children producing tangible creations or products, specifically in the context of Visual Arts activities; and
5) Children displaying positive behaviors and/or attitudes to complete the activities proposed by teachers.

The widespread presence of these themes suggests that the conception of Arts and Creativity held by the EDB assessors somewhat deviates from Western creativity perspectives (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2019; Essa & Burnham, 2019; Fox & Schirrmacher, 2015) and also from the vision depicted in the Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2017). Indeed, core ideas such as the notion of child-centeredness, the importance of providing children with freedom and choice, or the importance of fostering exploration and experimentation in art-related activities were rarely mentioned by the assessors. In contrast, the QR reports described Arts and Creativity teaching and learning practices as characterized by being predominantly teacher-directed, product-oriented, and reproductive. In the typical scenario described in the reports, teachers would provide concrete tasks and materials to children and would give them instructions to produce aesthetic art products, with the final aim to showcase their newly developed abilities and skills to adults. They would also teach new songs or drama plays for children to develop new linguistic and/or social skills. This finding is consistent with the types of pedagogical practices described in prior qualitative studies focusing on Visual Arts (Cheung, 2017, 2018; Leung, 2018, 2020), Music (Lau & Grieshaber, 2018), and Drama (Tam, 2016).

Conclusion

The document analysis of the QR reports suggests existence of a gap between the vision of Arts and Creativity outlined in Hong Kong's official Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2017) and actual pedagogical practices in local kindergartens. Although Arts and Creativity is regarded as an essential learning area in the curriculum, it seems to be somewhat secondary in kindergartens, as reflected by its marginal presence in the QR reports. The teaching of the various art forms differs notably, with

Music and Visual Arts being more present in kindergartens than Drama and especially Dance. The approach to Arts and Creativity seems to be predominantly teacher-centered, product-oriented, and reproductive. These features reflect the traditional local culture, specifically Confucian values such as perfection, excellence, conformity, and knowledge/skill acquisition (Li, 2010; Niu & Kaufman, 2013). Other factors involved in the explanation of these findings are parents' academic demands and expectations (Chen et al., 2017; Watkins, 2010), time-related constraints in kindergartens (Rao et al., 2018), and teachers' limited training in Arts and Creativity (Bautista & Ho, 2021; Cheung, 2017; Leung, 2020).

Significance, Limitations, and Future Research

This is the first study in Hong Kong that provides a large-scale overview of the Arts and Creativity learning area in kindergartens. However, the study has several limitations that should be overcome in future research. The QR reports were the only data source considered. While this had the advantage of providing breadth in terms of the large number of kindergartens considered, the disadvantage was the lack of analytic depth. Future studies should collect additional data sources (e.g., classroom observations, curriculum materials, interviews with teachers and principals) to allow for data triangulation. Additionally, it would be relevant to analyze potential differences across kindergartens from different providers and geographical areas.

Another consideration is that the QR mechanism is intended to assess kindergartens holistically, including multiple domains and learning areas. While this could be interpreted as a limitation, we believe this characteristic makes the present study particularly interesting. Indeed, the QR reports have allowed us to assess the role given to Arts and Creativity within the entire curriculum. Nonetheless, as complementary studies, it would be important to investigate the experiences of the EDB assessors while completing the QR reports, as well as the perspectives of various stakeholders (e.g., teachers, principals, EDB assessors) about the role of Arts and Creativity in kindergarten education.

Implications

This study reveals the need to reconsider the rationale and goals of the Arts and Creativity learning area within Hong Kong's official Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2017). As explained in the Introduction, creativity in the arts involves several recursive components that require exploration, discovery, experimentation, and ultimately time and freedom (Abdulla Alabbasi et al., 2020; Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2019; Fox & Schirrmacher, 2015). However, the QR reports suggest that Hong Kong kindergartens cannot guarantee the basic conditions for creativity to emerge, due to multiple factors. This shows that borrowing ideas from Western societies (such as the very notion of creativity) fails to acknowledge the traditions and values of non-Western cultures, and more generally, the situated nature of teaching and learning (Burdett & O'Donnell, 2016).

As an alternative, we recommend that local curriculum designers adopt the "glocalization" paradigm (Patel & Lynch, 2013) intended to find the right balance between global trends and local

realities. Rather than labeling this learning area as Arts and Creativity, we agree with Bautista et al. (2021) that the glocal term Arts Engagement would be more culturally appropriate, in the sense of being better aligned with Confucian values and parental expectation, and therefore more viable to implement on the ground. Under the Arts Engagement learning area, teachers would be encouraged to facilitate the three components of creativity as much as possible. However, the curriculum should also recognize that the degrees of exploration, freedom, and choice given to children will depend on multiple variables, such as the time available in each specific program, the resources and spaces available, the teacher/child ratio in each kindergarten, and the prior training of teachers (Bautista & Ho, 2021). In sum, the revised glocal curriculum we advocate for would acknowledge that the level of creativity could vary across kindergartens and it would validate different types of teaching approaches, from child-centered to teacher-directed approaches (Veraksa et al., 2021).

Local experts with solid knowledge of both global and local pedagogies (e.g., principals, seasoned teachers, teacher educators, EDB assessors) should play a central role in defining the Arts Engagement learning area. Their ideas, suggestions, and feedback would be vital to reach agreements regarding what is desirable and what is viable regarding the teaching of this area in Hong Kong local kindergartens. Furthermore, pre-service and in-service teacher education programs should provide educators with sufficient knowledge, skills, and attitudes to ensure alignment between the official curriculum and actual practices. Finally, the QR mechanism should be flexible enough to accept different pedagogical approaches and recognize them as equally valid within the local setting. These strategies would be vital to facilitate the glocalization of the Arts and Creativity learning area in Hong Kong. Similar strategies could be applied in other Asian societies facing similar curriculum-practice gaps as a result of globalization (Patel & Lynch, 2013).

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