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*Conjecture or Reality ? Islamization of the curriculum in the
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scheme in Hong Kong.*

Conjecture or Reality ? Islamization of the curriculum in the Islamic Kindergarten under the operation of the school voucher scheme in Hong Kong.

Abstract

The world is changing and so must the curriculum. The old paradigm of teacher-centred curriculum is now considered out-dated and should give way to a holistic development underpinned by a child-centred ideology for quality education. In his 2006-07 Policy Address, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong committed HK\$2 billion to enhancing holistic Early Childhood Education through the instigation of a school voucher scheme. The new paradigm of a child-centred curriculum is considered necessary to keep pace with international quality educational developments.

However, research data collected in this study revealed the inequality issue facing the faith schools in Hong Kong under the school voucher scheme instead. While a review of literature on the Islamic Education reveals that the current trend in Islamic thought- Islamization of knowledge, is becoming a global issue in the Muslim world and that scholars in various disciplines have been striving tirelessly to recast knowledge in its entirety, from the Islamic perspective. This paper makes two important arguments. It demonstrates how the curriculum design is important for preserving the faith of the Islamic religion. The curriculum design depends fundamentally on a well-defined philosophy of education and with a corresponding pedagogic practise for its realization. The religious dictions of myth and ritual are used to illustrate the complimentary relationship of the two. Essentially, a change of ritual (pedagogical practises) would mean a change of the origin of the myth. Hence, a mixed mode of curriculum underpinned by contrasting ideological stance is not a complementary but an alternative mode of practise. The consequential result of using such a mixed mode is

accountable to the many problems of evangelizing the young children in Hong Kong. An extended historical example during the May Fourth event has been referred to illustrate the effect of syncretism. The findings of the research is therefore relevant to the faith schools of other religions in general.

In the discussion and concluding part of the paper, it leads the reader to question our perspective on a range of issues including diversity, parental rights and ultimately the aims of education.

(341 words)

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Derivation of Themes and meanings emerge from the data collected in the
interview with the Muslim parents (Confidential data, not to be printed in
the website version)

Conjecture or Reality ? Islamization of the curriculum in the Islamic Kindergarten under the operation of the school voucher scheme in Hong Kong.

Introduction

The first five years of a child are very crucial and important in his life as whatever he is exposed to during the period has a serious and lasting effect on him in future. The indelibility of the knowledge acquired by young and innocent children suggests the paramount importance of early childhood education. Knowledge in childhood is likened to an engraved mark on a rock, which is difficult to rub off (Adebayo, year unknown, p. 73).

1. The Education worldview of Early Childhood

Education in the Muslim world

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.O.H.) emphatically mentioned it that children must be religiously educated in their early stages. A famous tradition of the Prophet Muhammad exhorts believers to “seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.” Thus, the potential of learning begins as early as a few months after conception. Education is of three types: informal, formal, and nonformal. The home is the most important institution of informal education. In it, learning takes place in an unstructured and indirect manner. It is the first “school,” and the mother is the first “teacher.” School is the most important institution of learning for formal education. In it, learning experiences are structured and organized systematically to achieve specific learning outcomes. In formal education, the school curriculum and the school teachers are very important instructors of learning. Nonformal education means education is provided by organizations other than the formal schools

(Rosnani-Hashim , 2004).

Scholars from the Muslim world have indeed constantly remind the parents that the failure of the Muslims to realize that education is a product of a particular worldview and is tailored towards some particular socio-historical and civilizational contexts, made them register their children and wards into other Religious oriented schools or to some secular run preschools. The secular nature of western education in particular has been a major concern for the Muslim intellectuals. The mundane and profane nature of western education takes care of the terrestrial world with no consideration at all for the celestial world (Adebayo, year unknown, p.74).

2. Islamic Philosophy of Education

In order to counter-act the ‘bad’ secular influence of the western world through its ideological penetration into the curriculum of school education, a comprehensive Islamic philosophy of education was defined in the First World Conference on Muslim Education in 1977 that:

Education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality of Man through the training of Man’s spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses. Education should cater therefore for the growth of Man in all its aspects: spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic, both individually and collectively and motivate all aspects towards goodness and the attainment of perfection. The ultimate aim of Muslim education lies in the realisation of complete submission to Allah on the level of the individual, the community and humanity at large¹.

The above aim of education shows a balanced interaction between the belief system, the knowledge system and the value system, which does not exist in the western education system. Professor Rosnani-Hashim in the Department of Education at the International Islamic University, mentions that learner, knowledge and the means of instruction are three important elements in the formulation of a philosophy of Islamic

education. The following account on the Islamic Philosophy of Education was referenced from Rosnani-Hashim (2004).

2.1 Learner

The learner, being human, is made up of a dual nature of spirit and body. The spiritual faculty is known as the *ruh* (soul), *'aql* (mind or intellect), *qalb* (emotion), or *nafs* (self) according to the function that is ascribed to it. *'Aql* (the faculty of reason), unique to human beings, elevates them above the rest of creation (Qur'ran, 95:4, cited in Hashim, R. 2004).

It is common knowledge that the learner is inquisitive and flexible and can be molded especially at a tender age. The learner has physical needs for food, activity, and sex; social needs for affection, belonging, and status within a social group; and spiritual needs relating to something larger and beyond one's self, that is, the need to reach for God.

2.2 Knowledge

Islam believes that man is equipped with a soul and physical senses and prepared by Allah to acquire knowledge. Knowledge is integral or holistic as suggested by the "tawhidic" worldview. Knowledge is integral to action, spirituality, and ethics (Wan M. Nor Wan Daud, 1991).

Education (*ta'dib*, disciplining; some still prefer *tarbiyah*, upbringing) is *adab* (proper way or virtue), progressively instilled in man (Naquib Al-Attas, 1990, cited in Hashim, 2004). *Adab* refers to the discipline of body, mind, and spirit. It endows the possessor with the knowledge of the proper places of things or objects (*hikmah*) in the scheme of Creation and subsequently to act in a just manner (*'adl*).

Apart from that, in the Islamic worldview, there exists a hierarchical structure to knowledge, and, just as there exists a dual nature in mankind, there exists two categories of knowledge, the *'ilm alnaqliyah*

(revealed)—some of which is *fard 'ayn*, individual duty—and the *'ilm alnaqliyah*—which is *fard kifayah*, which is a communal duty.

Each community should ensure that there are some people who are knowledgeable in the acquired or intellectual knowledges essential for the survival of the society, such as medicine, mathematics, natural and applied sciences, and social sciences. In this manner, Islam ensures that every individual is anchored to his faith while exploring new horizons. That is the reason why Islamic education always stress the importance of the study of Science (Ding, 2009).

Henceforth, the primary goal of education is to lead man to recognize and acknowledge his Creator. This acknowledgment is manifested in obedience and adherence to His commandments. In other words, the primary goal of Islamic education is to produce the good being, who, by developing all his/her potentials accordingly, ensures him or her to be the servant (*'abd*) and the vicegerent (*khalifah*) of Allah who has undertaken the amanah (trust) of maintaining prosperity on earth. To this effect education is designed to produce the God-fearing (*taqwa*) servant of Allah who is aware of his individual vertical relations with Allah (*hablun min Allah*) and his social horizontal relations with his fellow man (*hablun min al-nas*). Thus, in effect the primary goals of education include spiritual, moral, social, intellectual, and physical development with specific goals. There is no conflict between societal and individual aims because there is unity of purpose (Hashim, 2004, p.32).

According to the Moslem code, the Qur'an supplies sound direction for all the affairs and perplexities of life (Sirdar Iqbal Ali Shah, 1980), the curriculum content so designed should be integrated in all disciplines of the subjects area by making due reference to the teachings in the Qur'an.

As a whole, the Muslims, just like the Christians, establishing the nursery institutions, with a specially designed curriculum and pedagogical application as a means of transforming and preserving their religious culture and tenets (Adebayo, year unknown, p.74).

3. Application of the Philosophy of Education in a ‘genuine’ idealistic Islamic Kindergarten through the curriculum design and pedagogical application in class

With an understanding of the Islamic philosophy of Education, I would anticipate a genuine Islamic Kindergarten to have the following characteristics:

3.1 An Islamic Early Childhood Curriculum

Curriculum, according to a Muslim scholar (Hashim, 2004, p.29), is a reflection of the educational philosophy of the institution concerned, in fact, the mechanism by which its goals are attained. Thus, by applying the Islamic philosophy of Education, a curriculum should be Allah-centred.

3.1.1 A curriculum which is Allah-centred

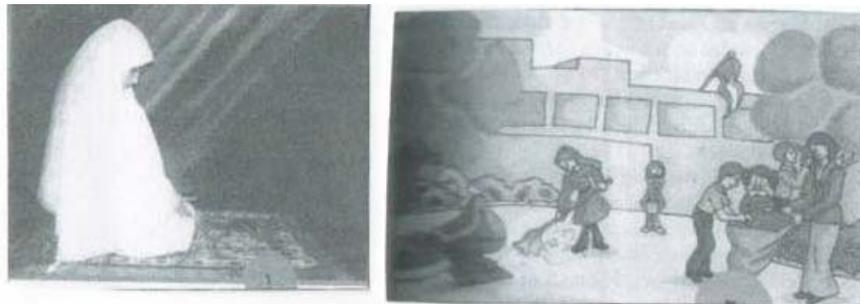
A review of literature has further been made for ascertaining what a ‘genuine’ Islamic Early Childhood Curriculum would be like. Unlike the secularist modernist worldview as well as the dismissal of God as a major characteristic of western education, Muslim scholar in the field of Early Childhood Education mentions the necessity to introduce Religious Education into the ECE curriculum (Adebayo, year unknown, p.77).

An ‘genuine’ Islamic Early Childhood Institution should foster correct practice in praying, making ablutions, donating to charity, wishing dishes, crossing in the crosswalk, and cleaning the yard of a school (cf. see figure 1, image adopted from Brown, 2007. p.133). One would realize all these routines, repetitive practices are **ritualistic practices** for the transmitting of the Islamic religious knowledge in action. The connection between repetitive practices and ritualistic practices could be traced on a review of literature on Kertzer (1988, p.339), in that it is not

until a generation ago, anthropologists typically defined ritual as culturally standardized, repetitive activity, primarily symbolic in character, aimed at influencing human affairs, and involving the supernatural realm. Ritual has further been studied that people who participate in [instructional] ritual forms most often had nothing to do with creating (ibid. p.340). Because of the repetitiveness nature of ritual, it is used as a way of transmitting cultural knowledge in schools.

3.1.2 A holistic integrated curriculum that permeates the religious aspect to all subject areas

Although the various subjects sometime take different approaches, they speak with one voice on the integration of religion into all spheres of life. Moral lessons intrude on virtually every subject, sometime supported by a quranic verse. What was described above is indeed what we termed as an **Integrated** curriculum. Figure 1 (source: Brown, 2007,p.133)



An Integrated Curriculum, with Qur'an's teachings as core and permeate the religious values in every strata of the subject-based curriculum would be most appropriate for the Muslim young children. One could identify this kind of integrated curriculum as the Multidisciplinary Approach(多學科統整形式) (Drake, 1993).

By definition, the multidisciplinary curriculum is intended to correlate two or more subjects in relation to some organizing theme, concept, topic, or issue. Planning for such a curriculum usually begins with identification of a topic or theme, followed by the question, "what can various subject areas contribute to the study of the theme?" In this way two concerns are addressed (Drake, 1993). First, as subjects are connected in the context of

the theme or topic, they may seem less fragmented to students. Second, by opening a topic to consideration through the lenses of two or more subject areas, it may be better and more completely understood. Like the separate subject approach, the multidisciplinary approach continues the purpose of encountering and mastering content from various subjects. Moreover, though a central theme or topic is used to correlate them, the separate subjects retain their identity and, typically, their separate time slots in the school schedule.

In line with the ritualistic practices for enhancing the Islamic Philosophy of Education, what has been mentioned above in the Multidisciplinary Approach 多學科統整形式 (Drake, 1993) carried out in the daily curriculum design and would have a recurrence nature, though it would mean different things under the same name in the western terminology. In other words, the realization of the curriculum content in the Islamic Kindergarten has to be repeated in the classroom teaching over time. To speak it plainly, the young students in class are taught to learn the curriculum content repetitively. I would like to argue that “Learning by repetition” perhaps is the familiarized words to use to describe the model, which could be found in the traditional model of the knowledge-transmission educational learning model. This is to ensure the continuity of practices. An example of the captioned Islamic Kindergarten curriculum could be found in Appendix 1. This application of the Islamic Education theory into the ECE classroom is different from those of its contemporary secular humanistic approach, advocated by the western secular educator, John Dewey, who is also a pragmatist, a progressivist and a humanist. For the secular humanist educators, they would use the what Drake (1993) classified as the Transdisciplinary Approach(超學科形式) or the least, the in-between one, which is the Interdisciplinary Approach(跨學科形式). It is the last two modes of integrated approach that are used for the realization of the profanity of the aims and objectives of the dominant kindergartens and preschools. It is worth noting that the term ‘holistic’ used by the western terminology is quite different from the holistic view in the Islamic curriculum.

3.2 A matching Islamic Early Childhood Education Pedagogy

From my understanding as an Early Childhood practitioner for more than fourteen years, the teaching pedagogy to accompany this

multidisciplinary integrated curriculum would be the knowledge-transmission (direct instructional) pedagogic practices rather than the critical pedagogy which is rooted in the humanistic philosophy. Having said that, though the pedagogy employed is knowledge-transmission one, knowledge can be imparted as both general bodies of information and as scientific skills of observation, discovery, formulation of hypotheses, and the proposal and testing of theories. The chief aim of education is for the young children to understand the teachings of Allah. From this understanding, young children grow in their ability to observe the commands of Allah in relation to all of life. The main difference between the pedagogy adopted by the Islamic Kindergarten and the secularized Kindergarten lie in the order of carrying out the teaching activities.

For the religious kindergarten, in order to align with the ritualistic practices, there is an orderliness in doing things. They would deliver the pre-planned teaching content first (just like mentioning the theory as priori in the research) which then follow by encouraging young children to participate in various kind of activities, including exploratory scientific activities.

Whereas for the secular humanistic pedagogic approach, the teacher would revert this order of 'teaching'. She/He would act as the peer of her students by either facilitating children to learn by 'self-discovery' or by scaffolding children to learn underpinned by the social constructivist theory. While 'watching' children to learn through the activities by means of Dewey's most well known "learning-by-doing" theory, teacher would interrupt occasionally so as to 'give hints- scaffold' children to know the necessary 'knowledge' or 'skills' to enable children to proceed on their hands-on work. In this way, the role of the teacher is a facilitator rather than a 'teacher' who would teaching children forcefully in a didactic way ---a way which is condemned by the humanist educator. (Constructivism learning theories, Wikipedia).

The concept of teacher is an authoritative figure who could properly educate student by imparting the moral values willed by Allah.

The concept of student is stressed as a learner, who is required to be obedient so as to learn how he/she could act according to the teachings of Allah in all aspects of life via education.

Associated sample vocabulary used: Islamic faith and loyalty, parental responsibility, obedience, supernatural enablement, service, duty, role assigned, authority structures, integration of truth and faith, wisdom, benevolent, gentle.

4. Moderating factors to effect upon the genuine Islamic Education

Although an idealistic and genuine early childhood curriculum should be set according to the Islamic philosophy of education, in actual practice, the design and implementation of the curriculum still rest on many moderating factors.

4.1 Review on literatures to see how the socio-political factors have shaped the design of the curriculum in both the Muslim and non-Muslim countries

Socio-economic change has been a hallmark of the Middle East over the last 150 years and has accelerated since the late 1980s. The spread of mass education has increased literacy for men and women, opened up new career opportunities, and subsequently generated debates about societal responsibilities.

4.1.1 Jordan: Prescription for Obedience and Conformity through the message transferred in the textbooks.

A literature review on Anderson's paper "Jordan: Prescription for Obedience and Conformity" confirms that the Islamic textbooks of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan provides students with a guide for living

in a world in which every relationship is structured, categorized, and delineated (2007, p.71). According to the texts, obedience is the primary value instilled in children. Children must revere their parents, speak to them humbly, and support them if needed (12b:85-86). Reciprocal responsibilities are established between the parents and the children, and the children themselves, within a hierarchical structure. The texts also propose Islamic answers to the many threats directed against the family unit. For example, societal problems arise when people put personal desires ahead of tradition, wars or natural disasters befall a society, powerful societies impose their ideas over weaker ones, and people move away from the teachings of their faith(11c:239). Islam treats these problems preemptively by encouraging people to think first of Islam, then of the individual is the servant of the society (11c:240) (Ibid, p.80,81).

4.1.2. Genesis of a New Curricula in Palestine: A dilemma

In 1988, the Ministry of Education in Palestine established the Curriculum Development Centre commissioned teams for each of the various subjects to be addressed. The first textbooks (for grades 1 to 6) were introduced in 2000. The entire curriculum is said to be faith in God (CDC 1998:7). Authoritative structures (such as family) were treated with great respect (Brown, 2007, p.128).

4.1.2.1. For the safeguard of Islamic religion and the Palestinians' national identity, didactic teaching on Islamic values is needed

In order to safeguard the Islamic religion and Palestinians nationalism, the contents of the textbooks have marked the Western outsiders and Israelis sharp distinction from Palestinians. Sometimes the contrast between Palestinians and non-Palestinians and the rest of the world appears sharply. For example, imitating youth in things “not appropriate for our genuine Arab culture and the value system can be bad (see figure 2, image adopted from Brown, 2007, p.129).

Figure 2.



4.1.2.2. To cater for different stance on Nationality, the critical pedagogy is used to accompany the curriculum content design.

Although the citizens in Palestine are predominantly Muslim, it was said that there are subtle conflicts about the relationship between individual and nation. For some Palestinians, the opportunity of creating a Palestinian state opened the possibility to create a new and more critical kind of citizenship, one based as much on individuality and democratic values as on national identity (Brown, 2007, p. 127). As a result of this conflicts of attitude among the citizens, the critical pedagogy underpinned by the reformist methodology was used to stress on “critical thought”, “creativity”, and “empowerment” which is very much centered on the individual and devoted to cultivating skills of democratic citizenship, was intended to supplant the authoritative presentation of reality in the arena of Civic Education, though the deliverance of Religious education is still a knowledge-transmission one (Ibid., p.136).

4.1.3 Sliding along the curriculum chain of the critical pedagogy and the didactic pedagogy in Pakistan

Perhaps an article entitled, “A Gentle Islam” authored by Ishaan Tharoor on page 48 of the 17 August 2009 issue of the Time magazine might give another picture underpinned by the demarcation of religious worldviews in the Muslim world of Pakistan. In the article, it mentions that ‘for centuries many of the world’s Muslims were, in one way or another, practitioners of Sufism, a spiritualism that centers on the mystical connection between the individual and the divine. Sufism’s ethos was egalitarian, charitable and friendly, often propagated by wandering seers and story tellers. It blended with local cultures and cemented Islam’s place from North Africa to the Indian subcontinent.

At Sufism's core, suggests Oxford University's Devji, is an embrace of the world. "It allows you to identify beyond your mosque and village to something that can be both Islamic and secular." Having said that, co-existing with the admirers of the gentle Sufism is the orthodox Islam, the hard-liners Pakistani in Pakistan.

Since there are two different views on the Religious outlook in Pakistan, when applying these worldviews into the school curriculum, there could be at least two forms of curriculum, one being the more didactic mode with the authoritative transmission of knowledge while the other might take a mixture of the progressive humanistic mode as well as the tradition mode of knowledge transmission.

4.2 Islamic Education in a preschool in the non-Muslim country- United Kingdom

Although early childhood education is valued highly by the Muslim in Hong Kong, no studies have ever been conducted in Hong Kong with the Islamic Kindergarten until my recent study on the subject, not to mention the incorporation of the Islamic philosophy into the ECE curriculum. It could perhaps due to the fact that most of the kindergartens and preschools in Hong Kong are established by the Christian Institutions by history and that the curriculum models are mostly designed according to the Christian values. Before conducting a thorough research studies of inculcating the Islamic Philosophy into the early childhood curriculum in Hong Kong, the following paper presented in a case study is reviewed. Discussions would be made on the findings for cross-referencing to the Hong Kong situation.

The paper "Why do Muslim parents want Muslim schools?" under-reviewed is taken from the United Kingdom (McCreery, E, Jones, L., Holmes, R., 2007, p.203-219). It is chosen for review because of its relevancy to the Hong Kong situation as Hong Kong was used to be a colonial state of Britain before its return to her motherland in July 1997. Though Hong Kong ceased to be a British colony, her educational system is still being informed by the United Kingdom situations and by the worldwide global trend. This is one of the reasons why I have chosen to study a case study in the United Kingdom and to see its relevancy of application in the case of Hong Kong.

The settings of the study is a Christian kindergarten where Muslim children are enrolled. The findings suggested a new definitions of Islamic education and its practice outside the traditional Muslim world.

The small-scale study focuses on a number of Muslim parents and practitioners who have rejected local primary community schools in favour of Muslim faith schooling. It was found from the study that Muslim parents have the following reasons to request their young children to be educated in the Muslim-settings school. It was argued that,

- (a) only Muslim-settings gave children a firm foundation that enabled them to develop confidence in their own identity and way of life;
- (b) Muslim parents can educate their children ‘in accordance with their own conception of the good’(De Jong & Snik, p.579). For example, in the nursery group nurtured by the Muslims, they talked about the great emphasis that was placed on both adults and children to be kind, respectful and to have good manners. They saw themselves as continuing the kind of values that are practised at home (McCreery, Jones & Holmes, 2007, p.209). As could be found from the data collected in Hong Kong Islamic Kindergarten, parents are not so sure about the curriculum practises in the Kindergarten though the Kindergarten under study is practising a curriculum which could more or less allied with the Philosophy of the Islamic faith.
- (c) The curriculum content could cover some Islamic history which make reference to the rich Islamic heritage;
- (d) Make sure that in the music lesson, only daff (drum) should be allowed, no music with dance and movement should be allowed(cf. Ding, 2009). This point is interesting and worth elaborate a bit. TO The Muslim parents, music if to be taught is against the teaching of Islam although singing songs was acceptable and the use of the daff (drum) was allowed. Music was described as a ‘distracter’ that might lead to ‘an enhancement of moods’, presumably leading

children away from rather than towards Allah (McCreery et al, 2007, p.212). This Islamic worldview has indeed been confirmed by the author of this paper from one of the practitioners who teach in an Islamic Kindergarten in Hong Kong.

- (e) Muslim parents should have a right to state what is taught to children instead of what have been advocated by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). In the captioned Convention, it enshrined the right of the children by stating that

Article 8

1 [States] Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without lawful interference (United Nations, 1989,p.3)

Article 14

1 [States] Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion;

2[States] Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child;

3.Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. (United Nations, 1989, p.4).

To explain the meaning inferred in these Articles, McCreery et al. (2007) say that 'a significant theme here seems to be the child's right to preserve and have preserved a sense of identity, culture and heritage. This seems to present both teachers and parents with notions of duty, responsibility and commitment to finding ways to nurture each child's sense of who he/she is [instead of listening to what the adults are going to teach them]. As McCreery et al. (2007) point out that there are competing discourse at

work here, for example the tensions within a child's right to 'freedom of thought', conscience and religion' and his/her parent's duty 'to provide direction'. In the case of Hong Kong, as could be seen later in this paper, when the author of this paper asked the Muslim parents on how to transmit the Islamic Religious Belief to their children, the parents said they would 'force' their children to believe. Their reasons being young children at a tender age who know nothing of what is good to them, they must be 'forced' to inherit the faith.

In short, it was argued that 'what is seen as a good Islamic education does not necessarily coincide with what is considered to be a good Western liberal education. The focus for all Muslim endeavour is Allah and the start of study is with the Qur'an. 'When a Muslim teacher comes to devise a curriculum unit, the starting point will be "What has the Qur'an to say on this subject" (Hewer, 2001, p.523). Education is one way of drawing a person towards Allah: "its overarching goal is attuned to faith in action which in its turn continually leads Muslims to remember God. For Muslims, the ultimate goal is to seek God through Knowledge' (*ilm*) (Codes, 2004, p.44). Within a Muslim school therefore, children can be educated about the world from an Islamic perspective rather than a Western liberal one. Having said that, there are only a few Islamic faith schools in Hong Kong. Most of the Kindergartens run in Hong Kong are faith schools of either Religions of other faith or secular schools. With the advent of the school voucher scheme that supported the educational paradigm shift to a secular humanistic one, the Islamization of the curriculum should come into scene.

5. To counter-act the influence of westernization, secularization over the Islamic curriculum, the idea of Islamization was initiated

A review of literature on the issue of Islamization of the curriculum

suggested that the Islamization of knowledge is the current trend in Islamic thought – and is becoming a global issue in the Muslim world. The Islamization project was initiated in the United States by Muslim academics including Isma'il al-Faruqi, Syed Husain Nasr and Fazlur Rahman as a response to the secularisation of Muslim society, including its educational institutions. In essence, by Islamization of curriculum, it means the practice of intellectual activity and other planned and unplanned activities in the school based on the Islamic concept of the universe, life and man, which a child is exposed to under the control of the school. From what has been initiated the notion of Islamization, it could take two forms for implementation.

5.1 An orthodox Islam adopting the Allah-centred and non-humanistic approach

Roughly speaking, just like the not too similar religious worldview upheld by different Muslims, the hard-liners orthodox Islam is one which has determined to counter-act the secular westernization influence in the educational curriculum of the children by excluding God (Allah) in the centre of the curriculum (Adebayo, year unknown, p.76) and from which to permeate the same philosophical ideals throughout the curriculum by a matching pedagogy. The mode adopted is what the author of this paper termed as “Knowledge-transmission Curriculum Mode (1)”.

5.2 A so-to-speak ‘gentle Islam’ which adopt the mixed mode of approach by sliding along the curriculum chain of the critical pedagogy and the didactic pedagogy

This one is a bit moderate and would be ready to accept a curriculum which could be a mixture of the humanistic and non-humanistic approach. The model adopted is what the author of this paper called, the “Knowledge-transmission Curriculum Mode (2)”.

The characteristics of the mixed type of curriculum approach would perhaps be summarized by Hushim (2007, p.40) when he says, “The teaching of religious sciences must not be too dependent on traditional methods, such as memorization of classical texts, although certain fundamental knowledge needs to be memorized. Students must be

exposed to the process of learning, including the scientific method and problem solving, and not just the project. Therefore, they need to be led to critical and sound thinking as called upon by Allah in the Qur'an. A balance must be struck between student-centred and subject-centered approaches." Having said that, Hushim's paper did emphasize a lot of loyalty to Allah, which is central to the Islamic philosophy of Education. One could then imagine that such a mixed type of curriculum mode, which stress the 'total obedience to Allah (which is God-centred), so that students whenever they did things would be in the name of Allah. While on the other hand, the other subject disciplines would employ the humanistic mode for teaching and learning. The author of this paper really feels ponder at the point when in real life situation: it would be extremely difficult to put theory into practise for there are two conflicting ideologies that co-exist when realizing them in the classroom. Tensions would be bound to occur when teachers have to choose when to apply the non-humanistic mode and when to apply its counterpart. Similarly, young children are difficult to accommodate this tension as well.

The next line of thought which follows, however, is that when children at a tender age of three to six are trained to be a God-fearing person on one hand, this is to be realized by using the didactic method of teaching. While on the other hand, children are encouraged to enhance their creative power by engaging in some experimental, at times dangerous learning activities. It would be fine if only provided that children have chosen to adhere to the genuine teaching of Qur'an while keeping away from those practices which runs contrary to Allah's teaching at the expense of those self-driven creative thoughts encouraged by the humanistic liberal teaching mode. The model thus used would be "**Knowledge-transmission Curriculum Mode (1)**" as mentioned in a diagram in this paper.

But what if young children, below the reasonable age of seven have mistakenly thinking that they could follow their own self-interest to do things creatively while accrediting the consequences of their action in the name of Allah? Hence, there is still some lurking danger for the faith schools to employ the progressive humanistic approaches for educating their children, which should not be overlooked.

6. A cross reference of May Fourth movement in China to discuss the issue of syncretism

Perhaps by making a cross reference, though not entirely a matching one to the above assumption for further thoughts, so as to solicit the views of the reader for the possible cause and outcome by using such a syncretism mixed mode approach. The example to quote might be the historical well known figure, if not a renowned one in the May Fourth movement of 1919 in Mainland China—Deng Yuzhi (江青). The life of Deng Yuzhi, the wife of chairman Mao in Mainland China was recorded as a life which was full of ups and downs while after all the consequential endings of her life is a tragic one. Could the tragic yet legendary life of Deng a consequence of her deliberate choice of bearing the name of Christian while doing things contrary to her Christian identity? The practise of Deng was said to be the result of her progressive thoughts being nurtured by her parents in a progressive manner for its time.

Deng Yuzhi(江青) described herself as first and foremost a Christian, yet as head of the Labor Bureau of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), she played a major role in organizing women to participate in the Chinese Communist revolution from the 1920's to 1949 (Honig, 1996, p.243).

Deng's Christianity identity was mentioned though it was said that her Christian identity was not the result of individual deliberation and conversion, but rather the continuation of a family tradition begun by her grandmother. In this respect she was like many of her contemporaries. This 'tradition' however, began only after her parents died. They had never been Christians and had raised Deng and her sisters in a manner progressive for its time. In order to keep alive her progressive political value she acquired at Zhounan, Deng became involved with the social service committee of the YWCA, which provided for her the link

between Christianity and social activism that became central to her life's work.
(Honig, p.247).

The May Fourth experience not only affected Deng's ideas about the potential fusion of Christianity and social activism, but about women's roles as well (Honig,249-250). In my understanding, Deng might be called a 'Christian humanist' in the modern terminology, using the Gospel teaching to enforce social action in the activist manner. In the present study, the practice of fusing two contrasting ideological stance in the realm of ECE educational realm obviously does not work. The fusing defects might perhaps not working in the realm of religion as well. This 'religious' practice is obviously not appreciated by the present Catholic Pope, the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger when he wrote in his book, "In the Beginning....': A Catholic Understanding of the story of Creation and the Fall".

Jesus Christ goes Adam's route, but in reverse. In contrast to Adam he is Really "like God". But this being like God, this similarity to God, is being a Son, and hence it is totally relational. "I do nothing on my own authority" (John 8:28). Therefore the One who is truly like God does not hold graspingly to his autonomy, to the limitlessness of his ability and his willing. He does the contrary: he becomes completely dependent, he becomes a slave.
(Ratzinger, 1986, p.75).

It is no surprise for the present Catholic Pope, who represents the centre of the Universal Church (versus the Local Church of the Catholics) to voice out his concerns/teaching on matters relating to the understanding of the Catholic faith. Before his writings in 1986 in the captioned book, there are already some Church documents written for the Catholic Education.

In the understanding of the author of this paper, the concern of the present

Pope is to stress a return to the Catholic heritage in Education matters, since it could be seen the unsatisfactory results of the syncretism mixed mode approach. Would the Catholic experience in the education matter during the new era of change provide a good reflection for other orthodox religions as well? To cite but the following highlighted contents of three of the documents are: (Please refer to the highlighted sentences in particular),

Document name: *Ad Normam Decreti*

Description: *General Catechetical Directory, Congregation for the Clergy, April 11, 1971*

This document was published after Vatican II (1962-1965) council ,which has already taking into consideration the discussed concern over the Catholic Education of the council.

Experiments and changes in catechetics began in the 1950s. Influenced at first by a “kerygmatic” or scriptural approach, **then by an existential “life situation” method, many new courses replaced the traditional catechisms. This rapidly led to deep divisions over method and content. On the one hand, it was claimed that old methods could no longer communicate the faith to the young, and on the other hand, that the transmission of the faith was being destroyed by new methods**. At the height of this debate the *General Catechetical Directory* was published by the Congregation for the Clergy, which has competency in the field of catechetics. This was an attempt to provide some universal coordination, so that **extremes could be avoided and the content of catechesis could be protected, whatever teaching methods were chosen.**

Document name: *The Catholic School*

Description: *Congregation for Catholic Education, March 19, 1977*

In the later decades of the twentieth century, the identity of not a few Catholic schools had

become somewhat vague in pluralist societies. Partly as a result of an attempt to ensure better academic standards or to compete with other schools, the religious content of the syllabus, even prayer and access to the sacraments, had been reduced. **The decline in the number of teaching religious was a further factor leading to a secularizing trend.** The Congregation for Catholic Education seeks to counter this tendency with concrete guidelines, and helps lead Catholic schools to rediscover their identity and heritage and what they can offer children and young people in new social situations.

Document name: *Catechesi Tradendae*

Description: *Catechesis in Our Times, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, March 19, 1977*

The General Catechetical Directory had largely been ignored and many disputes over catechesis continued to divide and distract Catholics. **By the end of the 1970s, it was obvious that there were serious problems in the transmission of the Faith.** Responding to a Synod of Bishops which examined this alarming situation, in *Catechesi Tradendae*, **Pope John Paul II requires a recovery of doctrinal content, a return to the use of memory, and more prudent reliance on a variety of methods.** The nature and content of catechesis would be defined and clarified through the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church in 1993.

In the like manner, an Early Childhood Islamic scholar in Nigeria, Adebayo (year unknown, p.76) also mentions that the secular modernist curriculum would produce a materialistic personality in the individual who looks at religion and spiritual needs as private and not basic to human life on this earth (Farhan Ishaq, 1989)

In this way, Religion will be downgraded for serving human needs instead of honoring God by fulfilling human's mission in life according to the Divine Will (高宣楊, 1984). This is the pragmatist's view of the value of Religion(s) (ibid.) It is well wrapped under the banner of doing good

things to the under-privileged and the needy by name, while hiding the real motive of a reformation mind—a liberal mind by using one’s ability to change the world, either consciously or unconsciously. To many of the orthodox God-fearing faith people, the driving force behind the practice is said essentially to be the ‘pride’ of man, which is the same reason for the fall of the first parents from the Garden of Eden. Having discussed so far, let us now return to the discussion of the Islamic curriculum.

7. How might the Hong Kong Pre-school curriculum include a genuine Muslim curriculum for the Muslim young children?

The need to design an appropriate Islamic curriculum is urgent in face of the growing Muslim population in Hong Kong in recent years either by birth or by migrating to Hong Kong via mainland China. In recent years. Many preschools and kindergartens in Hong Kong, both have religious denominations and non-religious denominations have reported that the number of intake of young children from Pakistan has progressively increased. The parents of these children are mostly from low socio-economic background where both parents have to work during the day, while leaving their children at the care of the preschools and kindergartens. These Muslim children are Hong Kong citizen and are qualified to study in preschools and kindergartens under the school voucher scheme.

By taking into consideration the moderating factors in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries in running an idealistic Islamic kindergarten which based its philosophy on Islamic educational practices, we could see how far Hong Kong could identify the most ‘appropriate’ and feasible Islamic curriculum given all the promises and constraints to these Muslim children.

7.1 The case in Hong Kong: The world has changed, so does the Educational system.

Historically, in Hong Kong, there was little government intervention in preschool provision. It was only in the latter half of 1990's the government of Hong Kong began to reform the school curriculum in order to increase the competitiveness in the world arena.

The main driving force behind the reform of education was the recognition that "The World has Changed, So Must the Education System":

7.1.1 The Promises

Though Hong Kong ceased to be a British colony by July 1997, her educational system is still being informed by the United Kingdom situations and by the worldwide global trend.

After reviewing the three-year study on Hong Kong education system, the Education Commission, the highest-level advisory committee on Hong Kong education issues, published an educational reform report in September 2000. For the first time, it explicitly stated the importance of implementing spiritual and moral education into education. Here it says:

Moral Education will be acknowledged as playing a very important role in the education system, and having an important social mission. Students will experience structured learning in moral, educational and spiritual education to help them develop a healthy outlook to life. (Education Commission, *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum*, Hong Kong: 2000, p.35)

This report has brought up our attention to look at spiritual education as an essential part of education and it helped to design an all-rounded curriculum suitable for the development of young children. Because of the emphasis placed on fostering the holistic curriculum with inclusion of the religious and spiritual development of the young children, there might be a chance for schools run by Islamic organization to foster the Islamic heritage and cultural value to the young children through school education.

7.1.2 The Constraints

7.1.2.1 The Educational Reform in Early Childhood Education favoured the model of humanistic curriculum in Hong Kong.

In order to support the educational reform in the year 2007 (Wardlaw, 2006) at its full strength, in his 2006-07 Policy Address, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong committed HK\$2 billion to enhancing holistic ECE through the instigation of a school voucher scheme. The new paradigm of a child-centred curriculum is considered necessary to keep pace with international quality educational developments. Regulations are set to enforce the compulsory staff development for school administrators and teachers. Seminars and workshops, Independent School Support Unit were run and set up to provide all the possible means to ensure the determined set goals be reached within 5 years.

7.1.2.2 What the liberal humanistic curriculum advocated in Hong Kong is like? ²

The Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (CDC, 2006, p.13, 40, 41) states its set goals as follow:

“Pre-primary institutions should develop children’s learning abilities and potential through informal learning which is integrated, open, flexible and appropriate to catering for children’s developmental needs and interests. Children’s abilities should be developed through play activities that are inspiring and fun.” In short, the Guide suggests the ‘Pre-primary institutions should adopt the following principles for designing the curriculum’;

7.1.2.2.1 Be **child-centred**, which could

Meet children’s developmental needs and abilities;
Relate to children’s experiences and interests;

7.1.2.2.2 Be comprehensive and **well-balanced**

Cater for children’s **holistic development** in the cognitive, language, physical, affective, social and

aesthetic aspects;
Foster children’s knowledge, skills and attitudes in
different learning areas;

7.1.2.2.3 Adopt **play** as a learning strategy.

7.1.2.3. The advocated liberal humanistic curriculum has run contrary to the goals and aims of education of the Islamic educational mode.

As the goals and aims of education obviously have an impact on the kind of curriculum to be taught. For Muslims, there is no distinction between religious knowledge and other knowledge, all is knowledge of Allah: ‘the search for knowledge can be seen as an act of piety, as equivalent to prayer’ (Coles, 2004, p.44). This is a very different starting point from that of British schools(cf. case in United Kingdom), which is relevant to the Hong Kong situation as well, in which Western liberal values form the basis of study, and gives rise to some tensions surrounding the Islamic curriculum which stress obedience of children to their teachers and parents as well as conformity in knowing the Qur’an. Having said that, one must also bear in mind that this mode of curriculum and pedagogy sided more with the orthodox Islam rather than the “gentle Islam”, as explained earlier in the paper. For the ‘gentle Islam’, a mixed mode of secular humanist approach and non-humanist approach would be used.

7.1.2.3.1. Justifications that the prevalent advocated curriculum on ECE is a humanistic curriculum underpinned by the liberal values (cf. points in 7.1.2.2.)

- (1) The term of “**child-centred**” means children should be given more autonomy in the form of self-initiated activity; adults should give more space for children’s worlds, with their own creation of meaning to the extent that the activity should be wholly owned by the children;
- (2) As the Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (2006) emphasizes on the **development of children**, DAP (Developmental Appropriate Practice) is generally adopted by practitioners in Hong Kong to foster the implementation of the Guide, though DAP is not specifically

vocated by John Dewey ³ and Kilpatrick. As suggested in the Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (2006), play is an important element to foster an informal and integrated curriculum and hence the link between play, informal education, integrated curriculum and child-centred curriculum should be fostered. It is highly recommended that the playfulness attitude of the children should be illustrated in the paper as a manifestation of play ⁴ ;

In order to minimize the harming effect of jeopardizing the younger generation's faith and Islamic practices, explorations on ways to locate an appropriate Islamic curriculum and pedagogical application is worthwhile. Since Early Childhood Education has its own discipline and specialty, what is mentioned below is the attempt of the author to explain to the reader at large (especially those who are familiar with the religious and cultural concepts) for an easy comprehension of the situation.

8. Using the religious notions of Myth and Ritual to explain the Myth of the educational ideology and the Ritual of the pedagogic practises in the ECE classroom

8.1 Using the notion of ritual to explain the pedagogical phenomenon exhibited in the Hong Kong early year classroom.

In a review of literature on ritual, ritual is defined as an analytical category that helps us deal with the chaos of human experience and put it into a coherent framework. As mentioned earlier in this paper, it is said not until a generation ago, anthropologists typically defined ritual as

culturally standardized, repetitive activity, primarily symbolic in character, aimed at influencing human affairs, and involving the supernatural realm (Kertzer, 1988, p.339). Ritual has further been studied that people who participate in [instructional] ritual forms most often had nothing to do with creating (ibid. p.340). Because of the repetitiveness nature of ritual, it is used as a way of transmitting cultural knowledge in schools. To make the transmission possible and efficiently, the rite of teaching pedagogy has to be teacher-directed and best served in a highly domain of work with its emphasis on academic subjects and con-comitant work habits. This teaching pedagogy could best be represented in the highly structured, academically oriented classes as observed and being criticized in many of the kindergartens in Hong Kong.

In ‘Schooling as a Ritual Performance’, McLaren (1999) seeks to convince educators to recognize and understand the cultural politics of ritual performance in the classroom. McLaren writes, “Because rituals transmit societal and cultural ideologies, we can discover a lot about how ideologies do their work by examining the key symbols and root paradigms of the ritual system of school [through the pedagogy used in the classroom].

Examples of some typical ritualistic practises which are familiar by the Hong Kong ECE practitioners are,

Chinese hand-writing exercises which place emphasis in the order of stokes when compiling the character.

The lining up requirement demanded of young children

The training of toileting to young children.

The learning of taking turn to speak and to play toys

The learning of restoring the toys to its original position after playing

The learning to sit properly in chairs

The learning to stop an activity whenever the teacher claps her hands to give order

The learning to keep quiet when the teacher is talking

The learning to take turn to speak to peers

To stand up properly to say a prayer before eating snacks in snack time.

When applying ritual in the realm of education, rituals are usually refer to the pedagogies that are used as a way of defining what is to be taught and how it is to be taught, reflecting the teacher's decisions about what is pedagogically sound in the narrow sense.

8. 2. How Myths are represented as the ideological beliefs of the teachers in the early childhood classrooms?

Same as ritual which has its alignment with the supernatural realm, myths also represent the language of the sacred in symbols put into a narrative form. According to a prominent Romanian thinker in the study of religions, cultural life, linguistics, literature, etymology, oriental studies, ethnological studies, playwright studies, the philosophy of history and memoirs author, Micea Eliade wrote that myth is not just one image or sign; it is a sequence of images put into the shape of a story. It tells a tale of the gods, of the ancestors or heroes, and their world of the supernatural (Livia, 2007).

As to the archaic peoples, Mythical values provide the very ideological framework of the early years teachers within which they think, the values which they admire, and the models they choose to follow whenever they act.

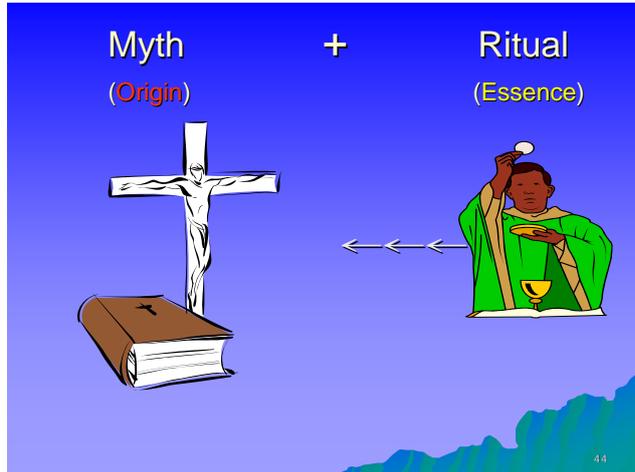
8.2.1. The continuation of Myth must be allied with the 'right' form of Ritual

Please find below a diagrammatically representation of the relationship

between Myth and Ritual

Daily example to show the relationship between Myth and Ritual

The rite of Mass is a ritual to foster the [myth] of the Christian faith.



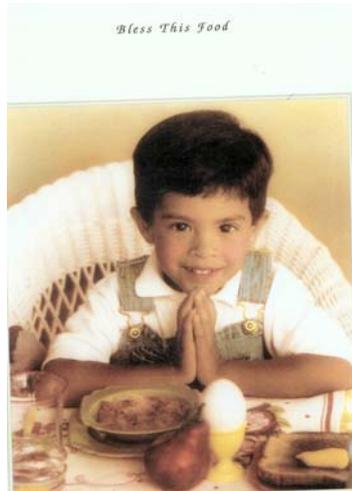
Daily example to show the relationship between Myth (origin) and Ritual (essence)

- A Muslim child by the age of seven says five times of Prayer to Allah in a day.



Daily example to show the relationship between Myth and Ritual

Saying a prayer before meal is a kind of ritual to foster the [myth] of the Christian faith.



Daily example to show the relationship between Myth and Ritual

To perform Tai Chi is a kind of ritual to foster the Taoist myth.



Daily example to show the relationship between Myth and Ritual

The practice of Martial art is a ritual to enforce the myth of Chinese Taoist tradition



Life example to show the relationship between Myth and Ritual

The ceremonial rite of knighting is a ritual to enforce the myth of knighthood and loyalty.



The Buddhist Religious teaching by a practise of ritualistic

Renewal

種瓜得瓜，種豆得豆。
法是「軌持」：能令眾生修證佛果

(梁啓超、張澄基) (順印法師)



There are designated roles for those who practise the Buddhist religion

學佛人應皈奉三寶

(梁啓超、張澄基) (順印法師)

佛教

以「佛」為主體，

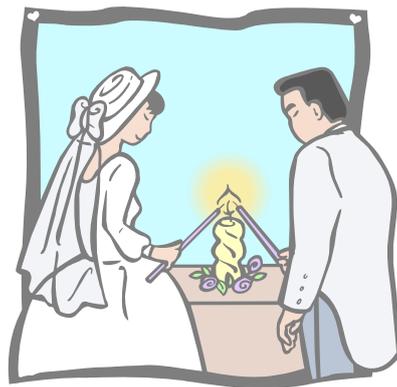
以「法」為軌則，

依「僧」以傳持。



Life example to show the relationship between Myth and Ritual

The ceremonial rite (ritual) of wedding has reiterated the couple's belief in the holiness and unity of marriage.



Free as the Wind_{(Myth)...}

or

Under the authority_{(Myth) . . .}

舊式的幼教方法 / 新式的幼教方法

Teach the Child !

Follow the Child !

Learn from the child !



Daily example to show the relationship between Myth and Ritual

The ritual of fostering the ideological myth of humanist educational ideals is manifested in the teaching pedagogy which allows autonomy for young children in their pursuit of Knowledge.



Follow the Child !

A teacher to follow the child is a non-conformist ritual of performing the myth of the Humanist faith.

8.3 A change of Ritual would call for a change of Myth, losing the origin of Myth

A change in the ritual will change the belief of the myth. What one has once believed would then become a different belief. The situation might be explained by the analogy of cooking an egg. Given an egg as the ingredient to cook a meal, the cook could either break the egg and then using the frying technique or to scramble the egg and then steamed it. It is precisely the differences in the cooking techniques that has produced two entirely different egg dishes. In a similar way, if the method (pedaogogy) to teach the same content (curriculum) is different, then the outcome of knowledge (myth-the belief system) would be different.

9. The impact of the school voucher scheme of Faith schools, with special reference to an Islamic Kindergarten in Hong Kong.

Would the Islamic Kindergarten with its curriculum design and pedagogy

Used not fair to the Muslim parents who wish to transmit the Islamic faith to their young children under the school voucher scheme?

Before answering this question, one might perhaps seek for an answer to the following question, “Which mode of the curriculum, a didactic one, a humanistic one or a mixed mode is a better approach for the Muslim to sustain/transmit their ‘genuine’ Islamic Faith in the Hong Kong Kindergarten context?”

In an attempt to answer this question, apart from others, an applied research has been conducted by the author of this paper in May 2009. The research is about exploring how parents and teachers perceive their roles while children explore the concept of God and Spirituality.

9.1 Aim of the Research

The aim of this pilot study is basically to trace dimensions in God concepts of preschoolers, teachers and parents, namely, to document what young children know and believe about God and the related issue of spirituality orally and by pictures/ artwork that the children drawn, and to assess God concepts of parents and teachers and to see if they have an influence on Young children’s concepts of God and Spirituality by interviews. It is anticipated that the data collected will reflect how and from whom God concepts were formed or developed that are affecting the lives of these kindergarten children. There is no priori assumption as to what the ‘origins’ of God should be like.

9.2 The Approach of the Study

Qualitative research method has been used with participant observation, interviews and conversations with children and their caretakers (parents and teachers), and gathering of drawings and art work being the sources of data collection. In order to set the scene for children’s involvement in the drawing, props such as story books of different themes, ranging from biblical story books, fairy tales, story books with classical stories; and story books with contemporary stories were used.

Data is to be obtained through the drawing of pictures of children in an informal setting of the classroom. It is because a review of literature suggests that the best way to capture children's concept of religion and spirituality development is through the informal drawing of picture, which is a form of informal play (play with autonomy, children could draw whatever they like to) . The informality nature of play could be manifested by its creativity and its integrated nature. (Bryza, Susan P. 2005).

The author of this paper as researcher of this study together with three of her colleagues have involved in collecting data from the Islamic kindergarten. The date of the visit to the Islamic kindergarten was on 21st May 2009. One hour has been spent in classroom observation of the a group of seven target children in a mixed aged group of children between 5 and 6 years of age. These target children were selected by teachers after gaining consent from the children's parents. The research team has participated in the free play activity in children's class, in the informal group activities of children's drawing and by talking with children as to understand the display of religious knowledge and/or spirituality elements of the young children through the informal free play activities. Four hours were spent on interviewing the adult caretakers (principals, teacher, a translator as well as the Muslim parents who are ethnic Pakistani). Data were collected by photo-taking, audio-taping, video-taping the conversation among the children and their teacher during the activities, as well as interviewing the teachers and the children's parents after the lesson. A semi-structured questionnaire is designed to guide the researchers to solicit answers from the teachers and parents. Data was triangulated by the feedback of the teachers and parents as to confirm or to adjust the analysis of the description made by the researchers.

Field notes would be kept as to scribble notes after each visit. Data would be triangulated by soliciting parents' and teachers' feedback concerning their observations of the correctness of the description made by the researchers. At the same time, parents and teachers would be asked to discuss their own concepts of God (Allah) as revealed in the

questionnaires filled to those displaced by their children.

9.3 Findings

Space does not permit the author to present each of the various texts of the research. However, those outlined below suggest the emergence of the characteristic which could demonstrate the essence of upkeeping or deviation of the origin of the Islamic Faith in young children. The existence of this characteristic, however, presents a challenge for the curriculum and pedagogic mode advocated by the current reform requirements in Hong Kong, in particular for those programmes which operate within Faith schools where the Islamic narrative forms a source of the authoritative wisdom to be handed on to its students.

9.4 Derivation of Themes and meanings emerge from the data collected in the interview with the Muslim parents

Evidences of what have been mentioned above could be traced from the themes derived from the data. For details of the raw data collected, please refer to Appendix 2.

Theme 1: Children' religious knowledge are learnt from the parents

Theme 2. Description of Allah : Allah is light and lived high above the sky

Theme 3:. There are prayer requirement imposed on the children.

Theme 4: Muslim needs to fast a whole month in a year

Theme 5: Rites of Prayer and reading of Qur'an.

Theme 6: Muslim Parents forced their children to believe in the Islamic religion by studying Qur'an.

Theme 7:. Muslim Parents mentioned the secular influence for their children in Hong Kong.

Theme 8:. Dress code is required for the Muslim children.

Theme 9:. Regulations to be observed for dining. Some food are forbidden to eat, the observation is strict and has to apply to the Kindergarten snack time.

Theme 10:. Parental expectation for a smooth transition to good Primary school in Hong Kong. They longed for a chance for their children to study in good schools, like some of the Catholics schools in Hong Kong.

Theme 11: Muslim Parents hope that in those Faith schools (good Catholic schools) freedom of Religion could be enhanced. To serve this ends, parents hope that these captioned faith schools would not forced their children to observe the faith of the other religions, like those of the Catholic rite and religious knowledge.

Theme 12: Marriage system in the Islamic religion.

9.5 Understanding gained from the themes emerged

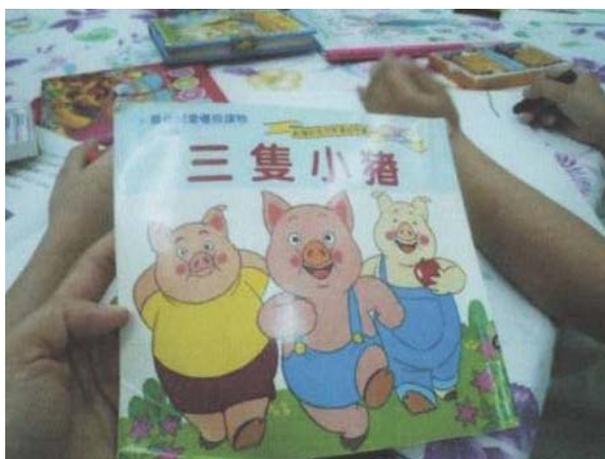
from the data

1. Most of the young Muslim parents participated in the interview session show very strong Islamic faith as revealed from their understanding of the Islamic religious practices.
2. Muslim parents would ‘force’ their children to study Qur;an and to practise the Islamic Faith since they think their children are too young to leave to their own choice for not adhering to the traditional religion.
3. Muslim parents do care about the notion of ‘freedom of religion’ and stress that if their children be admitted to the Faith schools of other religion, like the Catholic Primary and Secondary schools, their

children should not be forced to practise the Catholic rite.

4. Muslim parents seem not to concern very much of the curriculum design and pedagogic practices in the Kindergarten. This concept could be applied later to the Primary and Secondary education. They seem not to understand the paradigm shift of the (ECE) curriculum due to the education reform in recent years would subtly ‘ursurp’ the faith of their children by liberating the thoughts of their children.

For example, the well-known classical story, ‘Three little pigs’ which is one of the popular story books in the Kindergartens in Hong Kong is forbidden to be read in the Islamic Kindergarten, though it is still being placed in the library corner of this Kindergarten.



Evidence collected in the research with young Muslim children during the informal drawing activities in class might perhaps explain the situation.

Given the moderate mode of curriculum as checked against the standard set in the new Curriculum Guide to Pre-primary Education (2006) mentioned earlier, when children were given opportunities to exercise their creativity in the new form of secular modernist humanistic curriculum, children would attempt to draw picture which are driven by their self interest and worldview.

This creativity ability of children is best observed while children are having their informal classroom activities, such as drawing (Mountain, V.

2007).



An example of which could be seen in Case 1 of the study.

Case 1: Anita (fictitious name), female, aged 6



In here, one could see Anita has drawn a swimming suit mermaid and told the researchers that this is one of her favourite stories she came across among the other classical western stories, like the Cinderella, Snow White...and the other fairy tales. To the parents of this faith school, Anita's creative drawing of the mermaid and to create meaning for the story seems odd in the Islamic religious tradition, however, to the advocators of spirituality education (Priestly, 1997; Woods, 1996), arguments have been in favour of the affective or experiential approach of 'the weaving the threads of meaning' by children into the child-centred curriculum.

Close-up of the picture drawn by Anita in this research.



A former picture drawn by Anita showing the same theme of mermaid.



Note that if this kindergarten would adopt the curriculum mode and pedagogic practises of the informal humanistic pedagogy, while on the other hand, children will be given home tuition of the Islamic faith, then the model is of the “**Humanistic Curriculum mode-(1)**” mentioned in

this paper.

Case 2 : Dora (fictitious name), aged 6



Since the mother of Dora is a woman with strong Islamic faith, her daughter even if given the freedom to draw whatever she likes, she was found drawn a picture of Mega. In the interview section with the parents, Dora's mother is the one that stresses most the importance of allowing the 'freedom of religion' for the Muslim school should they have a chance to enter the Primary and Secondary schools with other religious faith.

Case 3 Louis (fictitious name), aged 6





Same as Dora's mother who would teach their children to practise the Islamic faith at home, Louis's mother also did the same. As could be seen from the picture drawn by this Muslim boy, his picture manifested much of the Islamic faith influences.

Case 4: Albert, (fictitious name), aged 6



It is said that Albert's father is one of the Islamic religious leader in Hong Kong, Albert has learnt many of the Islamic doctrine from his parents. According to the message delivered by the principal of this faith school Albert's parents are very staunch in their Islamic faith and have taken the orthodox stance of their religion to a vast extent. In the picture, Albert has drawn a picture to glorify the creative power of Allah through His creation. Albert thereby stood up and hold his picture up to show his

respect for Allah's creation.

10. Discussion

10.1 Change of ritual, change of myth: in order to enhance the continuity of myth, corresponding ritual must be practised.

It was found from this research that young children acquire their concepts from adults who intended to 'teach' them, while the creativity aspect of young children are mostly initiated from the children themselves by weaving the threads of meaning from her immediate environment. This creation of meaning is best observed while children are having their informal classroom activities, such as drawing.

As such, the meaning making and world views of students themselves in the classroom context cannot be ignored, and this may present a challenge for religious educators in Faith contexts who attempt to pass on a particular Faith tradition. Research conducted in Australia has arrived at the same conclusion (Hyde, 2008, p.242-243) while conducting research with children in the Catholic primary schools.

Variables such as the orthodox understanding of the Islamic Faith, the curriculum content and pedagogy employed by the teacher...etc. would impact on young children's formation of either God's concept of Allah from the traditional 'religious' sense, or to follow their interests in secular things that attract them in daily life.

Diagram to identify four simple Early Childhood curriculum modes and pedagogic practises currently practised in Hong Kong (see diagram 1 below)

Knowledge-transmission Curriculum Mode (1) ----- > carry out

***consistently
with
matching
didactic
pedagogy***

Knowledge-transmission Curriculum Mode (2) ----- >using mixed

*mode of humanistic
pedagogy and
knowledge
-transmission
pedagogic
practices (didactic
practises) in reality*

Humanistic Curriculum mode-(1)---- > Using child-centred

*pedagogic practises to
enforce humanistic
worldview but moderated by
parents' teaching.*

Humanistic Curriculum mode (2)----- > Using child-centred

*pedagogic practises to
enforce humanistic
worldview, the recipient
would acquire a
secularized personality
as a result.*

10.2 Educational Inequality for the minority ethnic Muslim children in Hong Kong under the school voucher scheme

As discussed earlier, the Muslim traditions emphasise a heavily top-down teaching environment that underscores the social interaction expected from students. Therefore, the teaching of Religious Education amongst these cultural groups is associated with a teacher-centred approach and didactic pedagogy (True, 2009).

When the 2006 Guide advocates a humanistic, child-centred educational approach, then there is an official expectation that all preschools need to adopt this approach. If certain schools, such as religious schools, prefer to pursue a contrary approach by adopting a religious-cultural transmission model of teaching, then they are putting themselves at risk of failing to be judged as quality education providers, which may affect their application for the school voucher scheme.

This situation not only jeopardises the efficient implementation of educational reform in Hong Kong, but may also result in educational inequality for stakeholders.

This is in particular the case when taken into mind the operation of the school voucher scheme in Hong Kong, which is based on the free choice of the parents to choose the preferred education for their children, the demarcation between the ‘genuine’ cultural-transmission curriculum model with that of the liberal humanistic religious education model must be clarified or else the misunderstanding on the part of the school-voucher holders (the parents) would become an ethical issue. Clarification must be made for the parents, so that they could make the right choice for the education of their children.

By taking the present study of the Islamic school as an example to illustrate the above mentioned, one would realize the implications of the issue raised.

Thanks for the parents’ tutoring of the Islamic religious knowledge to their children at home, the children in this school, with the moderate curriculum, could still exhibit the Islamic faith. However, when given the opportunities for an informal settings, children would immediately drawn pictures out of their self-pursuit and self-interest, as in the case of Anita, who draw the ‘swimming suit’ mermaid.

But how about the other Islamic schools, which operated under the school voucher scheme? As far as the author of this paper has understood, unlike the Islamic Kindergarten under study, there are Islamic Kindertgartens in Hong Kong who would permit their teachers to practise the ‘liberal approach’ by content and pedagogy. The application of liberal pedagogic practises are even found widely practised in those non-religious schools or schools with other religious practise with intake of Muslim children, like the Pakistani and the Indonesian children. The model that these schools adopted are the **“Humanistic Curriculum mode (2)** mentioned in this paper.

In either of the cases, the phenomenon is not fair to the Muslim children.

In the case of the Islamic Kindergarten of the present study, the Kindergarten would run a risk of being labelled as not a ‘quality’ school since the methodology and curriculum content being practised are of the traditional teacher-centre, the cultural-transmission one. The curriculum model used in this Kindergarten is the first type of the model, namely the **“Knowledge-transmission-Curriculum Mode (1)**.

Evidence to show that the Islam faith school under study is of the traditional style, hidden curriculum like the plague hangs on the wall at the entrance of the Kindergarten is self-explanatory.

The Muslim traditions emphasise a heavily top-down teaching environment for the transmission of Islamic faith in this Faith school.



Whereas for the second case, the methodology and curriculum content practised are of the secular liberation model, the practise of such would jeopardize the transmission of the Islamic faith to the Muslim children.

In both of the cases, it is obvious that there are misunderstandings on the part of the school voucher holders (the parents) on the philosophy of education in the schools of their choice. This would give rise to serious ethical problems. In short, these school voucher holders are not being made known of the serious implications by putting their young children to a school which would ‘usurp’ the faith or hindered the development of the faith via the curriculum design and pedagogical practises. The situation is simply unfair to those parents who care about the genuine transmission of faith to their children.

Most importantly, the practitioners of the Early Childhood practitioners (parents, teachers, early childhood practitioners) must not overlooked the serious impact of having a seemingly ‘unharmful’ mixed mode of curriculum and pedagogic practises, which is underpinned by contrasting ideological stance, one being a liberal mode of education, as manifested by the ‘child-centred’ approach and the other being the (Religious) knowledge-transmission mode and is facilitated by a teacher-centred mode of education. A mixed curriculum mode with different ideological stance would basically like practising the ‘wrong’ ritual to foster the ‘faith’. As argued before, a change of ritual would lead to a change of myth (origin) of a particular religious tradition. The consequences could be far more devastating and could lead to serious socio-political problems as well.

One of the consequences anticipated would be the hindrance to spread the religious faith to people who wish to accept a particular religion. A cross-reference of the practise of the Chinese Christian in Mainland China could perhaps give insight to the issue discussed.

In a chapter of a book entitled “Chinese Culture and the Development of Sino-Christian Theology” authored by Lai Pan-Chu (2006), one could perhaps draw a similarity between applying the Christian faith by a non-matching theological practises with that of applying the (Biblical Knowledge/Religious) knowledge-transmission curriculum model by a non-matching pedagogical practises in the ECE context. The similarity lies in the religious notion ‘with the change of rituals, there is a change of myth, which is the origin of the religion.’”.

The author of this paper wishes to echo of what she has written in one her previous assignments for course RTS 5120 ⁵ with those mentioned by Lai’s writing (ibid, 2006) about the Christianity religion in Mainland China during the May Fourth movement period in 1919.

(1) There is a possibility of the penetration of non-religious humanistic ideology into the Christian religious practises at the time through the influence of the pragmatist, humanist and progressive advocator---John Dewey and his disciples. His loyal disciples at that time include the well-known Christian reformists, Hu Shih(胡適, 1891-1961), Tao Xingzhi

(陶行知, 1891-1946), and Chen He-qin (陳鶴琴-1892-1982). Note that the last two scholars are still prominent figures in influencing the contemporarily ECE reform in Hong Kong.⁶

In fact, many of the popular criticisms of Christianity voiced in China at that time were based on western ideologies, such as the theories of evolution, materialism, atheism and scientism.

(2) Would there be a possibility that the ‘Christian Education Reformers’ like Tao Xingzhi, Chen He-qin as well as the already mentioned one, Deng Yushi (江青) are responsible to harass the spreading of Christianity rather than doing good to it? Are the use of “Social Gospel” a root cause for the rejection of the Christian faith without even known by its proponents? The reason being the naïve mismatch of corresponding ‘ritualistic (method) to practise the ‘myth’(origin of the Christian faith in this case). In the understanding of the author of this paper about the Catholic faith, the believers should listen to what Jesus has taught them through the Bible and the catechism set by the Universal Church. “In the Catholic Church, there is always the external check of the higher authorities to act as a balance to the excesses of religious mania” (Blamires, 2007, p.33).

Hence, the believers are not expected to ‘act’ like ‘God’ and be ‘God’ themselves. As the present Pope (Ratzinger, 2005, p.91) has used (Gen 3:5) to remind us, “The core of the temptation for man and of his fall is contained in the programmatic statement, “You will be like God.” Like God: that means free of the law of the Creator, free of the laws of nature itself, absolute lord of one’s own destiny, while still justifying their practises by claiming that Jesus is also a revolutionary figure Himself in history. The concept of liberation theology in the Christianity might perhaps the concept to explain Christianity as a praxis of liberation and sees itself as the guide to this praxis (Ratzinger, 2005, p.176).

Constrastingly to this worldview and practises of Christianity, the author of this paper has written in her Sino-Christian assignment by arguing that from the Catholics’ s understanding of the ‘Church’, she

should be like the mother of God, who is gentle, humble and obeying to the teachings of Jesus. That's why the 'people of God' should not be a rebellious social figure who want to achieve the liberation exclusively in the immanent plane, in history, in this world (Ratzinger, 2005, p, 173).

...the ideological impact of the new cultural movement highlighting science and democracy, together with the rapid social and political changes, constituted serious challenges to Chinese Christinnity. In response to the criticisms of Christianity voiced by the **Anti-Christian movement (1922-1927), Chinese Christian intellectual endeavoured to prove that Christianity was not contradictory to science and that, as a progressive and revolutionary religion, Christianity was set to make positive contributions against the emergent national problems (Lai, 2006, p.284)**

.....From the 1920's onwards, the rapid changes in the social and political situation in China compelled some Chinese theologians to develop various political theologies in order to **demonstrate the revolutionary nature of Christianity.**¹ Gradually the focus of discussion among Chinese Christian theologians shifted from "how to indigenize Christianity" to "whether and how Christianity might save the nation." (Lai, 2006, p.248).

11. Implications for the Islamic and the other Faith schools in Hong Kong

Clarification of the current curriculum and pedagogical practises should be made known to parents who wish their children to sustain their 'freedom of religion' and 'freedom of transmission of religion of their choice to their young children"

Similarly, under the school voucher scheme where parents are entitled to

have a free choice for choosing a preschool for their children, faith schools in particular must make every attempt to explain to the parents of the underlying philosophy and the education outcomes of the moulding of the person in particular. Faith schools are those schools which claimed to have religious background as their school missions. Hence, generally speaking, the Faith schools in Hong Kong include the Catholic Kindergartens, Protestant Kindergartens, Islamic Kindergartens, Taoist Kindergartens, Buddhist Kindergartens, Japanese Kindergartens, and those Kindergartens run with an ideological stance like the Montessori Kindergartens⁷, Waldoff Kindergartens,⁸ and those Kindergartens which favour the Confucian practices⁹.

11.1 Proposed Solution: A school-based curriculum underpinned by the Islamic Philosophy of Education is needed

In agreement with what McCreery et al (2007) mentioned in that ‘as educationists we are challenged by a different value system and a different way of being in the world. We can of course learn as much as we can about a different way of seeing the world, but ultimately we may not agree with it and we may not be comfortable with children being educated in such a way....as schools [run outside the Muslim countries] cannot provide for the needs of all children and their parents...why not accept this and let different groups develop their own provision?’, I also wish that the Education Bureau (EdB) in Hong Kong would hear this plead of the practitioners in the ECE field in Hong Kong by following what they (the EdB) have suggested in the Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum, 2006, p. 13 that “Following the rising standard of professionalism in the field of pre-primary education, pre-primary institutions are encouraged to develop a curriculum tailored to their own needs.” But not to the extent that mentioned in the same paragraph that asks for a contrary concept of accommodating the use of ‘the fundamental concepts and principles set out in this Guide as a base, to follow the directions below, and to adopt appropriate strategies.’

And most of all, the criteria to decide on whether a pre-school is entitled to obtain the ‘school-voucher’ should not be rested on whether they could implement the ‘quality’ education set according to the Western liberal education standard but to a ‘real’ school-based curriculum by taking

account of the religious/cultural philosophy/mission of the school and the intake of its students.

12. Conclusion

It is hoped that when time goes by, a full curriculum would be catered for a reconstruction of the curriculum according to the Islamic teaching preference.

It is anticipated that basing on the findings of the present research, attention would be aroused to the public at large for the need to have Faith school and/or to design a school-based curriculum rested on the interest of the Faith school. The criteria to judge whether the school voucher should be given would therefore suggest a re-visit to the school mission of the school concerned instead of enforcing a curriculum which runs contrary to the mission/religious background of the school.

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Endnote:

¹Syed Ali Ashraf, *New Horizons in Muslim Education*, Cambridge, Hodder and Stoughton and the **Islamic** Academy. 1985. P. 4.

²Progressive ideology has its root in humanist ideology. The reason why progressive education is considered as an anti-religious practise is self-explanatory by the humanist themselves on the first hand. One could refer to the Humanist Manifesto I, II and III for its underlying anti-religious stance on all established religions. For features of the Humanist education, please refer to ³ **Notes on the features of the Humanist Education** for identification. Secondly, the fact that progressive education, as advocated by John Dewey, has placed an emphasis on first-hand experience of learning (learning-by-doing theory) for children, for this reason, Dewey was also regarded as a pragmatist. Together with the enforcement of critical thinking skills of children, the progressivists have successfully undermined the cultural-value transmission model of the Christian education. Take for an example, young children of age below seven when trained to think critically and not to believe in anything except for those phenomenon that he has observed by first-hand experience. Children being trained in this way will find it difficult to believe in what their religious teacher says, say when they were told that Jesus could turn water into wine. Coupled with lowering of authority on the part of the teacher, where teacher could be 'graded' by children, children will then be empowered the right whether to believe in what their teachers say or not. In this way, the progressivist-humanist could skilfully usurped the seed of faith implanted in the young mind by the teacher when the children choose not to listen to them.

It is worth noting that what are promoted by the contemporary early childhood curriculum like the High Scope Approach, the Project Approach, the Reggio Emilia Approach, the Whole Language Approach and the Montessori Approach have all involved using the humanistic ideology of John Dewey.

³ **Notes on the features of the Humanist Education**

Humanist Education is a kind of New Age Education. The promoters are people whom we called the "Secular humanists", "Religious humanists" and even some "Christian humanists". **

Philosophical Roots:

Enlightenment, existentialism, progressivism, Marxism (Communist Party's ideology).

Major Proponents:

Jean Rousseau, Marie Montessori, Arnold Gesell, Sigmund Freud, John Dewey, Carl Rogers, Pestolozzi, Froebel, Horace Mann, William Glasser, Hegel, Paulo Freire.

Background Information : Emphasis in the Humanistic Manifesto I and II in 1933 and 1973:

Regard the universe as self-existing and not created. Do not believe in any dogmas of the established religions. Regard the promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory

and harmful. 'Truth' is relative and pragmatic, what we find works and is helpful to us. (Note: This is in direct contrary of what God through the Holy Bible tells us that "Truth" is absolute). Man is his own God, choosing or determining for himself what constitutes good and evil. Atheist Humanists believe that man must work increasingly for joy in living, and to encourage achievements that add to the satisfactions of life. New Age Educators want to create a 'new world' or a 'new age' which is based on human efforts and not on superstition (refer to the established religions). Want to 'preach' this ideal globally and advocate the practice of "globalization". Hence, the family value is obsolete. The individual or the state is basic. In order to fulfill the "mission" of the "New Age" movement, the "New Age" curriculum in the progressive era is a one that promotes "**relativism**" as Dewey said, "in an age of change and uncertainty, future citizens needed to be trained in a spirit that eschewed dogma in favour of a flexible outlook on the world (Dewey 1908, p.808-809).

** "Secular humanists" refer to those people who uphold a non-religiously based philosophy which promote humanity as the measure of all things. It had its roots in the rationalism of the 18th Century and the free thought movement of the 19th Century. "Religious humanists" are similar to the secular humanists, except that it is practiced in a setting with fellowship and rituals. "Christian humanists" are people who have adopted a philosophy based on Christian beliefs about the nature of God and which advocate people's fulfillment by personal effort.

Definition and Features :

Pragmatism "has no dogmas, no doctrines, save its methods" (R.H. Tierney, "Pragmatism and the Higher Life, I" p.417 cited in Woods, T.E. p. 48)

- Children are inherently good (assume that children are not wounded by **Original Sin**) and are eager to learn. Therefore education must focus on the affective results in a process of unfolding human characteristics.
- "Let children lead the way" has become the motto of New Age Education.
- Hence, the detailed planning of the lesson objectives is not necessary by the teachers. Teachers should not dictate what children should learn. Teachers need only to write down the aims of the lesson and the teaching content will be modified according to the children's interest. If children do not feel interested in a particular area which was planned ahead by the teachers, teachers could skip that part and dwell on those parts that children want to learn. Basically, it is the children who plan the curriculum.
- "Affective education" or feelings of the children must be noted. New Age education aims to make children feel good. Children are made to discuss their feelings. The "Affective Education" is a kind of feminist-based form of educational approach. They soon learn that feelings, not absolutes, determine behaviour.
- Excessively promote the idea of self-esteem and self-acceptance. (To adhere to the idea advocated by Maslow's hierarchy of needs). Opponents of the self-esteem focus argue that the focus on self-esteem is a direct result of a change in the way we view human nature. This change has been towards a relativistic view of morality, which discourages belief in transcendent moral values. Students are prompted to seek truth within, like the Buddhist' teaching, seeking "God-within" and to see moral values, or ethics, as emanating from that process. Truth is seen as tied to a particular person; it becomes biographical. What is true for you may not be true for me. On top of that, the virtues of self-control and self-denial are ignored, so the end result is self-centeredness.
- Learning is child-centered and occurs as a child self-actualizes, the process of gaining information and becoming what the child desires without adult influence. Adults become facilitator and not instructor. Adults use non-directive educational methods to facilitate children to learn. Non-directive education is obviously successful in enabling children to break with their parents' traditional religious values, a necessary prerequisite for accepting the values of the new world order.
- Education is self-realization and self-development of the child.

- In feeling-good education, discipline was thrown out as it allegedly hindered creativity. Carl Rogers deplored teachers who favoured “neatness, quiet, order and ‘being right’ out of which can come conservatism and rigidity. He advocated “messiness, noise, confusion and mistakes, out of which may come originality, creativity and genius”. Children are encouraged to “talk” instead of to “listen” to others, especially to those have authority, like their teachers and parents.
- In line with Dewey and Carl Rogers’ dictum on noise and messiness, the National Association for the Education of Young Children advises American and Canadian teachers:

Reference Source: Ferreira, C.R. (2003). Retrieved from website: http://www.trosch.org/msn/cfn_new-age-edul.html

“The traditional elementary school classroom with neat rows of desks and students quietly working is not the best way to teach children...

So, the New Age educators advise teachers Do not:

- Use mostly structured activities, (with teacher’s pre-set lesson plans and teach accordingly) and have activities led by the teacher (teacher-directed).
- Expect children to sit quietly and listen for long periods...
- Focus on negative rules such as “Don’t hit...”
- Use a lot of worksheets, workbooks, textbooks, flashcards. Do not promote writing mechanically.

But recommends:

(Without the guidance of adults, to plan activities so children can work individually or in small groups (i.e. can wander around and chat).

- Plan activities so children can help each other.....
- Expect a noisy classroom....

Some more advices from the other advocators of the New Age education.

- Should not pay too much attention to discipline.
- Should ban memorization. Should not ask children to spell words and to do copying work. (No drilling of any forms are encouraged)
- Discourage examination and direct testing, such as dictation. Teachers need to write extensive performance records of children through daily observation. Very often, the ‘assessment’ is to be taken place while the children are in action of playing, the record so recorded is incidental and not so reliable.
- Discourage rote-learning and direct-instructional method (banking method).
- Promote the idea of “critical thinking” and “situational ethics”, which destroys the idea of moral absolutes. Learning to repudiate all authority, children are led to believe that they can decide for themselves whether an idea or action is right or wrong, depending on the situation or their feelings. Since teachers have no more authority, children’s peer group shapes one’s morals. Individual is submitted to the majority pressure group (who has self-interest). In other words, peer pressure will be the teacher if no absolutes are taught.
- The school and the world must measure up to the pupils’ needs. The pupil grades the teacher (like what the Communist Party did in the Cultural revolution).
- Advocate “whole language” /”Communicative Approach”/Look-say method of teaching reading, instead of phonics. It teaches whole word recognition in the context of visual clues. It’s basically guesswork – and makes the child responsible for his learning. Do not encourage teachers to teach basic skills (like grammar, tenses) to the children. John Dewey’s idea was that education is not to develop talents, but to prepare the child to fit into the global “new age’ society and as servant of the state. As a result, “illiteracy among 10 to 20-year-olds in the United States decreased from 7.6 % on 1900 to 4.7% in 1910. As a result of using the whole-language method, people suffer from reading disability and has become the learning cause of emotional problems in

North American children and adolescents”, reported by Dr. Carl Kline, a Vancouver child psychiatrist who treated thousands of children with learning problems.

- The idea of educating children to become a “whole person” is emphasized. It wants to bring mind, body and spirit together in a “whole person” concept of the individual. The idea underpinned the teaching is to formulate into the mind of children that they have to see things in the holistic way, which should include the acceptance of relativism and advocate the idea of globalization—the removal of all boundaries in the world, religious and national. To the “New Age people”, real education means interacting with other people and developing the whole person. Hence, the concept of “whole person” is basically the New Age jargon. To the Christian, we will become a ‘whole person” only with the grace of God and through God. Therefore, the “whole person” concept of the Christian is different from the New Age people.
- John Dewey introduced strong ideas about accepting multi-values. Gardner continues to elaborate the idea into multiple-intelligent. This is in agreement with the denial of absolute values. Please note that too many children today do not believe in absolute right and wrong. Instead they believe in relative answers, based on personal needs. This is a direct goal fulfilled by John Dewey and all like him.
- New Age education promotes “Exploratory studies”. “Exploratory studies” is a form of study which encourages tolerance of diversity in a pluralistic society and for nurturing and protecting democratic values and institutions.
- Emphasize first-hand learning experience or Dewey’s “learning by doing”. Teachers are encouraged to use real/life objects to facilitate children’s learning. (So that children would only believe in what they have “experienced/learned” in a real life first-hand experience. If children have built their knowledge habitually in this way, they would not accept so easily what the teachers told them as “second- hand knowledge” such as the abstract and historical “biblical teaching”, which is regarded as something unrelated to their real-life experience.)
- Different “interest corners” or “areas” should be open for children so as to give them more “choices” to learn according to their nature. If the choice of “interest corners/areas” is limited, there is no democracy for children and is regarded as “inhuman” to the children. Similarly, teachers should provide a lot of materials (more than 10 kinds of materials) for children in the “interest corners/areas”.
- Advocate Piaget’s constructivist’s theory. To use environment to motivate children to learn. Teachers should choose “unstructured” materials like sand, water and clay or “semi-structured” materials like Lego and blocks for children to play, so as to enhance their “imagination” and “creativity”. The role of “structured” materials is not definite and could be redefined with the use of imagination. Materials which would facilitate “convergent” thinking is discouraged while materials which would facilitate “divergent” thinking is encouraged.
- Encourage the collaboration between teacher and children in the process of learning. Encourage the equal conversational exchange opportunities between the teachers and children. In the extreme case, teachers would only response to what the children have said and done instead of being the authoritative figure to “lead” the conversation.
- Promote active learning of children. Children should take the initiative to learn instead of being ‘told’ to learn by the teachers.
- Children can determine what to learn in the learning process. Teachers should not interfere their learning and re-direct their learning path.
- Promote liberal arts education, which aimed basically, to encourage self-autonomy of children, to liberate children’s thoughts and to encourage children to act according to their self-will. (and not God’s will, nor their parents’ will and teachers’ will). In order to facilitate the learning of liberal arts, children’s ‘curiosity’ should be ignited. This could be achieved by encouraging children to use more of their ‘senses’ to explore their immediate environment. The traditional classroom

learning is therefore being replaced by community learning which occur outside the classroom. In a similar vein, “Multiple intelligent” method (which include the prevalent use of mass-media and computers) advocated by Harvard Gardner is encouraged. The aim is to promote the learning of “multiple-values” and is basically a child-centered method.

- Promote the idea of self-enhancing (Creativity), particularly in subjects like Music, Art and P.E. In the course of learning, children are encouraged to use a lot of their “imagination” so as to enhance the “creativity” abilities in themselves. (Notice that the ability to tell lies is also a form of creativity). Notice how the Holy Bible says about enhancing oneself will indeed bring about the fall of oneself “Thou castedst them down when they lifted up themselves” Ps. Ixxiii. St. Augustine of Hippo in the City of God (2000, p.461) writes, “For he does not say, “When they had been lifted up,” as if first they were exalted, and then afterwards cast down; but “When they lifted up themselves” even then they were cast down – that is to say, the very lifting up was already a fall.
- Encourage children to learn through informal activities, like play. We call this the “informal curriculum”. Play like free play, Socio-dramatic play, playground free play and art and craft activities (which encourage creativity and self-expression of children) are over-emphasized in the curriculum.
- Teachers should spend less time in the teaching of “facts” and “basic skills” but should spend more time to facilitate the “social learning” of children. This idea could be realized in an “integrated” form of teaching, with the best result being achieved in the “socio-dramatic” play, “art/craft” or “free play” activities.
- Promote sex education (even at the early childhood stage). (Empirical evidence shows that kids who receive sex education have a 40% increased possibility of becoming sexually active).
- Children are encouraged/ “being told” to respect the different cultures of their peers and thus to accept the different “norms” in dealing with matters even on moral concerns. The standard of “morals” could be judged relatively in different situations/circumstances. Following on that, different religions need to be tolerated. In order to practice religious tolerance, children at an early age should be taught to know different forms of religions. (Children’s concept of religion will be blurred by confusing different features of different religions by the disguise of multiculturalism.)
- When children are in conflict with each other, let children solve the problems by themselves. Teachers could be the facilitator in the conflict resolution process, she has to respect children’s decision once it is made by the “majority” of children. (Teachers are no longer the one to seek help from/ and to look upon as an authoritative figure in the eyes of children so as to tell them what is regarded as “truth”. Truth has become relative).
- In terms of religious education, the practice of “community service” is promoted and is accepted as a form of “ethical education”. (Therefore, the teaching of God’s divine revelation, dogmas and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the traditional “religious education” teaching could have received less attention)

Reference source:

Bode, B. (1998). Evaluating a personal knowledge of the nature of learning. In P. A. Kienel, O. E. Gibbs, S. R. Berry, (Ed.). *Philosophy of Christian School Education* (pp. 183-214). Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International.

Simple Vocabulary:

Self-expression, unfolding, discovery learning, meaningful learning, experiential, affective education, exploration, no absolutes, secular humanism, child-centered, self-initiative, self-actualization, curiosity fulfillment, self-esteem, self-concept, non-repressive, SummerHill School, self-realization, Psychotherapeutic models, whole-language, whole person/holistic development, no examination, no direct test, demand extensive paper work of teachers.

Concept of Student:

Basically good, wanting to do right, caring for others and for social good, eager to learn.

Concept of Teacher:

Facilitator, friend, observer, non-influential.

Implication for Classroom:

Enriched learning environment, many activity-based materials, no (or limited direction), limited discipline, no competition, no grades, limited interference and demands from authority figures, self-evaluation, self-competency.

Projected Outcome:

Self-actualized adults acting for the good of themselves and society. To have a democratic society when religion is not the answer for man to seek for “truth”. An actualization of a global society which share the same value of the ‘religious humanists’ or the ‘secular humanists’.

Results of New Age Education:

Countries like Germany, United Kingdom, Japan, France, United States of America, Australia, New Zealand who have tried out this kind of approach in the previous decades, say in the 50’s 60’s and 70’s have all experienced a degradation of students’ educational performance standards. Now, these countries have restored their old tradition way of teaching, which advocate work (structured curriculum) than play (unstructured curriculum). For example, in U.K. they have redesigned a “core” curriculum to raise standards of students in the 1990’s and have re-emphasized the importance of the teaching of the “work curriculum” in October 2006.

Results of New Age Education in Hong Kong: (Discussion)

Please refer to the Nov. 2005 issue of the “Hong Kong Journal of Early Childhood”—Changes in Kindergarten Practices in the Last Decade in Hong Kong ---from the Eyes of HKIED Graduates

⁴ Informal “Play” Approach advocated by John Dewey “playfulness is an attitude and is a mode of life. Although there is no universal consensus on the definition of play, children who have involved in the playfulness attitude are usually found in a non-rule bound play activities and that the attitude would sustain even after the play activity is completed. On the contrary, game is usually described as a rule-bound activity and children would resume the real life activity once the game has been completed)

⁵ In an assignment submitted for the course RTS 5120 “on Approaches to Chinese Religion”.

⁶ How Tao Xingzhi has extended his educational ideology to Hong Kong? In what way does this extension impacted on the religious landscape of Hong Kong?

Among all the reformers of May Fourth New Cultural Movement, the name of Tao Xingzhi was the most familiar one with the practitioners of early childhood education in Hong Kong. Tao’s educational theory is being taught in modules in the early childhood teachers training course throughout the years since 1999. In October 1999, the protagonists of Tao had organized a full-day seminar and had invited different scholars to deliver talks that promote the educational theory and

practice to the practitioners of early childhood education in Hong Kong. The seminar was well received by more than 200 participants, I myself am one of the participant. Apart from that, Tao's influence in the education realm of Hong Kong could be seen in the annually organized seminars and workshops held in Shanghai, the place where Tao died and buried. This annual function was organized and supported by the Hong Kong Education Bureau (SAR) of China.

7 Montessori Kindergartens

The Montessori method can be described as “an approach to individualized, reality-based education in which the individual child's potential for self-development is maximized” (Lindauer, 1987, p.109). For Montessorians around the world, Montessori's approach to early education is not only child-centered but also child-oriented in that the child in Montessori classrooms owns the spotlight. Montessori stated that, “the child has a mind able to absorb knowledge. He has the power to teach himself” (Montessori, 1967, p. 5).

8 Waldoff Kindergartens

According to Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia, **Waldorf education** is a humanistic pedagogy based upon the educational philosophy of the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner, the founder of anthroposophy. Learning is interdisciplinary, integrating practical, artistic, and conceptual elements. The Waldorf approach emphasizes the role of the imagination developing thinking that includes a creative as well as an analytic component. The overarching goals of this educational approach are to provide young people the basis on which to develop into free, moral¹ and integrated individuals, and to help every child fulfill his or her unique destiny, the existence of which anthroposophy posits. Schools and teachers are given considerable freedom to define curricula within collegial structures.

9 Those Kindergartens who favour the Confucian practices include those kindergartens run by the Po Leung Kuk in Hong Kong.

Excerpt of a curriculum model used in a well-known Islamic
Kindergarten in Hong Kong,

Appendix 2

Confidential data

(The data of this appendix is not to be posted in the website for reason of confidentiality)

Document name: - [IslamKG-parents'interview](#)

- **Date of conducting the interview: 21 May 2009**

Presenters:

G: (Author of this paper)

E: E. Ng (researcher)

R: R.A. (researcher)

T: translator (For translating foreign language other than English)

Te: Teacher (C. K)

P: Anyone of the parents