Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association (PECERA)
13th Annual Conference
20 – 22 July 2012
Articles by Conference Participant & Presenter

Building a Community of Researchers Children at the Heart of Research

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With preschool education being a particularly hot topic in Singapore in recent months, it was timely that the 13th Annual Conference of the Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association (PECERA) took place here in July 2012. More than 500 early childhood practitioners and researchers converged in Singapore's National Institute of Education (NIE) from 20 to 22 July 2012. The conference was jointly organised by NIE, Nanyang Technological University and the Association for Early Childhood Educators, Singapore (AECES).

The PECERA conference covered a myriad of topics, including the use of art in early childhood education, the importance of parental involvement and the professional development of preschool teachers. With close to 150 presentations, workshops and panel discussions, the conference offered a platform for early childhood professionals to participate in an academic forum, share research findings and explore possible collaborations.

In his opening address, Mr Lawrence Wong, the then Minister of State for Education and Minister of State for Defence, noted that more and more countries were paying closer attention to early childhood education. He said that the Singapore government was also looking at ways of improving the quality and affordability of preschools here. The industry was recently thrust under the spotlight following a study commissioned by the Lien Foundation, where Singapore was placed 29th in a field of 45 countries. Mr Wong added that the commitment of the whole community, including parents and preschool operators, was essential and highlighted the importance of "rigorous evidence-based research" to enhance the quality of preschool education.

Since its inception in 2000, the annual conference has been held in various countries including Japan, China, Australia and Thailand. This was Singapore's first in playing host. It also marked the first time that several countries – such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh and India – were participating in the event.

Some of the topics covered were more specific and drew on localised case studies. For instance, there were paper presentations on the changing nature of preschool provision in Beijing, code switching in Filipino children and the use of iPads in an Australian classroom to support literacy learning. Other presentations covered broader topics, such as the importance of advocating play and allowing children to demonstrate agency. There were also discussions based on more big-scale initiatives, such as the development of a regional tool to measure children's learning in East Asia and the Pacific.

Overall, it was a good opportunity for early childhood professionals in the Pacific region to meet, exchange ideas and share valuable information. In fact, some have found the PECERA conference so beneficial that they attend it regularly. Yang Soung Hyun, President of the Institute for Early Childhood Psychological Development in Seoul – where the conference will be held next year – was participating for the fifth time. Others such as Judith Loh, Vice President of the National Association of Early Childhood Care and Education in Malaysia, were first-time attendees. Ms Loh found the conference "very well organised and informative". "I'm interested in literacy and research related to current trends, seeing the relation between literacy and play, and how it is implemented in classrooms," she said. "We are working hard to improve early childhood education in our country and it's very useful to find out more about assessment models and research that has been done in the region."