Becoming a preschooler:

A study of children's relations with their teachers, peers and objects and the implications these relationships have in terms of becoming a "preschool student"

by

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Statement of Originality

I, TSE, Lok Tin, hereby declare that I am the sole author of the thesis and the material presented in this thesis is my original work except those indicated in the acknowledgement. I further declare that I have followed the University's policies and regulations on Academic Honesty, Copyright and Plagiarism in writing the thesis and no material in this thesis has been submitted for a degree in this or other universities.

Abstract

The aim of this qualitative study is to understand how children aged between three to four years of age acquire the identity of a “pre-school” student within a Chinese context. By drawing on Foucault’s work in relation to various related discourses, as well as Actor Network Theory (ANT), this ethnographic study also tries to appreciate the role and place of objects in terms of children becoming “preschoolers”.

The fieldwork that underpins this study took place at three Hong Kong preschools. These schools were selected because of their differences, as well as their similarities, in terms of approaches in delivering the curriculum. Qualitative methods, including observations and interviews, were used to capture children’s interactions with one another, with adults, and, importantly, with objects. A journal was kept throughout the study period and this, together with photographs of classroom life, enabled me to critically reflect on the study, so as to make sense of the lived experiences of the preschool students.

This study stems from the poststructuralism and posthumanism premise that there are no universal or absolute truths in relation to acquiring a preschool identity. As a consequence, there is no attempt to produce “findings” in a scientific sense. However, the study does add to our knowledge and understanding of the process by which children acquire a preschool identity, and explores the profound role that objects play within these processes.

By drawing on two theoretical frameworks, I was able to make two significant moves. First, Foucault's work enabled me to appreciate how children are disciplined and regulated into what constitutes the "normal" or "ideal" preschooler. Foucault also allowed me to recognize how children themselves can undertake three practices: "refusal", "curiosity", and "innovation", so as to experience alternative modes of being.

Second, ANT allowed me to appreciate that objects have agency and are therefore actors. As "lively matter", objects co-mingle within relationships, flows, and movements that circulate in and around the preschool classroom. The ways in which objects form alliances with children within the networks echoes Bennett's work on "agentic capacity", which emerges from but is not limited to human intention. It is in and amongst networks that becoming a preschooler which echoes with Barad's idea of "intra-active becoming" takes place.

The study is cautious in terms of developing taxonomies of practice for early years teachers. However, I believe that this study could potentially challenge how practitioners ordinarily think of young children and objects. From a personal perspective, undertaking this study has challenged my habitual assumptions and understandings of young children. I no longer think that children's development occurs within linear models of development. I have also come to

see objects as actors who can enter into symmetrical relationships with humans and, together, "stuff" happens. It is this "stuff", which includes affect, joy, frustration, and so on, that makes the project of becoming a preschooler an open-ended, always in-progress project. This means that, in view of developing more appropriate practices in future, I will try to live with multiple meanings concerning the "preschooler". (500 words).

Keywords: becoming a preschooler, discursive practice, Actor-Network Theory, role and place of objects, multiple meanings.

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Contents **Page**

List of Abbreviations

ANT Actor Network Theory

List of Tables

List of Photographs

Chapter One

Overview

Rationale for undertaking the study

This study, by locating itself within the context of preschool education, has paid close attention to the daily navigations undertaken by young children, where membership within a preschool (that is, acquiring the identity of "student") has to be pursued and achieved within the possibilities and restraints of organizational structures and the discursive practices of schooling (Foucault, 1977; Jones, 1996, 2013). Additionally, the study seeks to explain the significance of networks or assemblages in which different human and non-human actors offer different possibilities in terms of becoming a preschool student.

The practice of children attending preschool is now a common global occurrence. In Hong Kong, for example, the Local Census and Statistic Department indicates that the rate of attendance in preschool is 92.5% (2016). In general, the common aim of education has shifted; the focus of education now includes both academic attainment and the ability to develop confidence as a lifelong learner (Carr & Claxton, 2002, p. 9). Within the context of Hong Kong education, particularly early years education, there is recognition that the development of such confidence is an integral component of social relations (Pong & Chow, 2002; Kienig, 2002). Indeed, there is general acceptance within the West that establishing

successful relations is imperative; they are foundational in terms of young children's social, psychological, and emotional well-being, as well as being a precursor for subsequent positive social and emotional development (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2003; Margretts, 2003; Sylva et al., 2003; Kienig, 2002). Yet, the processes that surround developing social, emotional, and psychological relationships are not without difficulties, made more so given that they have to be negotiated within particular institutional practices and structures (Dockett & Perry, 2003; 2004).

While there is recognition that relationships are important in terms of children's own evolving identities, the studies that have been undertaken in this respect have been mainly dominated by adults' perspectives. Studies that focus on relationships as understood or experienced by the children themselves are limited (Corsaro; 2003, 2004; Moromizato, 2008). Additionally, the studies that have been undertaken are mainly located in North America, Australia, and Europe (e.g., Corsaro, 2003; Danby et al., 2012; Kernan, 2011). This research therefore ameliorates this gap by providing knowledge and understanding that emerges from a Chinese context. Additionally, I have tried to capture, through photographs, some of the experiences children live through when attending preschool. While I am not claiming that these offer a child's perspective, they nevertheless have allowed me to critically reflect on certain incidents in which I was able to study the body language of children, including their

facial expressions. As such, I believe I have acquired slightly different knowledge – bodily knowledge – concerning the "preschooler" (e.g., Anderson & Jones, 2009; Hogan, 2012).

More recent studies located within the fields of early years education that center on "relations", "relationships", and "identity" have recognized the significance of non-human materials (Maclure et al., 2012; Lenz-Taguchi, 2011; Rautio, 2013; Jones, 2013). Here, in addition to the organizational and discursive practices of schooling, there is a realization that the divide that traditionally separates the subject (including the young child and his or her teacher) from the object(s) (which, within schooling, can include anything from play equipment and furniture to policy documents, the curriculum, and so on) is fluid. This study, following a number of commentators (Lenz-Taguchi, 2011; Rautio, 2013; Somerville et al., 2009; Jones, 2013), takes up the challenge of decentering the subject in order to recognize and take seriously the role of non-human materials within the intricate processes that circulate in and around becoming a preschool student.

The following aims guide the study:

- To draw on poststructuralism and post-human theories to provide a rigorous account of how the discourses of schooling, together with material objects, contribute to children's

identities as preschool students;

- To use photographs as a methodological tool alongside other qualitative methods in order to include the "liveliness" experienced by young children, where the focus will be on their interactions with adults, peers, and non-human materials;
- To contribute to and further extend our existing knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of becoming a preschool student within a Chinese context; and
- To critically analyze whether or not the social, cultural, and educational practices that occur between children and teachers, children and one another, and children and objects can impact upon and extend the pedagogical practices and pedagogical repertoire of teachers.

Outline of the following chapters

Chapter Two offers some indicative examples of the key literature that is related to and informs the areas of study that this thesis addresses. It begins by detailing the significance and domination of developmental psychology on the field of early years education, before moving on to discuss issues relating to culture. Here, I try to foreground some of the tensions that lie between Western and Eastern perspectives in relation to children, childhood, and education. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model is foregrounded, as it provides some insights into the ways and means by which cultural practices, including social relationships,

travel between different locations, including the home and the school.

The review then turns to literature that has been influenced by poststructural ideas in relation to identity. The work of Foucault is especially important where it emphasizes that the negotiation of a preschool identity takes place within the discursive practices of schooling. The review focuses on work that attempts to pay less attention to humans and more to the assemblages or networks that occur between human and non-human matter. Such a step allows me to appreciate how "identity" emerges from intricate and dynamic relations that occur between numerous actors.

Chapter Three theoretically situates the study. I begin by drawing on an array of theories, including education, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy, in order to highlight why objects have assumed significant importance in such disciplines. I then turn to Foucault's work so as to highlight how objects are implicated in the discursive construction of preschool. The significance of Actor Network Theory (ANT) is then introduced. This, as the study goes on to describe, allows me to effectively encompass both an epistemological and ontological shift in terms of understanding how the preschool student is an open-ended project – always becoming.

Chapter Four details the research methodology that is used in the study. By locating the study within a qualitative paradigm, emphasis is placed on trying to “understand” rather than produce universal facts. I was guided by two questions: “What is the nature of the reality of becoming a preschool student?” and “How do I obtain that reality?” (Gorski, 2013). The chapter outlines the benefits of adopting an ethnographic approach in which various methods, including observations and interviews, as well as a research journal and photographs, allowed me to track, follow and understand how identity “works”.

Chapter five is a preamble to the analysis. As Mol (2008) notes that “words, materiality and practices hang together in a specific, historically and culturally situated way” (p. 8). Given the emphasis that this study places on “words, materiality and practices” it seems imperative that I recognize the influence of Confucianism because it is a thought system that is still prevalent in Hong Kong (Cheng, 1998). This is followed by a brief but necessary account of the development of early childhood education within Hong Kong. Here, while noting general similarities with Western approaches, I also mark out the significant differences that impact the overall development of the preschooler. Finally, the preamble offers some brief details relating to both the curriculum and practice. As Foucault reminds us, both are agents of control, regulation, and coercion that aim to normalize the child.

Chapters Six and Seven offer a rigorous analysis of the data and a discussion of significant points within two theoretical frameworks. Foucault's work in relation to discourses is used in order to unpick examples of data. The analysis that draws on ANT aims to analyze the messy and heterogeneous lives of preschoolers in the classroom. In deploying ANT, the reader can gain an appreciation of how assemblages and networks come together, where "stuff" happens. I argue that it is within and out of the "stuff" that the preschooler emerges.

In Chapter Eight, I revisit aspects of the study in order to highlight what has been learned in terms of children acquiring a preschool identity. In all, undertaking this study has fundamentally challenged some of my previously held convictions in relation to "the child" and "learning". It is this personal learning that I will take with me as I pursue my career in early years education.

Chapter Two

Background of the Study

Introduction

This background offers some indicative examples of the key literature and a number of key research findings that are related to and inform the areas of study.

The influence and impact of developmental psychology

In general, the field of early childhood research has been heavily dominated by the discipline of developmental psychology. One repercussion of this dominance is that development, including the development of an identity and the role of relationships within this process, is understood within a schema of “stages and ages” (Burman, 2008; Morrs, 1996). Both Piaget (1975) and Erikson (1963), for example, propose a linear account in which children, as they mature, move between states. Thus, Erikson suggests that the newborn child moves from implicit trust to then experiencing mistrust, around the age of one. Similarly, a state of total dependence that is experienced at birth gives way, at around the age of 18 months, to degrees of competence, before an individual experiences greater levels of independence in certain areas (e.g., eating food) at around 30 months. In Piaget’s account, however, child development has a particular structure, consisting of a series of predetermined stages, leading the child from irrational states of being to rational ones. Within Piaget’s conceptual scheme,

the newborn child is in a sensorimotor stage and then progresses from reflexive, instinctual action at birth to the beginning of symbolic thought toward the end of the stage (at age two). From ages two to seven, the child begins to learn to speak, but still does not understand concrete logic and cannot mentally manipulate information. It is in the concrete operational stage (from age 7 to age 11) that the child demonstrates the logical and systematic manipulation of symbols related to concrete objects.

While this study will take a critical position in relation to development as a linear process, it will, nevertheless, recognize and be sensitive to other factors that Erikson and others working in the field of developmental psychology raise. For example, it highlights that, within the context of the child's home, food, shelter, attachment, and nurturing love are significant factors in the development of basic trust (Erikson, 1963; Maslow, 1954; Bowlby, 1973). This prompts me to consider what factors are circulating within the context of the preschool that impact upon and affect children in terms of experiencing trust and other qualities. Erikson (1963) also stresses that trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry are crucial to a child's self-esteem, a theme that reoccurs in Storr's (1998) work and is reiterated further by Aldridge (1993). All of this prompts a number of questions, including: How does a child's self-esteem manifest itself within the context of a Hong Kong Chinese preschool? In what way is self-esteem affected by human and non-human variables? How are judgments made about

what constitutes positive self-esteem? In what way does self-esteem assist a child in becoming a preschooler?

As noted previously, while this study takes a critical position in relation to the psychological perception of development, it is nevertheless interested in the ways that others, including teachers, draw from this perception in order to explain, justify, or perhaps criticize and discipline certain behaviors. As MacLure et al. (2012) identified, developmental psychology underpins and gives sustenance to many generalized common-sense notions of what is (and is not) normal in terms of a child's development, including the development of their emergent student identity.

The influence and impact of culture on children's identity and peer relations

As I will illustrate, there are stark differences between Western and Eastern cultures, which in part have stemmed from different philosophical foundations. Most notably, in Chinese culture, Confucian philosophy has had and continues to have influence in shaping and fashioning many values and virtues within Chinese societies. For instance, Chinese societies such as Hong Kong are dominated by a secular elite recruited through a merit-based examination system (Cheng, 1998). Within this system, a person's (a child's) academic performance is important to his or her economic security and social status (Cheng, 1998). Parents in Chinese

societies such as Taiwan and Hong Kong tend to focus on children's academic learning in their early years (Hsieh, 2004; Wong & Rao, 2015). Such focus will in turn influence children's identities and peer relations.

Chinese culture emphasizes maintaining a harmonize society via specific attitudes and behaviors between people with different statuses and in different positions. It is very much related to one of Confucius's concepts in Li, the "five cardinal", which emphasizes five key relationships between people in a hierarchical and structural system. According to this concept, these 'five cardinal' are relationships are that of a ruler to a subject (a good ruler is benevolent and the ruler's subjects are loyal), father to son (a father is loving to his son and the son demonstrates reverence to his father), husband to wife (a husband should be good to his wife and his wife should, in turn, be obedient), elder to younger siblings (an elder sibling should be gentle to younger siblings and younger siblings should be respectful of their older siblings), and friend to friend (two friends should be considerate and respectful of each other). If one follows these ideas, each of these relationships will be marked as harmonious and the society will be healthy (Hsu, 1985; Yao, 2000).

Hsu (1985) also stated that the supreme Chinese virtue, *jen*, implies that an individual has the potential to develop capabilities in order to interact with fellow human beings in a sincere and

polite way. Thus, when an individual is faced with a problematic situation involving others, having and acting on the virtue of *jen* implies the need to sacrifice oneself in order to maintain or create a harmonious relationship with others. The self usually has its referent to others' desire.

In Western culture, the philosophical tradition has, in general terms, influenced the conception of a self who is rational and capable of autonomous behavior (Harvey, 1989, 1993; Hall, 2002). The normative imperative of this culture is, therefore, to become independent from others in order to discover and express one's own unique attributes (Chen et al., 2006). The differences between Western and Eastern philosophical and cultural positions influence what occurs within the context of Hong Kong preschool classrooms. Thus, on the one hand, Confucianism in an integral part of Chinese culture. On the other, the colonial history of Hong Kong does mean that Western philosophical ideas and culture have some purchase on preschooling, including the ethos of the school in question, and its curriculum and pedagogy (e.g., Cheng, 2010; Chan & Chan, 2003; Fung & Lam, 2011; Wong et al., 2011).

Thus, within the context of a Hong Kong kindergarten, there is very likely to be interesting and complex intermingling where Chinese and Western cultural and philosophical traditions brush up against both the process of becoming a preschooler and the preschoolers'

relationships. For example, within Chinese culture, being shy, sensitive, and restrained in one's behaviors is validated and is understood as an indication of social accomplishment and maturity; shy children are perceived as well-behaved and understanding in social-evaluative situations (Liang, 1987). In Western cultures, however, shy and sensitive behavior is perceived as a reflection of an internal anxiety or fearfulness and/or a lack of self-confidence (Asendorpf, 1990). Given that, in general, Western culture emphasizes assertiveness, expressiveness, and competitiveness, children who display shy behavior can be understood as being socially immature or sometimes even deviant (Rubin, Burgess, & Coplan, 2002). Cross-cultural studies that have examined the social interactions of preschool children have attempted to understand some of the complexities and differences between young Chinese children and their Western counterparts. For example, DeSouza and Chen (2005, as cited in Chen X. et al., 2006) found that Canadian preschool-age children were more active in regard to participating in peer interactions than Chinese children of similar ages. Chinese children engaged in more nonsocial behavior, such as passive, solitary play activities, than Canadian children.

Cross-cultural studies also draw attention to differences in teaching styles. As Lee (1996) indicates, there is an expectation that, within Chinese culture, the teacher's main focus should be teaching and that, additionally, if necessary, teachers should be strict in order to achieve

the goals of teaching. Indeed, the traditional Chinese learning poem, “Three Character Classic”, states that “Instruction without severity, the idle teacher’s shame” (as cited in Lee, 1996, p. 26). The goals of teaching are often achieved through an approach that involves transmission and severity (Tse, 2015). Tobin and Hayashi’s (2011) cross-cultural study identified that teachers, in choosing how to teach and in deciding which strategies should be used when disciplining and managing the preschool classroom, are hugely dependent on personal beliefs, which, in turn, are rooted in their cultural experiences and traditions.

It will, therefore, be interesting to identify if and how these very different traditions circulate around the preschool and in what ways they influence the processes that surround peer interactions and becoming a preschooler.

An ecological perspective and its influence on identity and peer relations

The seminal work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) has been profoundly influential in foregrounding how children are situated within interconnected contexts or micro-systems, which initially include the home and family, before then embracing other systems and contexts, including preschool. As Bronfenbrenner (1994) states, “in order to understand human development, one must consider the entire ecological system in which growth occurs” (p. 37, 1994). He reminds us of the importance of interaction between different people within different contexts.

He also reminds us that child within this process are themselves dynamic entities who both interact with the environment and in turn can restructure it. However, the environment also has an influence and can cause change. Indeed, interactions between children and others and between children and their surroundings are reciprocal and continuous (Lerner, 1982). Bronfenbrenner also reminds us that home and preschool are quite different contexts, where children may be confronted by different cultural practices (Brofenbrenner, 1979). This is captured in Lam's study (2009), in which she shows that the child who experiences quite a dependent but yet relaxed routine at home confronts a number of difficulties when faced by preschool, where there are expectations that they should be more independent within a structured routine. Similarly, Tse's (2013) work indicated that those children who lack experience of peer interactions within the home are fazed by the demand of generally mixing with other children. Both Lam (2009) and Tse (2013) highlight the role of the teacher in assisting children to meet the social and cultural demands that school imposes.

This study, while it will not be undertaking research into the home lives of the children, will nevertheless be interested in the cultural and social practices the children carry with them from their homes. It will question first, if, and, second, how, these practices are allied with and negotiated against the prevailing practices that circulate within the preschool classroom

and which moreover contribute toward the child becoming a preschool student (Corsaro, 2003; Rogoff, 2003; Danby et al., 2012).

Poststructuralism and its influence on identity and peer relations

In general, poststructuralism argues that both "the child" and "childhood" should be understood as social constructs. As such, neither "the child" nor "childhood" is understood as "natural". Given this, universal scientific laws that offer generalizable accounts are therefore contested. As Usher and Edwards note (1994), poststructuralism demands that we problematize fixed notions of both identity and social relations. Specifically, poststructuralism challenges a humanist notion of the self in which there is investment in a consistent identity over time (Edley, 2001). Those commentators who work in the field of early years and incorporate poststructuralism foreground the interrelationship between the self and the social, where discursive practices, including those of home and school, constitute what it means to be "a child" (see, for example, Davies & Banks, 1992; Walkerdine, 1989; MacNaughton, 2003; Sumsion et al., 2011; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Jones, 1996, 2013). The work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault has been a key influence in these areas. Following his examination of a number of institutions, including the prison, the asylum, and the army, Foucault identified the means by which institutions incorporate discursive practices that govern their inhabitants. Britzman elaborates further on this idea:

Discourses authorize what can and cannot be said: they produce relations of power and communities of consent and dissent, and thus discursive boundaries are always being redrawn what constitutes the desirable and the undesirable and around what it is that makes possible structures of intelligibility and unintelligibility. (Britzman, 2000, p. 36)

In turning back to the preschool classroom, it is possible to think how certain ordinary, intelligible practices, such as putting up a hand in order to answer a question or remembering to say “please” or “thank you”, are implicated in the process of not just becoming a preschooler, but one who is accepted by both teachers and peers (MacLure et al., 2012).

Poststructuralism has also been employed by researchers in order to study children’s social interactions. Here, children construct discursive knowledge and strategic actions in order to establish friendship (Corsaro, 2003; Danby et al., 2012; Tse, 2013). The work of Jones (1996), for example, examines how children’s imaginary play, undertaken within the context of their preschool, was shaped by the fairy tales that were regularly available to the children both as texts and through Disney films. What these stories offer the children are highly predictable, stereotypical versions of masculinity and femininity. However, by positioning herself within poststructuralism and in following the work of Judith Butler (1993), Jones was able to appreciate that the depictions of gender that are available through fairy stories and Disney

films are “performances”. Indeed, Butler’s work encouraged Jones to see gender itself as a “performance” in which, as a consequence of repetition, gender comes to be understood as normal or, in Butler’s words, a “regulatory ideal” (Butler, 1993, p. 1; see also Jones, 1996). In abandoning the idea of gender as “fixed”, Jones was able to appreciate that, while the children in her preschool class were attracted to forms of play in which ideas were borrowed from fairy tales and superhero stories, such as Batman and Superman, she also began to appreciate the way that this play could quickly morph into other fantasies. Thus, a boy who was one moment play-fighting could then be seen to gently cuddle one of the dolls (Jones, 1996). The study will, therefore, pay attention to the interplay of discursive practices as they unfold in children’s interactions with one another and with their teacher, in order to appreciate the work that such practices perform in terms of acquiring membership of the preschool classroom.

Post-humanism, identity, and relationships

Recent theories that are emerging from the field of social and educational research that focus on and are sensitive to the place of material suggest that both humans and materials matter in terms of children’s interactions when in school (Lenz Taguchi, 2011; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Rautiio, 2013; Somerville et al., 2009; Jones, 2013). Much of this research is underpinned by actor network theory, as well as by new materialism (Thrift, 2006; Law,

2004). Such research recognizes that “all things – human and non-human, hybrids and parts, knowledge and systems – emerge as effects of connections and activity…Not only humans act, because non-humans act on and with humans” (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. 3).

This has repercussions in terms of agency, which “is not something a body (human or non-human) or an entity has, but…is a relationship brought about by intra-action” (Barad, 2007, p. 28). Stemming from quantum physics, intra-action is a concept favored by Barad (2007), which, put simply, means “entanglement”. As explained further by Rautio:

In interaction, independent entities are viewed as taking turns in affecting each other, which implies that these entities are taken to each have an a priori independent existence. In intra-action, on the contrary, interdependent entities are taken to co-emerge through simultaneous activity: to come into being as of certain kind because of their encounter. (Rautio, 2014, p. 462)

This theoretical perspective has consequences in terms of how we understand the child in a way that means they are “no longer the independent child who responds to, develops with, learns from and consumes inert or powerless objects” (2014, p. 462). Rather “it is the engagement of the child and ‘things’ that produce diverse ‘children’ and equally diverse

'things'" (Rautio, 2014, p. 462). "A new materialist and post-humanist approach to child–matter relations is to consider these relations as intra-active: as complex and evolving encounters and as producing modes of being and knowing in which both – children and matter – constitute each other" (Rautio, 2014, p. 471).

This research, in taking up post-humanism as a theoretical influence, demands that I am mindful of the necessity to examine phenomena as a relation in which, rather than privileging the human, I perceive the child, teacher, objects, discourses, and so on as in relation to one another, with each affecting the other in a non-hierarchical way (Massumi, 1992). Within these networks, the child is always in a state of becoming (Braidotti, 2010), rather than located in a specific stage of development at a specific age. Within the field of early years education, the adoption of post-humanism is increasing. In Norway, for example, Rossholt (2012) uses it in her studies to broaden and enrich her work when examining young children's interactions at meal times in preschool. Meanwhile, Jones and Barron (2007) and Jones (2013) took up post-humanism in order to move beyond more conventional and psychological perspectives that relate to "being" and "becoming"; in so doing, they were able to examine children's relationships in a way that avoided binary thinking, including "normal/abnormal" and "good/bad". This, in turn, avoided understanding children from an overly familiar moral base, as well as outside the realms of common sense.

As is evident from this brief overview, there is a need to undertake further research into identity and peer relationships, especially within a Chinese context. This study, by addressing this gap, will extend our knowledge and understanding of what it means to become a member of a preschool classroom. The next chapter will provide the theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter Three

Theoretically Framing the Study: Objects, Foucault, and Actor Network Theory

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to theoretically situate the study. Following both Denzin and Lincoln (1999) and Levi-Strauss (1966), I take up the idea of bricolage. In brief, bricolage denotes crafts-people who creatively (re)use materials left over from other projects so as to construct new artifacts. In taking the notion of bricolage across to qualitative research, I am able to be eclectic and enable the overall design of this thesis to emerge organically, thus allowing for flexibility and plurality. It also allows me to examine a phenomenon from multiple and sometimes competing theoretical and methodological perspectives, so as to respect the complexity of meaning-making processes and the contradictions of the lived world. As Denzin and Lincoln (1999) suggest, "the combination of multiple methodological practices, and empirical materials…is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breath, complexity, and depth to any inquiry" (p. 6). Accordingly, by drawing on an array of theories, I highlight why objects have assumed significant importance in an array of disciplines. I begin with education but then move to broaden the framework by briefly alluding to anthropology, psychology, and philosophy. I also highlight how objects are implicated in the discursive construction of the preschool child. Here, Foucault's work is particularly helpful, as objects are implicated within discursive practices and, as a consequence, caught up in

discursive power. This chapter also highlights the significance of Actor Network Theory (ANT, hereafter). By incorporating ANT into the study, I effectively undertake both an epistemological and ontological shift, which – as I go on argue – has profound implications in terms of understanding young children's interactions with objects.

In order to materialize the aims of this chapter, it is divided into three sections. In the first section, I draw on a number of different disciplines, including education, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy, in order to detail the significance of objects. In the second section, the focus is on Foucault; I summarize how and why objects are implicated in the discursive production of the preschool student. In the third section, I outline ANT; besides summarizing its significant characteristics, I also indicate its potential in allowing me to analyze the interplay between actors including children, teachers, and objects.

Section One

Objects, children, and early years education

In early years education, objects (e.g., toys, artifacts, props, tools, blocks, etc.) play a significant role in terms of children's learning and development. Objects are specifically designed by adults to promote learning through hands-on-interaction. Such "learning objects" (Zuckerman, 2006; Jones, 2013; Jones & Tse, forthcoming) are commonly seen in Western early years classrooms. The development of the use of objects to promote learning at school can be related to three education philosophers: Froebel (1782-1852), Montessori (1870-1952), and Dewey (1859-1952). According to Zuckerman, objects underpin three popular approaches: construction and design (associated with Frobel), conceptual manipulation (associated with Montessori), and reality roleplay (associated with Dewey).

Froebel believed that humans, especially children, are essentially productive and creative. He specifically designed and developed a series of instructional materials and activities. He perceived such materials as "gifts and occupations" (Frobel, 1908). A "gift" is an object, which can be a wooden sphere, cube, or cylindrical blocks. The role of the "gifts" is to offer opportunities for children to conceptually and physically engage. As a result, the child could express his or her own ideas through design and construction (Frobel, 1908; see also Jones, 2013, and Jones & Tse, forthcoming).

Meanwhile, Maria Montessori believed that children are inherently curious and are driven to learn and develop. Montessori's materials were designed to isolate a specific attribute, such as height, length, width, or color. The materials were developmentally graded from simple objects to more advanced ones. Children could manipulate these materials according to their own intellectual and physical development. According to the Montessori approach, the teacher plays a special role, which could be described as passive/active. On the one hand, children are encouraged to work independently. On the other hand, the teacher diligently observes and is thus able to provide further opportunities for enhancing development. Children learn through "indirect teaching and educational input" (Montessori, 1916, 1949; see also Jones, 2013, and Jones & Tse, forthcoming).

Dewey's pragmatism highlights the role of education in preparing children for life. Objects could therefore offer opportunities for "real-life" experiences. For Dewey, objects could contribute toward children's understanding and appreciation of themselves within the world. His views have prompted a proliferation of child-scaled, real-world artifacts, including cooking sets, house repairing tools, furniture, bowls, cutlery, fruit, and so on, for children to play with. Indeed, because such objects are part of the child's "habitat", they become the bases for "active occupation" and "direct living", through which the child "will learn" (Dewey, 2001, p. 13; see also Jones, 2013, and Jones & Tse, forthcoming).

The significance of objects has long been established and the relationship between playing with specific objects and development is generally taken for granted. Following Sutton-Smith (1997), objects are a seamless, integral part of the rhetoric of progress. Indeed, throughout my fieldwork within three Hong Kong preschools, I saw objects such as toys, artifacts, props, tools, and blocks being used that were clearly shaped by the above philosophies.

Objects and anthropology

As Candlin and Guins (2009) note "objects have long been and continue to be objects of study within anthropology and philosophy". They also note that objects have a "long standing currency" in fields such as folklore and architecture, as well as the multidisciplinary field of material cultural studies. They go on to note that the study of objects is "intensifying across the arts, humanities and social sciences" (pp. 2-3).

Traditionally, in Western philosophy, an "objects" is aligned with a "thing which is perceived", a thing that is external "from the apprehending mind, the subject" (Candlin & Guins, 2009, p. 2). However, everyday things have long been found to have an intimate as well as essential relation with subject (human) formation and social world building. Daniel Miller (1998), in the introduction to *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter*, argues that the integral relation of material culture to subject (human) formation and social world

building has been established since the 1970s. Commentators, including Pierre Bourdieu (1977), specifically highlight the role of everyday things in processes of socialization. Bourdieu's work allows us to appreciate that an object such as a pen isn't random or innocent. The child has to learn to hold it in the "right" way and it becomes implicated in terms of what is (and isn't) normal in terms of early education.

Miller (1998) notes that Bourdieu (1977) and Appadural (1986) show how "things matter" for things have social lives. Other scholars, such as Gell (1992), also argue that things, to a certain extent, "look like or "do duty as" person" (1992, p. 9), and Pinney (2005) reminds us to view objects as "contain[ing] its prior context" (p. 269) Nevertheless, Tim Ingold (2009 [2000]) argues that anthropological and archaeological studies of material culture focus on the "issue of meaning and form – that is, on culture as opposed to materiality" (2009, p. 82) and seldom attend to the actual materials and properties in question. Ingold further argues that "the forms of objects are not imposed from above but grow from the mutual involvement of people and materials in an environment" (p. 89). Key Ingoldian concepts of "meshwork" and "growing" (Ingold, 2011, 2013) allow us to rethink the child-material object relationship, such as children's relations with woven baskets (creative art work) in kindergarten, with different cultural contexts. Woven baskets (creative art work) are growing in an ever-becoming meshwork constituted by human and non-human intra-actions, and that

agency or vitality can be ascribed broadly to the material world. Ingold's work thus offers a re-grounded and worldly gaze on the child-material object relationship, with implications for children's lives in early education.

Objects and psychology

Objects also have psychic and social functions. In general, a gift is a common object. While gift-giving is a common activity in the human world, we nevertheless tend to neglect its significance to humans. However, as Mauss's (1974 [1950]) work indicates, in giving, the donor also gives part of himself. Mauss's analysis also shows that gift-giving is both related to magical objects and to social cohesion. This notion is supported by the fact that gifts generate a reciprocal exchange. Yet, each gift is shaped by the identity of the giver.

Playing with objects is a common activity for children. According to Piaget (1932), playing with objects (such as marbles, toys, props, artifacts, tools, and blocks) helps young children to understand rules and, as a consequence, objects are implicated in the moral and social development of the child. Upon observing children of different ages between 5-10 years playing with marbles, he concluded that children of different ages have different forms of thinking. However, Armsby (1971), based on a similar study of Piaget, suggested that the so-called universal rules regarding children's development of morality may be culturally

specific. Margaret Donaldson (1978) also critiqued the use of language in the structured interview of Piaget's test.

The work of Vygotsky (1962; 1978) posited that cultural tools (including real tools and symbolic tools) play an important role in cognitive development. He emphasized that real tools, such as toys and books, provide support in terms of children's thinking skills, including reasoning and problem solving. Meanwhile, Roland Barthes' (2009 [1972]) work reminds us of importance of materials in children's sensory pleasure.

The role or use of objects has also been identified as being of importance in terms of children's development generally (e.g., Piaget, 1932; Vygotsky, 1978), but especially during periods of transition. As Winnicott (1971) notes, objects assist in young children's growing ability to distinguish "me" from "not me". This development is conducted through the transitional object; the object represents "the infant's transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate" (p. 75).

Objects are thus valuable in terms of children's transitions, but they have also been identified as being implicated in adults' intimate relations. For example, Walter Benjamin (2009)

explains the intimate relationship he has with books, where they are indelibly interwoven with his life history. Benjamin (2009 [1992]) insists that '"ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects" (p. 262) and it is "not that they [i.e., books] come alive in him; it is he who lives in them" (p. 262).

Objects and philosophy

Traditionally, the "object" has been aligned with a "thing" that carries an external sense that leads it to be explored and understood as a phenomenon (Kant, 1978). However, Heidegger (1971) argues that the "object" can be considered as inseparable from the "subject". Heidegger (1971) used a jug to demonstrate that the jug's "thingness" actually "resides in its being a vessel" – the space that holds. Thingness is therefore found in the nothingness of the void, but this void is always present. As Taylor (2001) notes, "though subjects might posit objects, both are radically, indeed primordially, conditioned by something that is incalculable and out of control" (2001, p. 75).

More recent philosophical work has attempted to rethink the subject-object divide. Elisabeth Grosz sees the work of Darwin, Nietzsche, and Deleuze as pragmatic, where "action, practice and movement are at the center of ontology" (2001, p. 169). She insists that things have provocation and promise. Bill Brown (2001) also echoes this argument. Scholars

such as Bruno Latour (2005) and Julian Bleecher (2006) see objects as actors capable of performing and performance. Things or objects, like the subject, are not only caught in assemblages, but also instigate or are causes for the assemblage and, as a consequence, deserve equal attention. We should not exclude the role of things in the communicative process (Bleecher, 2006). Non-human material objects are equal actors within social networks and should not be ignored (Latour, 2005).

If, as Candlin and Guin (2009) argue, "our day-to-day, spiritual, emotional, sexual, social, cultural and political lives are conducted in relation to objects and thoroughly mediated by them in whatever forms they take, qualities they possess and complex practices they help enable" (Candlin & Guins, 2009, pp. 1-2) then it seems imperative that I draw on a philosopher who enables me to get to grips with the work that objects undertake in our lives. Accordingly, in Section Two, I turn to Foucault's work, which, as I shall go on to suggest, enables me to see why objects are implicated in the discursive production of the preschool student. Before that, I summarize the above disciplines and their key claims regarding objects in a table, for easy reference.

Table 1

A Summary of Disciplines and Their Key Claims for Objects

Disciplines	Key claims
Early childhood education	Objects such as toys, props, artifacts, tools, etc., play a significant role in children's learning and are commonly seen in Western early years classrooms. The development of objects in order to promote learning is related to three education philosophers: Froebel (1782-1852), Montessori (1870-1952), and Dewey (1859-1952). In the Hong Kong preschool settings where I undertook my fieldwork, I regularly saw instances of children playing or working with objects where the theories of the aforementioned pioneers underpinned such play or work.
Anthropology	Objects have long been and continue to be objects of study within in anthropology. The study of objects is also intensifying across arts, humanities, and social science. Everyday things have long been found to have an intimate as well as an essential relationship with subject (human) formation and social world building (Daniel Miller, 1998).

Psychology	Objects have psychic and social functions. For instance, gifts generate a reciprocal exchange. Yet, each gift is shaped by the identity of his or her giver. Children's playing with objects assists moral and social development (Piaget, 1932) but the question of whether there can then be universal rules in relation to object play and moral development is questionable, given the issue of "intention" (Armsby, 1971), plus the role that context plays in fashioning children's moral development (Donaldson, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) highlights the importance of the role or use of cultural tools (toys and books) in children's learning and development. Objects are also specifically valuable in terms of children's transition (Winnicott, 1971). They are also implicated in adults' intimate relations (Benjamin, 2009)
Philosophy	The traditional divide between subject and object has been contested. In this thesis, following a number of commentators (Ingold, 2000; Grosz, 2001; Brown, 2001), I

	too take up the challenge of working across the subject/object divide. Objects and subjects are perceived as being (always) relational. Objects are therefore seen as actors capable of performing and performance (e.g., Latour, 2005; Bleecher, 2006). Things or objects, together with subjects, are not only caught in assemblages, but also instigate an assemblage and, as a consequence, deserve equal attention (Bleecher, 2006). Non-human material objects are equal actors within social networks and should not be ignored (Latour, 2005).

Section Two

Foucault: Objects and the discursive construction of the preschool child

In this section of the chapter, I turn to Foucault's work to appreciate how objects are implicated in the discursive production of the preschool student. I begin by offering a brief but necessary overview of "individuality". Following on from this, I turn to Foucault's work in relation to institutions. I then draw these two strands together in order to illustrate their importance in relation to the discursive production of the preschool child.

Individuality: A brief overview

Foucault was interested in the development of individuality and its constitution through historically situated power-relations. As Foucault observed, political power has historically assigned itself the task of administrating life in two basic but linked forms. The first is centered on disciplines of the body: "an anatomic-politics of the human body" (Foucault, 1978. p. 139). The second focused "on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the base of the biological processes such as population, the level of health, etc." (Foucault, 1978, p. 139).

Foucault notes the emergence of bio-power during the early stages of the 17th century. Bio-power manifested itself in "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for

achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault, 1978, p. 140). Foucault then goes on to highlight how scientific rationality, with its roots in the Enlightenment Project, allowed for modern forms of professional and disciplinary knowledge that could be and indeed are being used to control human beings by transforming them into objects of knowledge. As Smart (1995) comments, Foucault "is constantly interested in the social processes through which rationality is constructed and applied to the human subject, in order to make it the object of possible forms of knowledge" (p. 9).

Foucault adopted a genealogical approach when analyzing power. That is, he looks to the past in order to explain the present. His work foregrounds the governmentality of individuals (1975), where specific regulatory techniques – which, in schools, would include assessment and testing – have the effect of rendering individuals "docile" or "normal" (Foucault, 1975). Crucially, Foucault is able to identify how modern society is controlled not by physical force but through individual endeavor. Foucault's work around 19th-century prisons captures how the inmates themselves assist in their own self-governance. Institutions, including schools, continue to use forms of self-surveillance as a key instrument to control or govern people. As Foucault claims, "our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance…It is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of force

and bodies" (1975, p. 217).

For Foucault, we are now situated in a disciplinary society where power is everywhere and "exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (Foucault, 1980, p. 94). His account of prison illustrates the "microphysics" of power, which are dispersed throughout society, inherent in social relationships, embedded in a network of practices, institutions, and technologies, and operating on all the "micro-levels" of everyday life. It cultivates a particular form of self, where we watch ourselves in place of being watched by others.

Foucault's genealogical analysis, like the work of Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, reveals the "sinister", unacknowledged aspects of power, which are invisible, hidden beneath the surface appearance of society (Smart, 1995). For Foucault, the discursive construction of power is linked to the formation of discourses, that is, the social practices that circulate within institutions. Think here of the architecture of the preschool classroom or the way the timetable is constructed. These are all social practices, which at some level distill discipline among children. Nevertheless, power and resistance are inter-linked. There is always the possibility of resistance and freedom to change the situation within a power relation. Discourses, while powerful, should nevertheless be thought of as "a series of discontinuous

segments whose tactical function is neither uniform or stable" (Foucault, 1981, p. 100). In Foucault's terms, power is always related to knowledge and it is this symbiotic relationship that ensures that power is capillary in its nature. Foucault therefore reminds us that my focus as the researcher should be on the way that power moves in and among individuals. He also reminds us that objects will be at work in terms of the discursive construction of the preschooler.

Foucault and institutions, including Hong Kong preschools

Following Foucault's ideas, the analysis of any social institution, including Hong Kong preschools should be centered upon the interrelationship between power, knowledge, and the body. As noted, power exists in multiple forms within systems of socialization. In general, these systems entail social relationships, where asymmetrical power relations are assumed; that is, where adults, for example are more powerful than children. However, for Foucault, power is always interrelated with knowledge. Foucault explains that the discourses of knowledge that circulate within the social sciences are implicated in power-knowledge relations and the production of governable bodies in our society. For Foucault (1988), the "truth games" of modern science are disciplinary discourses, which constitute and create "truths" about human subjects, thereby constructing, positioning, and regulating. Truths concerning children then become part of the educational landscape, where we come to know

the child as “the skill deficient child” or “the learning disabled child”, or the child as “the natural learner” (Luke, 1997).

Foucault (1988) sketches out differing social and discursive “technologies”. Each of these, he argues, comprises a “matrix of practical tension”:

1. technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform or manipulate things;
2. technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification;
3. technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, as objectivizing of the subject;
4. technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being (1988, p. 18).

In contemporary schooling, and as this thesis will argue in the case of Hong Kong preschools, educational discourses coordinate and interweave all four technologies and target the child’s body as a locus of power. In other words, discourses work at training the body and normalizing deviance. For Foucault (1977), discipline is “an art of the human body”, which

operates with specific methods through every detail of the individual (including movement, gestures, etc.) until it is mastered into a predicted shape. In the shaping process, a complicated form of surveillance is acquired to classify the deviance into an "(ab)normal" category that needs to be corrected. For instance, educational psychology, as a "discipline", classifies children according to different stages of development (Burman, 2008). Simultaneously, organizational principles, such as professional norms and institutional procedures, enforce such categories (e.g., Council on Professional Conduct in Education, HKSAR, 2017; Performance Indicators for Pre-Primary Institutions during Quality Review by the Education Department, HKSAR; Guide to Pre-Primary Curriculum, HKSAR, 2006). Teachers make judgments against policy driven standards, which are in turn supported by educational psychology. They use, for example, guides such as the "Developmental Characteristics for Children from Two to Six Years Old" recommended by the local Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide, HKSAR, 2017, in order to identify which children are falling behind, so as to "determine this child's further career in school". Moreover, typically, the preschool timetable (as recommended by the Kindergarten Education Curriculum, Draft, HKSAR, 2017) entails a rhythm and repetitive cycle that limits young children within a particular social order, which suits the predesigned functions or tasks. "Normalization" is the word used by Foucault for disciplinary methods that create a means of conforming. These methods literally enter into the young child's body in order to procure

compliance (Burman, 2008). Children are therefore “shaped” by the institutional gaze (see, for example, Opper, 1996; Cheng, 2011; Fung & Lam, 2012, 2015). For Foucault, successful normalization produces “docile bodies”:

In thinking of the mechanism of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary forms of existence, the point where power teaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts into their actions and attitudes, their discourse, learning processes and everyday lives (Foucault, 1980, p. 39).

However, Foucault reminds us that the production of “docile bodies” is not achieved through coercion or force, but rather through desire. As Foucault explains:

Power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression, in the manner of a great Superego, exercising itself only in a negative way. If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realize, it produces effects at the level of desire – and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it (Foucault, 1980b, p. 59).

Hence, in this thesis, my attention will be directed at the forms of subjectivity that the young child can assume within the preschool setting. I will also try to heed how children, in using knowledge, can assume forms of power.

Foucault: Subjectivity and the preschool child

Foucault's work has been a key influence on poststructuralist scholars, including Bronwyn Davies, Liz Jones, Glenda Mac Naughton, and Susan Grisehaber. These academics have put Foucault to work when examining aspects of young children's lives. As Bronwyn Davies notes, by drawing on Foucault, there are opportunities to understand the relationship between the young child and his or her social world. As she notes:

> The structure and processes of the social world are recognized as having a material force, a capacity to constrain, to shape, to coerce, as well as to potentiate individual action. The processes whereby individuals take themselves up as persons are understood as ongoing process. The individual is not so much a social construction that results in some relatively fixed product, but one who is constituted and reconstituted through a variety of discursive practices (Davies, 2003, p. xii).

Brown and Jones (2001), by drawing on Foucault, are able to offer an analysis of children's

play that illustrates how power both permeates and defines subjective positioning and where, as a consequence, individuals – including adults and children – experience themselves as both powerful and powerless. Brown and Jones also foreground how objects come into discursive play when, for instance, a doll can position a young girl in negative ways, while a sword made from Lego allows a boy to momentarily assume a position of power. However, what their study also illustrates is that, through the knowledge/power nexus, there is nothing essentialist or inevitable in the kinds of subjective positions that children can assume. Brown and Jones' Foucauldian study prompts me to carefully watch children throughout the course of this research so as to be acutely attuned to the ways in which power shifts.

Glenda MacNaughton (2005) also draws on key Foucauldian concepts, including "disciplinary power", "docile bodies", "power/knowledge", and "regimes of truth", so as to rethink both pedagogical knowledge and practice. Following Foucault's central ideas, MacNaughton challenges the idea that the individual can think and act freely outside the politics of knowledge. MacNaughton highlights that truths about, for instance, the "normal child" and "desirable ways to be a child", as well as the ideal preschool teacher, are institutionally produced via educational psychology, government policy, professional associations, and academic discourses. A set of truths within a given field is described as "'a regime of truth' that generates an authoritative consensus about what needs to be done in the

field and how it should be done" (MacNaugthon, 2005, p. 30). She goes on to argue that teachers also need to study children in a variety of situations, in order to understand better the meaning and degrees of variation and exceptionality among individuals. Her work also highlights how Western practices and philosophies can be understood as a "form of violence" that privileges cultural homogeneity and marginalizes cultural diversity. Similarly, Sue Greishaber (2017) argues that, "if ideas are assumed to be applicable universally (to all children/families in all situation at any time anywhere in the world), then it is not possible to take local matters such as complex histories, languages, cultures, contexts and inequalities, into account" (p. 4).

The work of these academics testifies to the analytical power of Foucault's theories. As tools, I believe they will enable me to examine how the child within the Hong Kong preschool is discursively produced and, importantly, the role of objects in this production.

Studies highlighting objects and the discursive construction of the preschool child

Two important studies that have influenced my own work were carried out by MacLure, Jones, Holmes, and MacRae (2009) and Jones, MacLure, Holmes, and MacRae (2012). Following Foucault, the team was able to identify the discursive practices surrounding the production of the "naughty" child. This work was ethnographic in orientation and, in many

respects, it has shaped how I have undertaken fieldwork within the Hong Kong preschool classroom. Like MacLure et al., I have undertaken many hours of classroom observations, listened to adults and children, and tried to capture through photos the daily life of a Hong Kong preschool. As will become apparent, while I was not specifically examining ideas around “naughty” children, I was nevertheless interested in the ways that children, together with objects, are constituted within discourses. In a 2014 study that was undertaken in Hong Kong by Liz Jones, for which I worked as the research assistant, the focus was much more on how objects were used in relationship with young children aged between three and five years. We identified how young children are adept at using objects in order to satisfy notions of personal satisfaction and self-esteem. Thus, a boy who could see on a wall chart that he had fewer stickers than his classmates brought in his own sticker from home in order to satisfy his need to succeed.

Lee (2015) and Lee and Yelland (2017) illustrate how practices, including the timetable, the wearing of school uniforms, school bags, and workbooks work at produce “miniature students”. They are practices that schools use to govern the young child’s body (Foucault, 1991; see also Jones, 2013).

Early childhood education can therefore be regarded as an instrument that governs children’s

everyday experiences as students via the processes of disciplinary power, which normalizes behavior in schooling. Early childhood education can be understood as "technologies of the self" that progress the governance of children's bodies in order to secure "desirable" students and a "desirable" notion of what constitutes students within a school. As Foucault (1988) notes, what subjects do to themselves in relation to what is being constructed as a norm through others (such as the teacher's standards of "appropriateness") is linked with the notion of governmentality, which is used to highlight how children come to "internalize" certain codes of conduct.

While Foucault's work draws attention to the implication of objects within the discursive production of the preschool child, ANT allows me to interpret objects somewhat differently; rather than taking on a subversive role in regard to humans, they are understood as being actors who have agency.

Section Three

ANT: Its significant characteristics and its potential to analyze the interplay between actors

A key and central characteristic of Actor Network Theory (ANT) is that it refuses to see objects as being subservient to humans. Rather, they are part of an egalitarian relationship (Latour, 1987, 1991/1996, 2005). Within ANT, humans are not treated any differently from non-humans, because "without the nonhuman, the humans would not last for a minute" (Latour, 2005, p. 91). This position is described as "symmetry", a term first used by Bloor (1976) and further elaborated upon by Latour (1987). According to Latour (1987), humans and non-humans (material objects) are actors and are assumed to be capable of exerting force and joining together, changing and being changed by each other. As they assemble together, they form associations or networks that can keep expending to extend across spaces, long distances, or time periods (Latour, 2010, p. 3).

Actor Network Theory therefore integrates "human and non-humans into social networks, wherein the animate and non-animate both have an active role in the formulation, mediation and stabilization of social, cultural and political relations. Far from social and cultural practices attributing meaning to mute and lumpen stuff, this model suggests that social networks cannot function or cohere without the delegated intentionality and agency of things"

(Candlin & Guin, 2009, p. 5). Bruno Latour (1996) notes that ANT does not wish to add social networks to social theory, but rather to rebuild social theory out of networks. He states, "It is as much an ontology or a metaphysics, as a sociology. Social networks will of course be included in the description but they will have no privilege nor prominence" (1996, p. 369). Fenwick (2009) further elaborates when she notes that "ANT treats networks as contested and precarious multiplicities, which order practices, bodies and identities through complex enactments" (2009, p. 120) She goes on to say that the key point is "multiplicity – not just multiple views but enacting multiple worlds-multiple simultaneous ontologies" (2009, p. 120).

John Law (2009) refers to ANT as a disparate set of "tools, sensibilities and methods of analysis that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they located. It assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations" (p. 141).

ANT reminds us not to make a priori distinction and then use that distinction as the foundation upon which all other knowledge built. As Fenwick and Edwards (2010) note, "society and the social are not seen as a pre-existing objects of enquiry, but as emerging through enactments of various forms of association and network effects" (p. 3) They go on to

elaborate that “ANT examines the association of human and non-human entities in the performance of the social, the economic, the natural the educational, etc.” (p. 3) Fenwick and Edwards therefore conclude that “the objective is to understand precisely how these things come together – and manage to hold together, however temporarily – to form associations that produce agency and other effects: for example, ideas, identities, rules, policies and reform” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 3).

Latour (1987) uses the term “translation” to describe what happens when entities, human and non-human, come together and connect, changing one another to form links. Such a link could be composed of a child’s body, a key on a string, a locked door, a storeroom of toys, desire for those toys, and so on. It refers to the micro-negotiations among elements that work to shape or change them and link them into extended chains of interconnected activity. A network is an entity or assemblage of materials brought together and linked through processes of translation that perform a particular function. Power is central to any understanding of space and context translated through networks. There is a moment of stability when the network settles into a stable process or an object that maintains itself. When translation has succeeded, the actor network is mobilized to assume a particular role and perform knowledge in a particular way.

A network is always working within a fluid situation where there are a lot of movements – that is, micro-negotiations – among elements that work to shape or change them, and link them into extended chains of interconnected activity within the network. A network can continue to extend itself as more entities become connected to it. As Law describes, a network often

stabilizes dynamic events and negotiations into a black box that becomes durable. Such as a curriculum guideline, it brings together, frames, selects and freezes in one form a whole series of meetings, voices, exploration, conflicts and discarded. It is a form concealing many negotiations of the network that produced it. The curriculum guideline can circle also across vast spaces, gathering allies. The more allies and connections, the stronger the network becomes. (Law, 1999, p. 7).

A network can never be complete or totalizing. There are always gaps, holes, tears, and multiple networks vying to be effective. ANT analyses can show how knowledge is generated through the process and effects of these assemblages coming together.

ANT has been employed to understand educational practice, including curriculum studies (McGregor, 2004), higher education (Fox, 2005), literacy (Hamilton, 2009), and educational

policy and change (Waltz, 2004). ANT has been employed to analyze virtual games and environments (Cypher & Richardson, 2006; Jessen & Jessen, 2014). Such scholars suggest that games (e.g., MMOGs and MMORPGs) and virtual spaces can be interpreted as aesthetic forms that are established and stabilized by a “collective” of human and technologies. The ' agent “that comprises any collective or network – whether it be a simple human-tool relation or a far more complex assemblage of actors (e.g., an assemblage of computers, computer games, players, bodies, devices and all manner of other agents) in massively multiplayer games (e.g., Everquest, World of Warcraft, and Eve Online) – are equally human and non-human, social and material, corporeal and technical. Rather than following the more conventional user- and viewer-centered interpretations in game studies, Cypher and Richardson remind us to be more organic in terms of the open-ended and constantly changing nature of our engagement with games and virtual environments.

While Cypher and Richardson (2006) focus on the interchange between humans and technology, Jessen and Jessen (2014) take a different approach to show how the ANT perspective can explain which forces are at work when games are actually played. They employ the concept of “translation” in regard to ANT as their main analytical foundation. They found that games could be regarded as actors because they function as an organizer of other actors. They drew on data involving a game with tiles that lit up when a finger was

placed on them. Three kindergarten-aged children were actually playing the game but other children and an adult were also observing them. The researchers found that a force was created that included both the movement of the light and the observing (cheering) children and the teacher. The study showed that all actors, including in this instance lights and tiles, but also observers can "transform, translate, distort, and modify" relations (Latour, 2005). Indeed, the study demonstrated that using ANT as a tool for analysis can provide a new understanding of the interaction between games and users.

In all, ANT can encourage researchers to examine more closely the things, tools, and non-human actants that are active in particular educational practices, and how those tools and non-human elements "exclude, invite and regulate particular forms of participation" (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 7). For example, Dagenais et al. (2013) employed ANT to examine the production of networks between both human and non-human actors during the video-making process. As a consequence, they were able to understand how these interactions shape the school experiences of language learners. Dagenais et al. (2013) also highlight that ANT provides new directions for data collection.

Combining Foucault's theories and Actor Network Theory

As previously stated, one of the purposes of my study is to understand how children's

relationships with both objects and other people – teachers and other children – assist in terms of constructing the "studenthood" of the preschooler. It is my contention that, by applying aspects of Foucault's theory when analyzing the data, I will be in a position to understand how discursive power operates and how such power positions children in some ways and not others. Foucault will also allow me to understand how children are able to both comply and yet at times resist certain aspects of what it means to be a preschool pupil. Applying Foucault's theories involves paying attention to the constitutive force of language and how discursive practices within the institution work to regulate what is "desirable", including the "desirable child", the "desirable teacher", and so on.

Yet, as MacLure (2012) notes, "across a range of disciplines, a critique has emerged of the 'linguistic turn' in theory, where this has emphasized the constitutive force of language at the expense of matter and corporeality, and prioritized culture over an always inaccessible 'nature'" (p. 999). Actor Network Theory (ANT) constitutes such a critique. It is because it does not make distinctions or prioritize between, for example, subject and object or nature and culture – a distinction that then becomes the foundation upon which all other knowledge it built – that it can offer an unfamiliar take on aspects of education. A recent study by Jones and Tse (forthcoming) also demonstrates that ANT allows one to widen the scope, so as to move beyond the work of discursive practices. This study will both emulate and extend

further Jones' and Tse's work, so as to examine the forces that are at play when objects and humans are assembled within networks.

As Candlin and Guin (2009) note, objects "can contribute to and utterly impoverish our environment" (p. 1) While this study will focus mainly on the ways in which objects contribute toward and are implicated in the identity of the preschooler, I am also interested in the ways in which objects can – directly or indirectly – be part of the process whereby the identity of the preschooler might be "impoverished" through objects. For example, the customary practice of awarding stickers is part of the discursive apparatus of schooling aimed at molding children's behavior. However, by including ANT theory in this study, it becomes possible to appreciate that stickers are one part of a network. Understanding the flow of the network will allow me to appreciate other forces, including affect and desire, where winning or losing stickers can be a positive and negative experience.

Concluding thoughts

Within the context of early years education, there is a growing conversation that foregrounds the work of objects (Taguchi, 2010; Blaise, 2012, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012). Pacini-Ketchabaw's (2012) work on the school clock highlighted how it is both a producer and an enabler within practice assemblages. Drawing on Barad's concept of intra-action,

Pacini-Ketchabaw was able to look into the ways in which clocking practices afforded the emergence of certain bodies, relationships, and subjectivities. She suggests that such clocking practices can be understood as situated events that do more work than just regulating and disciplining bodies. This study also moves beyond discourses, so as to include intra-actions within networks. But perhaps what distinguishes my study from others interested in new materialism and its role in terms of children's development (e.g., Taguchi, 2010; Rossholt, 2012; Jones & Barrons, 2007) is that it is located within a Chinese context. It is by drawing on aspects of Foucault's work that I am able to appreciate how objects are implicated in the rational endeavor of development and progress within a Chinese context. Including ANT offers me a supplementary conceptual space in which I can "pursue exploration of multiple networked bodies, visible and invisible that came together in different ways to produce an effective encounter" (Jones & Tse, forthcoming).

Chapter Four

Detailing the Research Methodology Used in the Study

Situating the study within a qualitative paradigm

As is evident from the literature review, establishing peer relationships and becoming a preschool student is complex. Therefore, the methodological design has to be developed in ways that allow me to both capture and understand the evolving nature of becoming a preschool student. As noted, the study also wishes to include the "liveliness" of the participating children as they made the move from home to preschool. Here, besides interacting with their teachers and their peers, they also had encounters with the material world (e.g., objects, environment), all of which played out within the discursive structures of school.

O'Gorman (2008) suggests that, before undertaking research, it is necessary to ask a number of questions concerning epistemology and ontology. Following O'Gorman, a useful ontological question is: "What is the nature of reality?" Reframing this question so that it aligns with the aims of this study, I ask: "What is the nature of the reality of becoming a preschool student?" Moving on to epistemology, a useful question is: "How do I obtain knowledge of that reality?" The following describes how I positioned myself in relation to these two questions, which then determined the methods I used in order to pursue the study.

In situating the study within a qualitative paradigm, I was able to secure understanding concerning children's interactions. As Gorski (2013) highlights, "natural life may be governed by laws". However, "social life is governed by meanings" (Gorski, 2013, p. 660). As the researcher, the task at hand did not involve establishing facts. Rather, my role was to render the social world "comprehensible" by "reconstructing meaning and intention" (Gorski, 2013, p. 661).

The methods: Developing an ethnographic study

Ethnography, in this context, is a distinct type of research in which the knowledge that is produced depends on the researcher paying close attention to social interactions over a period of time as they are played out within the context of the Hong Kong preschool classroom (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Ethnography also allows for and recognizes that children have agency. As Christensen (2004) notes:

In order to hear the voices of children in the representation of their own lives it is important to employ research practices such as reflexivity and dialogue. These enable researchers to enter into children's cultures of communication (p. 165).

Ethnographic studies confirm that young children are “extremely active in the construction and negotiation of their lives” (Pollard & Filer, 1999, pp. 304-305; Corsaro 1996, 2004). Scholars (e.g., Waksler, 1991; Corsaro, 2004; Howes, 2009) have found that young children need the ability to derive unspoken rules of the classroom. They also need to be able to “read” other children’s behavior and then make decisions about their own in order to both successfully interact with others and become successful preschoolers. Data collection therefore included on-site non-participant observations, with field notes documenting the everyday occurrences of classroom life, including routines and interactions between the children, between the children and the teacher, and between the children and various objects (material objects). These observations took place three days a week (from one to two hours per day) over a six-month period. This ensured a consistent presence. It also contributed toward rich ethnographic (Gertz, 1983) insights into preschool culture.

Preschools participating in the study

Following Foucault’s reminder that discourse, including curricula and pedagogical practice, can be agents of control, regulation, and coercion that aim to normalize the child in school, it was necessary to choose three schools that had some similarities but also differences in terms of curriculum and practice. Additionally, ANT makes the point that, because different human and non-human elements can become assembled into collectives of activities, it was

necessary to ensure that the schools did carry some differences. The study was therefore undertaken in three preschools that were different in terms of socio-economic variables. One was located in the North-East District of Hong Kong, where the children were from homes experiencing greater degrees of economic stability, as most of the parents were middle class. The other two preschools were located in the North-West and Central Districts of Hong Kong, where the children were from homes experiencing less favorable economic conditions.

Besides, each preschool was different in terms of the organization of the curriculum and teaching. That is, one school used a self-developed curriculum that followed principles of free choice and exploratory play; one used a curriculum that was structured mainly through the use of local teaching kits, but where there was some free choice and exploratory play during small group activity sessions; and one used a curriculum that was structured both by local teaching kits and teachers, and provided some free choice and exploratory play during small group activity sessions. Furthermore, the teachers' professional training and teaching experience were different: One teacher (KA, Amy) held a bachelor's degree in ECE and had nine years of teaching experience in K1; one (KB, Betty) held a certificate in ECE, was working toward attaining a bachelor's degree in ECE, and had two years of teaching experience in K1; and one (KC, Chris) held a certificate in ECE and had over 20 years of

experience in K1. This allowed for degrees of diversity in terms of educational background and pedagogical practice.

In terms of curriculum and teaching schedule, the three kindergartens shared similar practices. For instance, the three kindergartens adopted life-related themes, such as “nature”, “winter”, and “family”, in the curriculum. They designed and provided activities, such as math, language, art, blocks, role play, and exploration, in different groups, as well as providing learning corners where children could learn through play. Some of the children attended on a half-day, three-hour basis. Within this time frame, children spent roughly 60 minutes in total on small group activities and free choice activities. Further details concerning the curricula and practices of the three kindergartens can be seen in Chapter Five. While approximately 80 children were involved in the research (approximately 26 children per class), inevitably, as the research progressed, some children emerged as being particularly significant in terms of understanding salient aspects of social, emotional, and psychological interactions, and their relationships in terms of becoming a preschool student.

Observations

Regarding the observations in this study, I follow Latour’s recommendation (2005) and tried not to harbor any conceptual assumptions, but rather just looked at controversies that arose;

that is, situations in which actors disagree but also agree to disagree. The notion of disagreement is taken in the widest sense: It begins when actors discover that they cannot ignore each other and it ends when actors manage to work out a solid compromise to live together. It involves all kind of actors, not only human beings and human groups, but also natural and biological elements, and industrial and artistic products, including tables, chairs, and toys. It also includes wider institutions, such as local kindergarten curriculum guidelines, professional training programs, higher education student enrolment, and commercial and governmental post-recruitment circulating within Hong Kong, which impact preschool education. For instance, during my observations, a disagreement began with a boy and a girl handling the wearing of an apron during meal time. The apron had to be worn according to the teacher's instructions. The girl and the boy were anxious about the knot of the apron and could not ignore each other. Though the boy seemed to offer a helping hand to the girl, the girl refused to let him touch the knot. This was a surprising and interesting matter; it was not a "usual" interaction in the classroom. I could see actors: the teacher, an apron, and the children, and so on. There seemed to be a negotiation between and among the boy, the girl, the apron, and the teacher. The interaction ended when they seemed to agree to disagree.

Another disagreement began when a child, Paul, squeezed in an additional chair to sit next to his friend, who was working with a set of teaching aids during a small group activity. I was

curious about this “unusual” interaction in the classroom. I could see actors: the boy, the chair, teaching objects, the friend, and the teacher, and so on. The boy, together with the chair, had to negotiate with other actors. The interaction ended as they seemed to manage to work out a solid compromise (i.e., they agreed to disagree) to live together in the classroom.

In my field notes, I described the controversies I observed and tried to remain as open-minded as possible. As research perspectives are never unbiased, objectivity was pursued only in terms of multiple points of observation. I believe that the more numerous and partial the perspectives from which a phenomenon is considered, the more objective and impartial the observation will be as a result. For instance, I tried to be reflexively aware when rereading my observation notes. I reread them in order to understand the world that I was observing. Why did some things occur? What permitted certain actions and, by implication, prevented others from occurring? This is where Foucault’s work concerning discourses became particularly helpful. My field journal became very important because it allowed me to document questions, puzzlements, and curiosity. The journal, together with my writing, was also useful because it could be shared with my supervisors, allowing their views to mingle with mine and develop my reflections.

By engaging with two theoretical frameworks, I indulged in a degree of theoretical and methodological promiscuity. Nevertheless, I maintained great respect for all the actors I observed and was always willing to learn from them and from their collective existence. Yet, I tried to maintain a critical distance from the children, to avoid overseeing their behavior. Occasionally, however, I suspected that I was deflecting the children's attention away from their work so that they might perform differently. On such occasions, I took immediate measures to regulate my interactions with them accordingly. For instance, one child seemed keen for me to assume a powerful position in terms of acknowledging his artwork, though the class teacher had introduced me as a visitor. I reflected on this situation and reminded myself to regulate my body gestures toward the children, as they had the potential to cause a degree of distraction. The following data illustrate the situation:

Four children (three boys and a girl) are playing with Play-Doh. One of them goes to the washroom. The children do not talk to each other when they are playing with the Play-Doh. I am sitting beside the table. A boy, Joe, is sitting close to me and shows his creation to me. He looks at me and says "look!" I do not respond. After a while, a girl, Jenny, who sits opposite Joe, also starts to show me her creation. She says "apple!" when she looks at me. I smile back at her with a nod. Then she shows me another creation and says "mango!" Again, I smile back with a nod. Then Joe starts to say "apple!" and tries to take Jenny's apple. Jenny

pulls an angry face at him and says "Nuuuuummmm!" Jenny hides her creation from Joe. She uses both her hands to protect her Play-Doh. Joe then points at her and says "apple!" and looks at me. I pretend not to look at him and keep writing notes. Joe attempts to take the girl's apple every 10 seconds or so. Jenny is very alert each time Joe tries to take her Play-Doh. This continues for a while. When the teacher says "tidy up", all the children tidy up their Play-Doh. Joe comes in front of me and says "tidy up" before putting the Play-Doh away.

(Field notes, 11 November, 2016).

(photo 1)

(photo 2)

(photo 3)

In my journal, I reflected on this incident.

Joe clearly wanted to catch my attention but I tried not to respond to him. However, I did respond to Jenny. In responding to Jenny and not to Joe, at some level, I had clearly offended Joe by ignoring him. I think that by trying to show me his "apple", he was copying the girl

and her approach. When he told me to "tidy up", he was using the teacher's rule to try to put me in the position of a child. This whole incident made me very conscious of how I should act when undertaking observations.

(Field journal, 11 November, 2016).

Interviews

The participating class teachers were interviewed in order to understand their beliefs concerning their role as a teacher, as well as their professional knowledge, experience, and practices concerning child development and learning. In order to capture the teachers' "natural" teaching practice and to allow for issues emerging from the observations, interviews were conducted after the observation period. This allowed me to understand how teachers influence children's responses to both the children's peers and the objects around them. Photos of children's interactions with peers and objects were occasionally provided, in case there was a need for a teacher to recall an event. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The questions prepared for the teacher interviews are attached in Appendix I.

Photographs and other documents

Photographs seem a natural companion in contemporary children research, as they can "find ways of eliciting children's opinions and experience" (Morrow & Richards, 1996, p. 97). The

use of visual methods, including photographs, in social studies of childhood has been carefully discussed in a number of key works (e.g., James et al., 1998; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Matthews & Limb, 1999). Visual methods in research can provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of children (e.g., Anderson & Jones, 2009; Hogan, 2012). I also took photographs during the observations, which helped me to recall what had happened in the classroom. Photographs, when added to my observations and field notes, became a reflexive tool that allowed me to ask questions that I was not able to while actually in the classroom. They also offer the reader an opportunity to "see" the classroom. They add "liveliness" to my observations and remind me that the research participants are real, living people, and that I must always respect them.

All the accumulating notes, related documents, interviews records, transcripts, and photographs provide valuable information that enrich this analysis.

Data analysis

As the study situates itself within two theoretical frameworks – poststructuralism and posthumanism – I took two approaches to analyzing the data. Data were first subjected to a Foucauldian reading, so as to discern how objects were implicated in the discursive production of both desirable and undesirable manifestations of the child.

I first discerned what discourses were in circulation and then identified what the discourses were doing. Then, I moved on to Actor Network Theory, which allowed for a new take on the data, revealing a number of educational issues.

By situating myself within both poststructuralism and posthumanism, there were certain repercussions in terms of analyzing the data. For instance, I had no expectation that I would secure a particular truth about teachers, children, objects, or relationships while conducting the analysis. I did not expect the data to provide me with a clear view through which I could claim I could really see what was happening. The task was not to search for clarity or to settle for simple meanings; both are "illusory because there will always be other perspectives from which to interpret the material under review" (Humes & Bryce, 2003, p. 180). I recognize that there is no universal or absolute truth since the process of analysis is "always interpretive, always contingent, always a version or a reading from some theoretical, epistemological or ethical standpoint" (Wetheral, 2001, p. 394). This does not mean that I made speculations in regard to the data in an unsystematic way. Rather, I used the aims and the research questions that had been developed to guide the analysis.

As ANT is more like a sensitivity, rather than "applied" like a theoretical technology, it became a way to sense and draw near to a phenomenon, so as to trace the negotiations and

effects of a network. Following ANT analysis, I looked for how assemblages were made and unmade. My focus was on how things were enacted, rather than attempting to explain why they were the way they were. Nevertheless, I attempted to provoke some insights about the politics that constrain, obscure, or enable certain enactments to be most easily performed and recognized than others, and why these occur in terms of how children become preschool students.

Photographs were useful when undertaking an analysis guided by ANT, as they allowed me to recall how networks had been constituted and what sorts of emotions, tensions, and feelings had flowed between children, objects, teachers, and so on.

As I undertook discourse analysis within a discourse-based approach (MacLure, 2003; Jones, 2001, 2013; Brown & Jones, 2001; Davies, 1986; Burman, 1992, 1996), it is necessary to unpack what is entailed within such an analysis a little further. Discourse refers to groups of statements that structure the way things are normally thought about. It is “a particular form of language with its own rules and convention and the institutions within which the discourse is produced and circulated” (Lynda Nead, 1988, p. 4). Discourse-based approaches conceptualize subjectivity, including that of children who are ordained to become preschool students produced in the discursive practices that make up the social world, including the

social world of a Hong Kong preschool classroom (MacLure et al., 2012). Discourse analysis allows researchers to capture how the subjectivity of individuals is produced within the discursive practices of a setting, as participants “are active in terms of interpreting, categorizing and judging one another where identities are actualized in the specifics of the interactions with other and things” (MacLure et al. 2012). In order to better capture the details of how subjectivity is produced and contested, special attention has been paid to “the details of what participants actually say and do in the course of their interaction, and how they build their social world through their ongoing talk” (MacLure et al., 2012). This allowed me to identify which discursive practices were at work in the preschool classroom and what their effects were (Jones, 2001, 2003; Brown & Jones, 2001).

Nevertheless, in analyzing children’s accounts using discourse analysis, Alldred and Burman (2004) also highlight the “active and subjective involvement of researchers in hearing, interpreting and representing children's voices” (p. 175). My work is not much different. For instance, as my work focuses on Foucault’s ideas and ANT, I read intensively and ruminated upon how their ideas could be used in my fieldwork. Consequently, both the focus of my observations in school and the content and form of my field notes were strongly influenced by these thinkers. As my interest concerns disciplinary practices (practices that shape children into “normal” preschoolers), it seems unavoidable that, if one wants to analyze disciplinary

practice, one's analysis will be dominated by those who are most often, most overtly and, most severely subject to such practices. That said, I have tried to heed Delamont's (2000) concerns about the ways in which the activities of a small number of non-conformist children in a class can dominate field notes. Once again, I recognize that research "can and should be reflecting upon the world in which talk takes place" (Allred & Burman, 2004, p. 187), for meanings are located at a cultural rather than an individual level, and grounded in the contexts in which they are produced (Alldred & Burman, 2004). The findings cannot be itemized in a scientific way. I cannot claim to have identified "a truth" that would hold true across the whole of Hong Kong. Rather, my data and analysis provide understandings concerning preschool children in regard to a particular context and a particular point in time.

Data gathering and research questions

After gaining ethical approval for the study from the Education University of Hong Kong, I was able to undertake fieldwork. A schedule detailing the steps that were taken during the fieldwork is available in Appendix II

Observations and teacher interviews were undertaken from September 2016 to early June 2017. The following questions, which evolved from the literature review and the fieldwork, guided the empirical investigation:

1. What are the conditions, circumstances, and discursive practices within the classroom that encourage or discourage social, emotional, and psychological interactions between children?
2. What are the conditions, circumstances, and discursive practices within the classroom that encourage or discourage social, emotional, and psychological interaction between children and teachers?
3. In what ways do social, emotional, and psychological interactions assist children's identities in terms of becoming preschool students?
4. What are the roles of verbal and non-verbal expressions when negotiating social, emotional, and psychological interactions?
5. What are the roles of verbal and non-verbal expressions when negotiating student identity?
6. What are the roles of objects and other materials in facilitating social, emotional, and psychological interactions, and student identity?
7. What networks are formed between human and non-human actors and what is produced via this network?

Ethics

Special care was taken to safeguard the interests and well-being of the children. Permission to take part was sought from their parents prior to the start of the study, and issues of consent were also explored with the children themselves, since it has been argued that even young children are able to understand such concepts (Davie et al., 1996, Davis et al., 2000; Alderson, 1995). The research adhered to the current best practice concerning ethical standards for social science research, including respect for adults and children, confidentiality, consent, and the negotiation of data. It was also necessary to anonymize the data in order to protect the interests of the participating children and teachers. All the names used in this paper are therefore not the teachers' or children's real names

Conclusion

The study uses two theoretical positions to examine Chinese children as they negotiate the complexities of becoming a preschooler. In order to both capture and understand the evolution involved in becoming a preschooler, I situated the study within a qualitative paradigm. I also drew from ethnography to develop the thick descriptions with which to enrich understanding. Methods include on-site non-participant observations. The observations took place three days a week (from one to two hours per day) over a six-month period in three kindergartens, to ensure a consistent presence. I followed Latour's recommendations

(2004) to remain as open-minded as possible and include all kinds of actors. I also maintained a reflexive position regarding the field notes (Lather, 1997, 2004). The field notes documented the everydayness of classroom life, including routines and interactions between the children, between the children and teachers, and between the children and material objects. The three preschools that participated in the study were different in terms of socio-economic situation, organization of the curriculum, and teaching variables. These variables allowed for a degree of diversity in terms of the children and pedagogical practice.

I also interviewed teachers to understand how they might influence children's responses to the children's peers and objects about them. Moreover, I followed a number of researchers in taking photographs of the classroom practice, to capture children's lived experiences. Photographs were added to the observation notes to ensure reflexivity in my study. It also allowed me to identify the discursive practices in the preschool classroom, as well as their effects in terms of pupil identity (Jones, 2001, 2013; Brown & Jones, 2001). In all, observations and teacher interviews were undertaken for nearly 10 months. All of the accumulated notes, related documents, interviews records, transcript, and photographs are perceived as constituting valuable information that enriches the subsequent analysis.

As the study is situated within two theoretical frameworks, poststructuralism and Actor Network Theory, I took two approaches when analyzing the data. Data were first subjected to a Foucauldian reading in an attempt to draw out the discursive practices that circulate around becoming a preschooler. I then employed Actor Network Theory, paying more attention to the movements between actors, to reveal a number of complex and interesting issues. The task was not to search for clarity or settle for simple meanings, but to provoke insights into what it means to become a preschool student. I recognize that what I was seeing was a consequence of the paradigmatic position I took. Nevertheless, the study was guided by questions that evolved from the literature, as well as from the fieldwork. The study also adhered to the current best practice concerning ethical standards for social science research (e.g., respect for both adults and children, confidentially, consent, and the negotiation of data) and the data were anonymized.

Chapter Five

Preamble to the Analysis

As noted previously, there are few studies that are situated within a Chinese context where the primary focus is on the development of preschoolers and their relationships with objects. Additionally, the theoretical framing that draws on both Foucault and ANT is an innovative means of aiding the analysis of data that emerge from a Hong Kong Chinese context. Given that both the substantive topic and the theoretical framing is more familiar in the West, it could be argued that I am borrowing from the West in order to explore aspects of the East. This can be problematic. This preamble, therefore, provides me with an opportunity to explore a number of issues that arise when a researcher such as myself conducts a study in a Chinese society but has nevertheless been hugely influenced by the West generally and the UK specifically. Given that "words, materiality and practices hang together in a specific, historically and culturally situated way" (MoI, 2008, p. 8) and that a great deal of my analysis centers on "words, materiality and practices", there is a need, I think, to recognize the historical and cultural context from which such words, materiality, and practices emerge. In this chapter, therefore, I offer a brief review of Confucianism because it is a thought system that is still prevalent in Hong Kong (Cheng, 1998). As a thought system, it holds significance for matters concerning children, their identities, and their relationships with both humans and non-humans. Following on from this, I briefly review the historical development of early

childhood education as it has emerged in Hong Kong. This is necessary because, while there are some general similarities with Western approaches to early childhood education, there are also some significant differences; it is necessary to mark out these differences because they do impact upon the overall development of the preschooler. Finally, I offer some brief details in relation to both curriculum and practice because, as Foucault reminds us, these are both agents of control, regulation, and coercion that aim to normalize the child.

The Confucian Thought System and Its Impact on Shaping the Preschooler

Confucius (551-479 BCE), a Chinese philosopher who was praised as a great teacher in China, has substantial influence on the traditional attitudes and practice of not only China but also other Asian cultures, such as in Hong Kong. Singapore, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan. His teaching emphasizes ethnicity and statecraft. As a result, a Chinese culture such as Hong Kong's is dominated by a secular elite recruited through a merit-based examination system (Cheng, 1998). Along with this merit-based examination system, a person's academic achievement is highly valued, for it directly relates to his or her economic security and social status. Confucianism does not only impact the value of academic achievement for individual people, but also the peaceful and stable relationships between and among people. Historically, in imperial China, study was perceived as a means of climbing the social ladder in rural society. According to Confucius, "education was the route to social status and material

success, and promoted harmony based on morality and hierarchy" (Starr, 2012, p. 8). As a consequence of living in the declining power of the Zhou feudal state, Confucius sought to restore peace and stability via his three Hs: humanism, harmony, and hierarchy. Starr (2012) explains further:

> Humanism meant developing virtuous conduct through education. This involved practicing the five virtues: benevolence (ren), righteousness (yi), wisdom (zhi), loyalty (zhong) and altruism (shu). Harmony meant avoiding strife, avoiding extremism, being willing to compromise and aiming for the middle way. Hierarchy also reflects this quest for harmony; people should know their place and behave accordingly. (Starr, 2012, p. 8).

In Confucian philosophy, there are five key relationships in the hierarchy system: ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, friend and fiend (Analects; see Chan, 1963, 18-48, for Analects citations). The first four pairs entail asymmetrical relationships. These relationships are mostly governed by the concept of filial piety (e.g., respect, politeness, obedience, love, kindness, care, etc.), whereas the relationship of friend and friend is mostly governed by the concept of "yi" (e.g., consideration, sharing, support). If one follows the concept of the system, each of these relationships will be marked with harmony and society will be healthy (Hsu, 1985; Yao, 2000). It seems that these cultural

relationships could have some impact on a child's identity when they start their school life. There will, for example, be different behavioral expectations for boys and for girls. However, individual children may refuse to behave according to cultural expectations. As Jones and Tse's study (forth coming) shows, girls could and did dominate a game and were capable of disputing cultural assumptions concerning behavior. This capacity to upset cultural assumptions is something that I will be aware of when analyzing the data in this study.

As Hsu (1985, 1988) observed, the concept of the self in a hierarchical system entails a relational concept. The term "wo" ("I" or "self" in Chinese) has always been used in a social context. Chinese people assume that the smaller self ("xiaowo") should always submit to the larger self ("dawo"). Here, the smaller self may refer to individuals, groups, families, and so forth, depending on the context. Thus, individuals are expected to submit themselves to collectives. A smaller collective is expected to submit to the larger collective. Hus's studies echoes Fei's (1985 [1947]) where it is noted that Chinese societies are organized into a configuration of hierarchy and individuals exist only as members of a community. It is only through membership and by having a defined position in the social hierarchy that the individual gains an identity. Confucian collectivism still exists in many areas of East Asia. As Hofstede's empirical study (1980) notes, Hong Kong's maintenance of Chinese culture is stronger than the influences of global socio-economic development. Cheng (1998) highlights

that, in collectivist cultures in East Asia, including Hong Kong, “education is viewed first and foremost as a means of socialization. It is an organized means by which children learn to adapt themselves to the expectations of the larger community. School education is designed to instill in children the norms and expectations of the society” (p. 15). It seems that Chinese collectivism, which is different from Western individualism, poses different norms and expectations on children, their identities, and their relationships with both humans and non-humans. I must therefore be aware of such matters in my analysis.

In terms of teaching, Confucius positioned himself as a transmitter of ancient knowledge: (Analects 7:1; see Chan, 1963, 18-48 for Analects citations). Confucius edited the Five Classics (Classics of Documents, Classic of Poetry, Classics of Changes, Classics of Rites, and the Spring and Autumn Annals), which constitute the core of the traditional Chinese curriculum. His responses to questions from his students are recorded as Lunyu (The Analects). Lunyu, together with two sections from the Classis of Rites (the Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean) were put together by Shu Xi (1130-1200 CE) to form the Four Books, which became the preliminary text for young men as part of the civil examination curriculum in the Ming (1368-1644) and Quing (1644-1912) dynasties. After this, individuals studied the Four Books and Five Classics to prepare for the civil examination in China. Although the civil examination no longer exists, academic achievement via public

examination is still one means of mobilizing the upper classes in most of East Asian societies (Starr, 2012). Indeed, students in most East Asian societies are keen to obtain high academic scores, as it relates to their mobility in upper social classes. It is therefore not surprising that Hong Kong (as well as other Asian societies) has a significant track record in findings, as presented by the Programme for International Student Assessment. By conducting tests across half a million 15-year olds, the PISA survey allows for the comparison and evaluation of education systems and student progress and achievement from early years through to secondary education. East Asian students regularly outperform their Western counterparts. Commentators have attributed these higher PISA scores to Confucian culture, which values hard work and perseverance in pursuit of academic excellence (Cowen & Kazamias, 2009). Indeed, Hong Kong parents expect their child to be “first across the starting line” in terms of early years education. It is not too surprising that almost all Hong Kong children between the ages of three and six years attend preschool, with many of these children also attending tutorial classes, where there is an emphasis on writing and reading (Wong & Rao, 2015). Given this academic focus on preschool education, I wonder what consequences there are in terms of becoming a preschool student.

Confucius continues to influence education in a number of important ways. First, moral training is key. Confucius highlighted four elements in his teaching: culture (“wen”), conduct,

loyalty, and faithfulness (Analects 7:24). He emphasized the way in which this knowledge cannot remain purely academic, but must also be reflected in practice. Hence, a good teacher must set a good example. Teachers should also be strict when teaching. As stated in the Chinese classical text, Three Character Classic (Wang Yinglin, 1223-1296), “To teach without severity, is the teacher’s laziness” (translated by H. Giles, 2003, http://www.pep.com.cn/200306/ca224428.htm). Tobin et al. (1989) also mention that order, regimentation, and disciplining (“guan”) are subconsciously upheld by teachers in school in Chinese societies. For teachers, disciplining children seems necessary to ensure good behavior. More local studies (e.g., Ho et al., 2017) have also found that teachers expect all children (five to six years old) to follow rules and use discipline strategies such as “praising the opposite” in order to maintain good behavior. For students, effort is perceived as being more important than their innate abilities in terms of learning and advancement. As Stevenson and Stigler (1992) comment, “Chinese society allows no excuses for lack of progress in school; regardless of one’s current level of performance, opportunities for advancement are always believed to be available through more effort. High scores on a test are interpreted as a sign of diligence” (p. 95). Indeed, there is a saying in the Three Character Classic (Wang Yinglin, 1223-1296) that echoes this idea: “Diligence has merit; play has no advantage” (translated by H. Giles, 2003). Studies that examine traditional attitudes and practice within education also reveal that Asian society emphasizes effort, whereas Western society

emphasizes innate ability (e.g., Tobin et al., 2011; Starr, 2012). Indeed, when viewing culture in various societies, researchers and writers use constructs such as shared values and basic assumptions. With respect to education, assumptions about the interplay between effort and ability seem to underlie a society's values. These assumptions shape perceptions about inter-student competition, levels of expectation conveyed to students, and norms concerning desirable behavior in school. These expectations are laid down via school administration to teachers. Teachers use such expectations when handling learning difficulties and in the reinforcements they use to honor work during routine practice. Hence, scholars (e.g., Cheng, 1998; Starr, 2012; Egmond et al., 2013) suggests that the cultural variations in beliefs (e.g., effort and ability) ultimately explain the differences in the organization of schooling and the practice of learning in Asian society. Thus, Chinese heritage culture, the organization of the preschool, and teaching practices in terms of learning will influence and shape the preschool student.

Tobin and Hayashi (2011) remind us to look at the implicit cultural influences that shape teachers' teaching. As they highlight in "Preschool in three cultures revisited" (2011), in each culture studied (China, Japan, and the USA), there are commonly shared beliefs and practices in regard to teachers. They suggest that the widespread sharing of approaches to teaching is largely due to "implicit cultural beliefs and practices" – implicit because they are not learned

directly. Rather, beliefs are passed down when “on the job”, with newer teachers learning from older teachers (2011, p. 2). It is therefore imperative that I try to appreciate such beliefs, as they will influence the young child’s identity as a preschooler.

While it seems important to offer this review of the Confucian thought system in order to appreciate how it still influences academic achievement, as well as hierarchical relationships, I also need to briefly document the historical development of Hong Kong preschool education, because it has been hugely influenced by the West generally and the UK specifically. While there are some similarities with Western approaches to early childhood education, there are also some significance differences, and it is necessary for me to mark out these differences because they do impact upon the overall development of the preschooler.

Historical Development of Early Childhood Education in Hong Kong

The general features of colonial education

Hong Kong was a British colony from 1841 to 1997 but returned to the ruling of China in 1997. English is emphasized in school, which, as Anthony Leung Kan-chung (the Executive Councilor with Special Responsibility for Education) noted in July 1997, “was partly due to colonialism but it was also instrumental in making Hong Kong a success” (as cited in Education in Hong Kong, 1941-2001, HKU Press, 2004, p. 528). At that time, a child,

through his or her academic achievement, including competence in English, could be guaranteed economic security and a high social status. At the International Forum for World Leaders in Higher Education in July 1997, Mr. Tung Chee-hwa (the Chief Executive of the HKSAR) promised that the SAR Hong Kong Government would initiate:

1. Extending the whole-day basis to more primary schools;

2. Curriculum re-structuring to provide a more all-round education;

3. Greater emphasis on ethnicity, intellectual, and social skills;

4. Reinforcing existing language programmes;

5. Emphasizing the importance of Information Technology;

6. Highlighting patriotism and a better understanding of China;

7. A greater degree of independence for school managers.

(As cited in Education in Hong Kong, 1941-2001, HKU Press, 2004, p. 528).

Along with such promises, the HKSAR has shown increasing commitment to providing opportunities for education, as well as enhancing the quality of education. Thus, from the 1980s to the 2000s, significant reforms took place, some of which were influenced by Westerns ideals and practices. However, while these reforms impacted primary and secondary education, early years education was less prioritized, as it was not compulsory.

Before 2005, there were two types of regular daily early education and care programs, including half-day programs for children aged three to six years and childcare centers offering a full-day program for children aged two to six years. Each was covered by separate government ordinances, with kindergartens overseen by the Education Bureau and day nurseries overseen by the Social Welfare Department. A total of 70% of kindergartens were privately run, while childcare centers were subsidized by the government. The school fees for kindergartens were expensive. However, despite the high fees, there was great demand from parents for kindergarten education, as parents hoped their children would secure a good academic foundation. Financial support was needed so that children from less prosperous homes could still attend kindergarten. As local press noted (Dec, 1998), “tens of thousands of parents were applying for financial support from the government in order to keep their young children in kindergartens” (as cited in Education in Hong Kong, 1941-2001, HKU Press, 2004, p. 546).

However, the quality of kindergartens at this stage was not guaranteed. According to an ED spokesperson (Feb, 1999), “hundreds of young children were attending unlicensed kindergartens” (as cited in Education in Hong Kong, 1941-2001, HKU Press, 2004, p. 547). Besides, complaints were published in the press about over-crowded kindergartens (Mar,

1999, as cited in Education in Hong Kong, 1941-2001, HKU Press, 2004, p. 552). Professor Edward Chen Kuen-yiu (President of Lingnan College), in January 1999, claimed that "pre-schools were the weakest link in Hong Kong's education system because in the pre-school sector, there could be no guarantee of quality education" (as cited in Education in Hong Kong, 1941-2001, HKU Press, 2004, p. 547).

Indeed, the government adopted a laissez-faire approach to early years education; little attention was paid to the curriculum or the professional training of kindergarten teachers. Academic emphasis was placed on the rote learning of academic skills. As Opper (1996) commented, "Hong Kong children seem to be consistently in advance of children elsewhere in the area of pre-academic learning particularly for early number and prewriting skills" (p. 138). Opper's study (1996) showed that Hong Kong children "are one year ahead of their counterparts in most of the academic items studied, such as counting, knowledge of more/less, telling time by hours, ordering, addition, drawing a house and person, and copying various shapes. They are two years ahead of their counterparts from elsewhere in items such as rote counting from 1-3, knowing the concept of less within 10, and knowing the number of fingers on both hands" (p. 138). However, Opper's study also noted that Hong Kong children's social development was delayed; they "are one year behind in greetings, taking turns, playing cooperatively, and engaging in dramatic play, and two years behind in asking permission to

use toys" (p. 138). Lee and Yelland (2017) use the concept of "miniature students" to describe children in a local kindergarten where the learning activities are designed to lay the foundation for later school work, academic performance, and education outcomes, thus preparing the children for their futures as students (p. 47). Indeed, the academic and learning activities mostly focus on numeracy and b-literacy (e.g., Chinese characters and English letters). Children also perform like "miniature students", as they often sit "quietly" and listen attentively to their teachers talking (Lee & Yelland, 2017).

As there was an economic "downturn" affecting Asia, including Hong Kong, from 1997 onward, the number of working parents increased. In order to meet the demands of working parents in regard to full-day programs, the number of kindergartens registered as kindergartens-cum-childcare centers increased. As there was a need to merge the professional qualifications of both kindergarten teachers and daycare workers, the harmonization of pre-primary services, governed by the Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centers, was implemented in 2005. Curriculum guidelines and quality assurance mechanisms for kindergarten education were also launched.

Curriculum guidelines and quality assurance for kindergarten education

Along with the education reform in 2000, the government also moved from a laissez-faire approach toward an active interventionist approach in regard to early childhood policy (Pearson & Rao, 2006). The importance of early childhood education as the foundation for lifelong learning and whole-person development (which were influenced by Western ideas and practices) was emphasized. Following the latest global developments, a comprehensive "Guide to Pre-Primary Curriculum" was published in 2006. Here, Western ideas and practices, such as child-centeredness, whole-child development, life-related teaching, learning through play, and more interaction with environment and objects, are emphasized (Guide to Pre-Primary Curriculum, 2006). The guide also sets out recommendations for Free Choice Activities (e.g., play involving construction, creation, exploration, manipulation, social interaction, and language) in various learning areas/corners in both half-day and full-day pre-primary institutions (Guide to Pre-Primary Curriculum, 2006, p. 49). Developmental guidelines further enable practitioners to categorize children's abilities.

In 2017, a revised Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide was drafted for comments and then published. Apart from Western ideas and practices, such as free exploration in play and the need to help children to develop good living habits and strong and healthy bodies, more Chinese ideas and practices were put forth. For instance, the guide emphasized the promotion of moral education, the cultivation of self-discipline in children, and a basic understanding of

Chinese culture and national identity (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). In order to support the development of moral education, self-disciplining, and a Chinese national identity, a set of values and attitudes for practitioners to incorporate into school curricula was proposed (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). It seemed that the government of the HKSAR was intent on infusing more traditional Chinese values into early years education.

In response to education reform recommendations (which were influenced by Western ideas and practices), the Education Bureau has compiled a series of performance indicators as a tool for "self-evaluation" and external reviews in pre-primary institutions. Regular Quality Reviews are also undertaken in kindergartens. The subsequent Quality Review Reports are then uploaded to the website of the Education Department for the public to read. This open evaluation policy exerts a great deal of pressure on kindergartens, as it influences the intake of students. In order to show more commitment to enhancing the quality of pre-primary education, the HKSAR put forth the Pre-Primary Education Voucher System (PEVS) for children aged three to six years, to assist with attendance at preschool. The PEVS subsidized parents so that they were able to choose their preferred non-profit preschool. In 2017, the HKSAR introduced the Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme (QKES) to replace the PEVS. Parents with children aged between three to six years can now receive free preschool education from those schools participating in the QKES. However, the salaries of

kindergarten teachers are not guaranteed under the QKES. This has repercussions in terms of kindergarten teachers' status, with the professional qualification of kindergarten teacher not being respected. A lack of status means that kindergarten teachers are less equipped to face the challenges imposed by the requirements of school and parents.

Kindergarten teachers' status and professional qualifications

Kindergarten teachers' status and professional qualifications are both low, compared to those of primary and secondary school teachers. Promotion prospects and salaries are also poor. In the 1990s, the basic academic requirement to be a kindergarten teacher was secondary three and there was no pre-service kindergarten teacher training. Along with the review of early childhood education in late 1990s, more government funding was funneled into enhancing the professional standards of early childhood kindergarten teachers. For instance, between 1994 and 1999, there was a Blister Program for in-service teachers, so that they could upgrade their professional qualifications in order to become qualified kindergarten teachers (QKTs). In 1998, pre-service training was introduced for kindergarten teachers (CE-KG) and the basic academic requirement was changed to five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education (HKCE) or the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSCC). As most kindergarten principals only had the QKT qualification, a part-time

Certificate Education Course (CE-KG) was introduced for kindergarten administers (principals and head teachers), with a QKT qualification, in 1995.

By the early 2000s, most of administrators had gained the CE-KG qualification. Some administrators had also gained degrees in early childhood education. Nevertheless, administrators had to play a leadership role in both management and professional aspects. Since 2012, newly appointed kindergarten principals must obtain a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. Currently, there are many part-time in-service certificate programs in early childhood education and part-time in-service degree programs in early childhood education. There are also pre-service certificate programs in early childhood education. However, there is limited intake for a pre-service degree for an early childhood education program (five years full time); only 18 students per annum could take up the offer in 2017/18, increasing to 49 in 2019/20. Although there has been an increase in professional training for kindergarten teachers, the level of training is still basic. Kindergarten teachers also face difficulties putting the learning theories (which are mostly adopted from Western ideas and practices) that they have acquired on their training courses into practice.

Professional training program and responses to the new curriculum guide (http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/preparimary/KGECG-En-Draft-2017.pdf).

Regarding the professional training available for kindergarten teachers, many Western philosophies and ideas concerning early childhood education are introduced in order to meet the international standard and local government policy. These students encounter the theories of, for example, Froebel, Montessori, Dewy, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Brunner. However, as noted, it is sometimes difficult for students to put these theories into practice. This could be because both the status and training are not respected, due to the influence of the British colonial laissez-faire approach to early childhood education. It could also be because traditional Chinese culture places more emphasis on academic work, rather than learning through the experiences of a play-based curriculum. Fung and Lam (2011) found that "Hong Kong parents' choice of preschool focuses primarily on academic outcomes and the school's academic excellence" (p. 36). To ensure enrollment for their programs, teachers have to focus on assisting children's academic learning (Fung & Lam, 2009). As there is a policy that promotes trilingualism and biliteracy, kindergarten education has to let children be exposed to three languages within the confines of a half-day program (Ng et al., 2017). Learning through play, as well as learning through interactions with different environments and objects, which

are techniques adopted from Western ideas and practices, are difficult to implement in local kindergartens (e.g., Cheng, 2001, 2011; Wong et al., 2011).

Preschools are asked to prepare children to be familiar with and appropriate members of their culture and, at the same time, grow up to be successful in the new forms of society that await them. There is an emphasis on Western ideologies, such as having an inquisitive mind and an interest in learning and exploration. However, studies reveal that, because preschool is market-orientated, academic rote training is prevalent; parents prefer academic achievement for their children (e.g., Cheng, 2011; Fung & Lam, 2009, 2011; Wong et al., 2011; Lee & Yelland, 2017).

The above review shows that kindergarten education in Hong Kong involves a mixture of Western and Eastern ideologies. Hong Kong has been hugely influenced by the West. There are some general similarities with Western approaches toward early years education. Yet, there are also some significant differences that may impact upon the overall development of preschoolers. What are the roles and uses of objects in such a hybridized education culture and system? What is the relationship between teachers and learner? What is an early years learning environment like when there is a pull between a competitive exam culture and experiential learning? What is the result of academic homework in terms of being a preschool

student? As Lee and Yelland (2017) note, miniature students are revered in local kindergartens.

As Foucault reminds us, both curriculum and practice can be agents of control, regulation, and coercion that aim to normalize the child in school; thus, it is necessary to offer some information concerning both in relation to the three kindergartens in which I located the study.

The curricula and practices of the three kindergartens in the study

As stated, objects are recognized as an integral part of children's learning by education philosophers. The three kindergartens participating in this study incorporated objects into various learning corners. This practice is emphasized in policy guidelines (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). While all three kindergartens used objects, there were differences in terms of curriculum and practice. In the following summary, all schools and teachers remain anonymous.

Kindergarten A (KA)

In this kindergarten, I conducted the study in a K1 class consisting of 30 students, 13 of whom attended on a part-time basis, with the remaining 17 following a full-time program.

Those who attended on a part-time basis left school at 12 noon. Students attending the full-day program had lunch, had various snacks, and undertook activities until 4 pm. During meal times, the students had to follow certain rules, including wearing an apron, collecting their meal, and tidying up. There were two practitioners; a class teacher and an assistant teacher. The school adopted a theme approach based on different aspects of life. The children followed published materials. The practitioners discussed and designed the activities and these were based on the interests of the children. The two practitioners were also offered support and guidance by the preschool's curriculum team.

My observations were mainly conducted during small group sessions, as well as during meal times. The class teacher, Amy, usually designed and arranged objects and the environment for the children. In general, Amy provided the children with objects that were designed to support their language, mathematics, and creative development. Related teaching aids and activities were also provided and these were designed to support the learning of a particular theme (e.g., "my family").

Usually, four tables were set up with different learning tasks and the children could choose where to locate themselves. There were six chairs at each table. While the children could choose to participate in certain activities, they had to complete class work each day. They also

had to sit on a chair when undertaking class work and other activities. On occasion, I observed children playing on the floor, but they always had to obey the rule of not interfering with the children sitting on chairs. There was some freedom to move around the classroom and choose different activities. However, generally, there was very little freedom in terms of moving around the classroom; the children also had to speak in soft voices and listen attentively during teaching times (Teacher interview, May 2017). The class teacher usually supervised the children when undertaking class work, while the assistant teacher usually supervised the children when playing in different learning corners. The teacher accepted a degree of noise when the children were playing and undertaking other activities. During meal times, both practitioners assisted and supervised the children, helping them to put on aprons, collect plates, and tidy up. Every day, homework would be set and finished homework would be marked. The children also followed a published textbook, which was used at home, where there was the expectation that parents would help their children. Homework included activities such as pre-character writing (e.g., simple line drawings) and developing math concepts, such as matching, comparisons, and classification.

Kindergarten B (KB)

Again, I undertook my study in a K1 class. Here the class offered a half-day program for 20 students. There were two practitioners; a class teacher and an assistant. The school adopted a

life-related themed curriculum (e.g., “nature”), which was self-designed, and used an inquiry-based approach including questioning, exploration, and experience. A brief curriculum outline was provided for the teachers, but they also had to plan and design curriculum content and teaching activities.

At this preschool, I mainly undertook observations during free play sessions.

The class teacher, Betty, designed and arranged the learning environment and set out specific objects for the children to play with. There were four tables arranged with four chairs to each table. There were resources set up and the children were encouraged to help themselves to paper, crayons, and pencils. There was also a sharing corner. Here, children could bring things in from home to share with their friends. Some noise was permissible but the teacher forbade loud noises. During project discussions, children could sit where they liked, but they had to speak in soft voices and listen attentively (Teacher interview, May 2017). Both Betty and the assistant teacher supervised the children when undertaking specific teaching tasks, teaching aids and project work, and playing in various tables and corners. There was no textbook for parents to follow, nor did the children have to do homework.

Kindergarten C (KC)

Again, I conducted the study in a K1 class. The preschool offered a half-day program, with 30 students attending each session. There were two practitioners; both were class teachers. The school adopted a life-related themed curriculum (e.g., “family”), which is published by a local publisher. A curriculum team planned the curriculum and teaching content for all the class teachers. The class teachers were encouraged to discuss the curriculum and teaching content together, so that modifications and different activities could be introduced based on the children’s interests. At the beginning of the September term, both teachers undertook whole-class themed teaching. In mid-November, the teachers undertook themed teaching in small groups.

The observations I conducted were mainly based on sessions in which small group activities took place. In these sessions, the children were divided into two groups, with each group supervised by one of the teachers. Both the teachers, Chris and Daisy, designed and arranged the learning environment. Objects were used to support both play and learning. The children usually had to sit at a table and complete activities on an individual basis. Certain areas were restricted. For example, only two children could play in the home corner at one time. Noise was forbidden during play, as one of the teachers would always be teaching one of the groups.

A textbook was used and homework was set every day. Like in Preschool A, the textbook was to be used by parents and homework consisted of revision.

A general teaching timetable of a K1 class (half-day AM or PM and whole-day programs) for the three kindergartens is attached in Appendix III

This preamble has allowed me to identify a number of issues that I encountered as a researcher and that also have a bearing on the analysis of the data. The brief review of the Confucian thought system has allowed me to recognize that it still has some currency within Hong Kong preschools. Each of the three preschools in which I undertook the research recognized that parents expected their children to work hard and to succeed.

The brief review of the historical development of early childhood education in Hong Kong has allowed me to mark out why significant differences between Western approaches have come into play. Crucially, there is the expectation that children will succeed academically, which has clear repercussions in terms of curriculum and practice. In general, Hong Kong children spend significant amounts of time learning academic elements. This was also apparent in the kindergartens in which my study was located.

Chapter Six

Analyzing the Data

Introduction

This chapter is organized into two sections. In the first section, I draw on Foucault's ideas in order to examine how objects are implicated in the discursive practices of schooling in which the "preschooler" is produced.

In the second section of the chapter, I incorporate ANT into the analysis. In doing so, I shift my attention away from the individual and am able to appreciate how different actors, including objects, identity, Western-oriented early years pedagogies, Chinese culture, peer relationships, affect, and children's learning, constitute an assemblage or network. By incorporating ANT as an analytical approach, I am able to both draw out and explore certain assumptions concerning knowledge, subjectivity, the real, and the social. In order to address the messy and heterogeneous lives of preschoolers in the classroom, I include examples of children's play with objects. I then move on to discuss how it is out of these relations with objects that significant forms of knowledge regarding the constitution of the "preschooler" can emerge. The chapter goes on argue that perceiving the child as an integral component of a network offers novel insights into the constitution of the "preschooler".

Section One: Drawing on Foucault's theoretical ideas in order to understand the work of discourses

When examining data using a Foucauldian theoretical framework, my intentions are to understand the work of discourses. Foucault (1972) described discourses as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 49). Following Foucault, Weedon notes: "Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. Discourses constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and unconscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern" (Weedon, 1987, p. 108). As Foucault reminds us, discourses are therefore never innocent. Accordingly, my task when examining extracts of data is to discern what work discourses are doing. Put differently, I will try to establish what discourses are "guilty" of doing. Driven by the aims of the thesis, I will try to understand the discursive production of the desirable preschool student and, in so doing, I will also begin to appreciate who the "undesirable" preschool pupil might be.

Working with(in) Foucault's theoretical ideas: Examining "innocent" practices

I would like to begin this section by examining the innocent practice of wearing an apron.

It is 12 noon and the 17 children who attend the full-time program are getting ready for lunch. The children line up in order to put aprons on before eating. I note that a couple of the

children need the teacher's help when putting on their aprons. After putting on the aprons, the children form another line in order to receive their food. They then find a seat and start to eat. Some children are crying and asking for their mothers. I note that two children, a boy and a girl, wear aprons that are already knotted, which save them tying the apron strings. The boy is watching the crying children and he has his back to the girl. The girl touches the knot of the boy's apron. He turns and looks at the girl. The girl says, "I am looking at it." The boy pulls the girl's apron strings. The girl waves her hand and says, "No."

(Field notes, 20 September, 2016; KA, Amy).

A photo of an apron (KA, Amy)

(photo 4)

Following Foucault, I suggest that such an everyday practice as wearing an apron has significance. Obviously, an apron helps to keep clothes clean. However, if I frame this

observation within Foucault's ideas in relation to discourses in general and "biopower" especially, then I can begin to appreciate that there is more at work. In brief, wearing an apron "tells" the child that they are:

i. a child;

ii. lacking in competence;

iii. docile;

iv. away from home.

The apron serves to maintain power between adults and children because it is only the children who are required to wear aprons. The apron thus becomes an object that signifies that the children are lacking in competence. Wearing the apron is the precursor to eating in a context that is not home, which triggers some children to cry and asking for their mothers. The apron therefore serves to remind the children that they are no longer just members of the family within the family home, but that they are now transitioning to becoming preschool pupils. This transition period carries with it sets of rules. In the case of the apron, this has to be put on and hung up in particular ways. Though the teacher is helpful, she nevertheless ensures that the apron is worn "properly".

Foucault's concept of "biopower" is helpful when looking at the practice of wearing the

apron. As reviewed in Chapter Three, “biopower” is “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (Foucault, 1978, p. 140). “Biopower” centers on “the body as a machine”. The apron is implicated in biopower in that it disciplines and, in so doing, imposes limits on the body’s capabilities. It renders the children and their bodies “docile”. The apron integrates the children into “efficient systems and control”. Habitually wearing an apron, as well as learning how to tie it correctly and hang it properly, is part of what Foucault refers to as a “doctrine of apprenticeship” aimed at “regulating the formation of the social body” (Foucault, 1978, p. 39-140). Pylypa (1998) offers further clarity, noting that biopower “operates on our bodies, regulating through self-disciplinary practices”. Such practices are accepted and easily adopted and, in this way, the children are implicated in their own subjugation. These everyday practices, such as wearing an apron, become the norm. They create normality, as well as the “desire to conform” (Pylypa, 1998 p. 21). So, while seemingly “innocent”, practices such as wearing an apron function to make bodies obedient within a particular social formation. As an object, the apron imprints upon the child what it means to be a “preschooler”.

Upon reviewing the above data, it would seem that both the boy and the girl were quite anxious about the knots of their aprons; “touching” and “looking” caused both to respond.

While the boy seemed to be on the point of helping the girl, it would appear that the girl did not want him to intervene and disturb her knot. There does seem to be tension within the development of helpful peer relations, which is important to the child development and fulfilment of self-caring expectations (Corsaro, 2004) suggested by local curriculum guidelines, which are operating according to Western practices and philosophies. Nevertheless, Glenda MacNaughton (2005) highlights how Western practices and philosophies can be understood as a "form of violence" that privileges cultural homogeneity and marginalizes cultural diversity. Similarly, Sue Greishaber (2017) argues against the application of Western ideas to all children and families. These scholars remind us to take local matters, such as complex histories, languages, cultures, contexts, and inequalities, into account. These reminders prompt me to further explore the conditions, circumstances, and discursive practices within the classroom that encourage or discourage social, emotional, and psychological interactions between children and between children and teachers, as well as in what way these interactions assist children's identity in terms of becoming a preschool student.

The discourse of Confucian ideology and "innocent" practices

As noted in Chapter Five, Hong Kong is very much influenced by Confucius's ideas. Within Confucianism, young children are expected to be obedient and respectful to adults. Thus, the

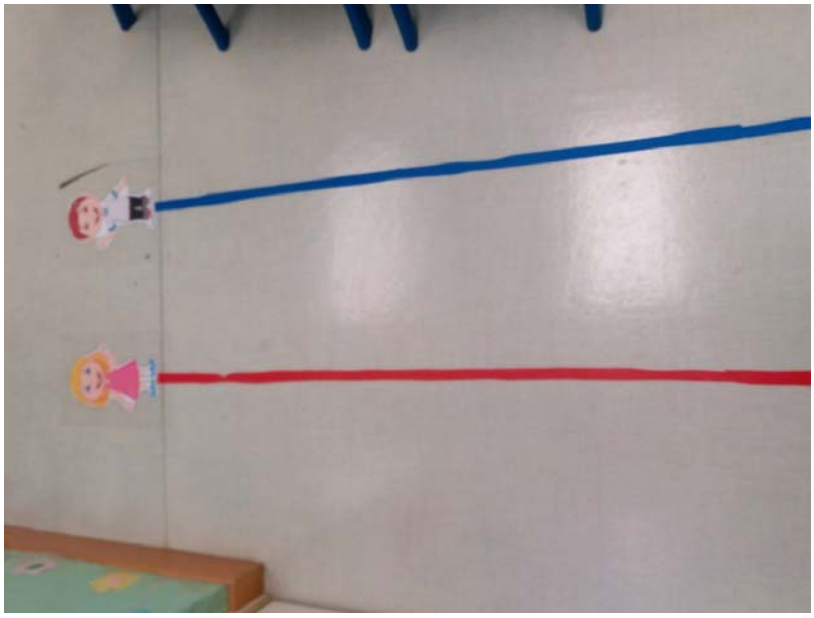
practice of wearing an apron helps to maintain the hierarchical relationship between teacher and child. Not wearing the apron is therefore construed as being disrespectful, disobedient, and improper. Hence, while wearing an apron protects the weather's clothes, it is also a practice that is part of the disciplinary techniques that are used by preschools in order to train the body to fit with what is considered to be the normal preschooler. In general, within a Western context, the practice of wearing aprons is limited to arts-based activities and children do not tend to wear aprons during snack time or meal time.

The practice of wearing an apron within school is an integral part of an overarching system of control. This became more apparent when interviewing the class teacher, who informed me that the development of self-caring skills was part of the K1 program. She had accordingly set up self-care training for the children (Teacher interview, April 2017). Such a training program reflects the philosophy of Hong Kong's Education Bureau; in the Guidelines to the Pre-Primary Education Curriculum (2006) and the latest revised Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide (2017), it states that children should "develop habits" so as to prepare them for life. Furthermore, "self-discipline and self-care abilities" are identified as developmental characteristics of children aged between two and six years. All preschools have to follow these government guidelines in order to pass the recently established Quality Reviews. Teachers, including the one I interviewed, gain their own status as "competent

teachers" by ensuring that the children they have responsibility for demonstrate adherence to rules such as wearing an apron. Wearing an apron is then implicated in fashioning the "ideal" child, as well as the "ideal" teacher.

Within the classroom in which I observed the practice of wearing aprons, I also noted other regulatory practices. These included specific "gendered lines" on the classroom floor that had been created by the teacher (see below) (4 October, 2016).

A photo of the gendered lines (KA, Amy):



(photo 5)

So, not only are the bodies of the children being regulated by lines on the floor, but their gender as a boy or as a girl is also being consolidated. The lines are part of the apparatus

through which children get to “know their body”, an awareness that (so it is argued) is necessary for “self-protection” (Guide to Pre-Primary Curriculum, 2006; Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide, 2017). It is also a practice that reflects Confucian moral education, in which harmony relationship and collectivism are emphasized. According to Hsu (1985, 1988), if “wo” (“I” or “the self” in Chinese), the smaller self, can control or manage his or her own body and stand in an orderly and disciplined way according to the gendered line, leaving or coming into the classroom will be faster and tidy (i.e., the operation of the whole class, which is considered as the larger self in Chinese culture, will be better and harmonious relationships between peers will also be maintained). Here, Confucius’s collectivism (rather than individualism), which is emphasized by Western ideologies, can also be seen in local curriculum guidelines that still exist in local preschools.

Discipline, according to Foucault (1977), is “an art of the human body” and “a method of its mastery” (as cited in Hollligan, 1999, p. 139). Hence, even educational institutions that are relatively “child-centered”, such as preschools, are implicated in processes of normalization – a process that depends on individuals internalizing rules and regulations (Walkerdine, 1986; ACEI, 2017). This is how the rational preschooler is produced. Disciplined activities, such as wearing an apron or lining up on a specific colored line, are performed for implicit reasons and intrinsic values (Wilson, 1971).

However, implicit reasons and intrinsic values can be influenced by an array of practices, including parents' expectations of educational achievement, cultural values that involve an emphasis on academic achievement, and professional training in which Western pedagogy is emphasized.

The next observation shows a child who seems to be experiencing a pull between reason, values, and desires, which offers some further insights into the complexities mentioned previously.

The pull between reason, values, and desires

Teacher: Tidy up, tidy up!

The teacher reminds the children that they must tidy up all equipment following a small group activity and then they must go to the toilet. I observe a boy who is holding a worksheet, a packet of candy, and a toy. The boy goes to join the lines of children while holding all these objects in his hands.

Teacher: Put the worksheet away.

Child: No!

Teacher: If you don't put away the worksheet, you cannot go.

The child stands and looks at the basket in the middle of the classroom. He decides to put the

worksheet in the basket (see below). He goes back to the line and tells the teacher that he has put away the worksheet. At the same time, he cuts in and stands at the front of the queue. I notice that the other children look at the teacher and it is clear that they are waiting for her to say something to the boy.

Teacher: You have to put away the candy and the toy.

Child: No!

Teacher: How can you go to the washroom with these?

Child: I can!

Teacher: No, put them away.

Child: Where?

Teacher: Put them in the drawer.

The boy goes and looks at his drawer, then comes back to the teacher.

Child: I cannot put them there. There is no space in my school bag.

Teacher: Where can you put them?

Child: I can put them in washroom.

Teacher: No, the candy will get wet, then you cannot eat it. Let's put it on the chair (see below).

The teacher then helps the boy to put the toy and candy on the chair (see below). The class line up and go to the washroom.

(Field notes, 27 September, 2017; KA, Amy).

Photos of the candy, toy, and worksheet (KA, Amy):

(photo 6)

(photo 7)

The objects (the candy, toy, and worksheet) seemed – albeit for a brief moment – to hold more sway over the child than the teacher's authority. The child wanted to control the objects because, at some level, they mattered to him; we all get anxious about our belongings. For instance, it is a common sight at airports to see people constantly checking that they have their passport or their wallet. People also devise ways of ensuring that these vital objects are easy to find – at airports, people might have special plastic envelopes to keep their passports in. For this child, while the toy might well be a thing that he likes to play with, it was also something that has been brought into the classroom from home. Similarly, the candy was also something that came from home, perhaps as a reward or a form of encouragement for going to school. Both objects could have been helping the boy to make the transition from home to school. As Winncott (1971) highlights, objects are specifically valuable in terms of children's transitions (Winncott 1971). The candy, toy, and worksheet that the boy held and which he was reluctant to release when lining up to go to the washroom mattered to him at an intrinsic level.

Many Hong Kong kindergartens require children to wear a specific uniform and to use a specific bag for their books. There are then limited opportunities for children to bring their own personal items or personal property to school. I would like to suggest that personal property can inform the child that they are not only a preschool student. Having ownership

over objects that are not official school objects reminds them that they have an identity other than that of a preschool student.

Meanwhile, the completed worksheet was in some sense part of the discursive practices of schooling that visibly demonstrated that the boy was becoming a competent member of the classroom. The worksheet mattered to the boy because it was implicated in the boy's identity as a preschooler. The worksheets usually carry an "objective" assessment to identify children's potential for learning (including particular learning outcomes and overt behavior), which may affect their self-esteem. A successfully completed worksheet is also implicated in Confucian ideology, in that it plays into educational practices that are aimed at securing educational achievement, which in turn will secure status and security. Parents are acutely aware that, in contemporary Hong Kong, academic achievement is a necessary precursor for bringing esteem and status to both the individual and the family as a whole. Thus, in order to "win at the starting line", Hong Kong parents invest enormously in preschool education. Hence, academic achievement is emphasized in local preschools and class work is encouraged (Cheng, 2011; Fung & Lam, 2011). There is a Chinese motto, "diligence has merit whereas play has no advantage", which underpins many preschool practices. Amy, the class teacher, in this instance was also caught within some of the traditional values that are in circulation. She said: "I perceive those children who are willing to do class work as good"

(Teacher interview, April 2017). She also thought that work should proceed small group activities, as she would say to the class, “children, you are being good if you do class work before you start the small group activity” (interview data, April 2017).

It would seem then that all the objects that the boy held that he was reluctant to release mattered at an intrinsic and extrinsic level. They mattered emotionally and psychologically (Jones, 2011). They mattered too in terms of educational attainment. Amy, the teacher, tried to use the objects – she did not get cross or irritated with the boy; rather, she tried to get him to think about alternative ways of looking after his objects and, in so doing, tried to get him to make “sensible” choices. Following Miller (2005), Amy’s rational technique aimed to help the child to internalize the values and norms that circulate in the preschool, which are also implicated in the broader discourses of “intelligibility” that are at work within Hong Kong. Thus, her own professional training, curricular guidelines, and Confucian ideology influence her, in that they help to (pre)determine who are and will be the “good” children. While she might make reference to some of the general assumptions that are in circulation in Western pedagogy when she says, “I prefer children to be happy [and] learning through play…[I] educate them according to their interest and needs” (Teacher interview, April 2017), she also believes that “those children who are willing to do class work are good”.

The "innocent" practice of no shoelaces

A girl brings her shoes to the teacher, Betty, when it's time to clean up. The girl asks the teacher to help her put the shoes on. The teacher asks her to do it herself. The girl then finds another girl to help her. The two girls are trying to put on the shoes in the middle of the classroom. The teacher goes and sees what they are doing. The teacher discovers that the shoes have shoelaces. The teacher says, "Oh! I don't want children to have shoes with shoelaces. It is very easy for you to trip and fall if your shoes have shoelaces." The teacher removes the shoelaces from the girl's shoes and helps the child to put the shoelaces in her pocket. The teacher then helps the girl to put on the shoes.

(Field notes, 28 September, 2016; KB, Betty)

A photo of the shoes with laces (KB, Betty):

(photo 8)

By considering Foucault's ideas in relation to discursive power in relation to this data concerning the shoes with shoelaces, it becomes possible to draw out a number of points, some of which are similar to those that concern the wearing of aprons. It is clear that, while the child's parents purchased shoes with laces, the teacher nevertheless has a "rule", which dictates that she does not want the children in her class to wear shoes with shoelaces. The teacher did offer reasons for this rule when she stated that the children might trip and fall. While this explanation does make sense, it nevertheless emphasizes the way in which there are differences in preschool compared to at home, where the practice of wearing shoes with laces is permissible.

Children in Hong Kong preschools are often required to take off their shoes when they go into certain small areas of the classroom that are carpeted, such as learning corners. It is possible to appreciate then that a teacher might want children to have shoes that are easy to put on and take off, as this will save time and avoid requests for help. It is also possible that, while it is easier for child to put on shoes without shoelaces, it also means that an opportunity to enhance self-care skills and independence is lost. Tying shoelaces would have enabled the child to demonstrate competence, initiative, and choice. So, while the shoelaces presented an opportunity for problem-solving and the development of fine motor skills, the teacher closed down this opportunity. By removing the laces, the teacher insisted that the child conformed to

her expectations concerning (preschool) shoes. As with the aprons, the shoelaces are implicated in discursive practices that encourage the docility of the child; self-assertion and cooperation between children in regard to their own self-care is discouraged.

In many ways, the outlawing of shoelaces runs counter to the class teacher's views concerning self-care. When interviewed, she informed me that "self-care skills are part of the curriculum" (interview data, May 2017). Yet, she seemed to miss an opportunity for a child to become a problem-solver. By removing the laces and putting them in the child's pocket, the teacher was also sending home a message to the parents of the child, telling them what her expectations are concerning shoes. In this way, the teacher was disciplining the family as a whole. Shoelaces are also implicated in forms of surveillance. On the one hand, it would seem that the preschool wants to assist children in becoming rational, autonomous individuals, yet the practice of wearing shoes without shoelaces seems to run counter to such a goal. The children have no choice in this matter. The teacher seems to be shunning what Walkerdine (1990) refers to as a "pedagogy of choice". As a discourse, the pedagogy of choice works to nurture the notion of the rational, autonomous individual. Yet, the teacher seemed to be denying children the choice of tying their own shoelaces and, in this way, prevented aspects of their development.

When I interviewed Betty, the class teacher, she stated that she used methods related to "guan", which are strategies to stop children from "getting into a mess". Betty saw "discipline and routines" as being really important. Routines included "going to the toilet, then washing hands", where the children needed to follow the right "steps for cleaning hands". The children also needed to know "how to sit during lessons" and the right "procedure for picking up toys". As she said, "if they know the routines, they will not be in a mess" (Teacher interview, May 2017). For Betty, it seems that, if a child knows the procedure for washing their hands and putting things back in the right place, they will learn how to take care of themselves, and will eventually be able to do these things independently. As Silin (1995) suggests, the image of the "child as [a] threat" is one that holds degrees of currency among adults in general and teachers especially. Messy children seem to be a threat to Betty. She uses and justifies "disciplinary power" (Foucault, 1977) as a means of control, which, as Freire (1975) suggests, produces passive conditions in which what is taught and what is learned are closely prescribed. It would seem then that, for Betty, having shoes that do not require laces removes some of the mess from children's lives.

The "innocent" practice of sharing a chair

Within Confucian ideology, there is the belief that teachers should be strict ("guan") and practices such as sitting properly aim to ensure the children listen to the teacher's instructions

(Cheng, 1998; Tobin & Hayashi, 2011). However, while Betty uses practices that aim to ensure individual children are prevented from getting into a mess, she also seems to acknowledge the Confucian ideal of collective harmony. The next extract of data illustrates this point.

A girl, Judy, wants to sit with her friend, but there are already two girls sitting beside her friend. She keeps standing near her friend. The teacher says, "We cannot start until everyone sits down." The girl keeps standing near her friend. The teacher sits on her chair (which is bigger than the students' chairs) and asks Judy to come and stand beside her. Then the teacher says, "We can sit anywhere. There is no need to sit beside her [the friend] every day." The girl, Judy, shakes her head and refuses to sit elsewhere. Then, the teacher asks if the other two girls would sit elsewhere. The two girls both say "no". The teacher says, "We don't need to sit beside our friends, we can still use our eyes to look at them even if we are not sitting beside them." The girl, Judy, shakes her head, and still refuses to move. Finally one of the other girls, May, stands up to allow Judy to sit next to her friend. The teacher then says, "Look! May is so generous letting go of her seat! We give her a big hand!" The whole class claps because the girl has been generous.

(Field notes, 23 November, 2016; KB, Betty)

(photo 9)

While Betty clearly has a rule where the children all have to sit before the lesson starts, she also seems to respect the Confucian idea of collectivism, which emphasizes a moral education rather than strictness or “guan”; this encourages ideas such as asking a child to give up his or her own needs and follow the teacher’s instruction. As noted in Chapters Two and Five, a harmonious relationship with others is considered to be more important than the needs of the self. As Hsu (1985) highlights, “jen” is a supreme Chinese virtue within Confucian ideology; it implies that an individual has the potential to develop capabilities in order to interact with fellow human beings in a sincere and polite way. Thus, when an individual is faced with a problematic situation involving others, having and acting on the virtue of “jen” implies the need to sacrifice oneself in order to sustain harmonious relationships with others.

The girl who was willing to compromise and give up her seat for the sake of another's desire was recognized and honored as being "generous" (a key element in the virtue of "jen") by the teacher in front of class; this may affect her development of self-esteem. As Tobin and Hayashi (2011) note, when teachers such as Betty decide which strategies should be used when disciplining and managing the preschool classroom, their choices are hugely dependent on personal beliefs, which in turn are rooted in their cultural experiences and tradition. Foucault (1978) too notes how cultural influences shape how individuals construct themselves. Betty seems to have been influenced by Chinese culture in her disciplining and managing of the classroom.

The above data further shows the influence of the teacher's perception of "the child", as well as the teacher's beliefs, which are rooted in cultural experiences and traditions. What is also interesting about the above data is Judy's refusal to be passive. While her teacher uses many practices and procedures that aim to prevent the children from getting into a mess, Judy was able to assert herself via non-verbal expression, so that she could sit on a chair next to her friend. As Foucault reminds us, while discourses are powerful, there is always a possibility of resistance and the possibility to change a situation within a power relation. As Foucault (1978) notes, discursive knowledge has to be conceived as "a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform or stable" (Foucault, 1978, p. 100). This has

important repercussions in relation to children's constitution of their student identity.

Innocent practices: The tension between "knowing your place", "practices of self", and a harmonious relationship within a hierarchical structure

In a special area of the classroom, there are some child-sized cleaning tools, such as a mop, a dust buster, and a vacuum cleaner, for the children to play with. These objects create what is referred to as a home area. There is a class rule that only two children at a time can play in this area. One boy breaks the dust buster and he also does not allow another boy to join in, so the two boys are sent out of the area.

The teacher invites two girls, Judy and Rose, to play in the area. I watch as they pick up the mop and the dust buster. They sweep the floor and clean the place together peacefully. Another boy, John, watches the girls playing in the area for a while. Then, he joins in, but does not do any cleaning; he just fiddles with the vacuum cleaner.

The girls yell at the boy. The teacher looks at the children and tells Rose to play somewhere else. Rose leaves but positions herself so that she is playing with a basket of toys that is right next to the home area. She chats with Judy, who is still playing in the home corner, instead of playing with her toys on the table.

After a while, some boys go to the home corner and want to play there. Judy says loudly, "You go away! You go away!" The boys do not listen to her. At the same time, Rose also joins in saying, "You go away! You go away!" The two girls keep saying this louder and louder. The teacher comes over and asks both the boys and girls to leave the home corner.

(Field notes, 24 November, 2016; KC, Chris).

Photos of the home corner (KC, Chris):

(photo 10)

(photo 11)

There are a number of interesting points that emerge from this data. The first is that the two girls seemed to play harmoniously together, while John seemed disinterested in undertaking housework; rather, he was more interested in taking the vacuum cleaner apart and putting it back together again. It seemed that John did not fulfill the sharing and turn-taking attributes that are promoted by the curriculum guidelines for preschool. However, as Foucault suggests, I have to consider all the discursive practices that are at work in the classroom. This includes Confucian teachings. As mentioned, humanism, harmony, and hierarchy are the core ideas of Confucianism. In terms of hierarchical structure, there are five key relationships: ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and friend and friend. Aside from the last, these are all asymmetric relationships. A group activity involving

a friend and friend relationship could be implicated in promoting humanism through "virtuous conduct". On the one hand, John failed to share, and so he also failed to be benevolent, which is one of the five virtues of humanism. By refusing to share with the girls, John interfered with the discourse of harmony because he did not aim to compromise, but instead generated strife. On the other hand, the boy succeeded in practicing another virtue of humanism, loyalty, in that he was loyal to the rule of the "family" game. He seemed interested in ensuring the vacuum cleaner worked so that the house could be cleaned. This is part of the role of the husband in a traditional Chinese family, a role that has been shaped by Confucian teaching. For instance, the husband plays a dominant role in the family, including earning money and ensuring that there are tools in the home and that these are in working order. The wife plays a complementary role, whereby she feeds the family and cleans the house. It could well be that, at some level, John was aware of these roles within his own family. Additionally, he may also be learning such cultural messages from Hong Kong television, where traditional Chinese family life is often portrayed. Thus, cleaning and failing to listen to and follow the girls' commands might be practices that John is growing familiar with. Thus, objects, including in this instance a mop and a vacuum cleaner, brought harmony between the two girls because they had an understanding of domestic discourses. However, with the arrival of the boy, this harmony was disturbed because there was an insistence on the boy's part to resist the domestic discourse. It is through such practices that the children learn

what it means to be a boy and a girl.

However, a study undertaken by Jones and Tse (forthcoming) highlights the way in which girls may refuse certain cultural impositions. In the data above, it does appear that the girls were prepared to use angry and clear commands to thwart the boys who wanted to come into the home area. Additionally, Rose, although told by the teacher to leave the home area, very cleverly positioned herself in close proximity to the home so that she still had degrees of power in terms of what went on within the area. It was her closeness to the home that allowed both girls to unite in order to forcibly tell the boys to “go away”. They were no longer acquiescent girls who were happy just to clean; they became a force that demanded attention. Having assumed the non-hierarchical position of friends, they were able to take up a position of defiance against the hierarchy. By forming a friend/friend relationship, the girls drew a boundary between an in-group (i.e., friends) and an out-group (i.e., non-friends). The girls worked together to defend their rights in using the family corner by sending away non-friends. The teacher forms rules for the classroom (e.g., only two children are allowed to play in the home corner at one time, turn-taking, the sharing of materials, playing quietly, siting and playing quietly and individually at the tables, etc.) to ensure social well-being and safety and that other groups’ learning will not be disturbed (according to a Teacher interview, June 2017), but so too do the children, who decide that group members may have more right to occupy an

area in the classroom than non-group members. Thus, the group members can work together in order to reject the participation of non-friends in the area. The children thereby construct their own rules outside of those imposed by the teacher. The girls in this example effectively refused to "know their place and behave accordingly" (Starr, p. 8).

As Foucault (1998) suggests, it is through "practices of self" that individuals can transgress specific structures, which stipulate ways of being. So, while categories, including those of "boy" and "girl", carry with them sets of assumptions that, for numerous philosophical, cultural, political, historical, social, and psychological reasons, have come into existence, these are not fixed; they can and do change.

The above analysis illustrates how early childhood education can be seen as employing "technologies of the self" that progress the governance of children's bodies in order to secure "desirable" students, as well as a "desirable" notion of what constitutes studenthood within preschool. Power circulates within the classroom and is associated with objects in the production of what is normal, ideal, and desirable in terms of children's identities in general, but particularly in terms of what it means to be a "preschooler".

While Foucault's theoretical ideas have allowed me to appreciate the role of objects within

discourses, his work also enables me to appreciate the affective dimension of objects; that is, their affective power and the relationship of this power to the formation of the preschooler. Consequently, I turn to Actor Network Theory (henceforth, ANT) in order to foreground "stuff", including affect, that we know pervades life, including life within Hong Kong preschools, but which, as researchers, we often neglect. By working with ANT, I offer some novel insights into the constitution of the preschooler.

Section Two: Working With(in) Actor Network Theory

Introduction

As a theory, ANT suggests that objects and humans are equal partners within relational networks. By carefully examining these networks, I hope to gain a deeper of understanding of the “preschooler”.

Children and chairs and discipline and, and…

The following observation concerns tables, chairs, and children. and, as the analysis subsequently unfolds, much more. Within the classroom, there is a rule that children have to sit on a chair when undertaking certain tasks. Such tasks include art-based activities, as well as literacy and numeracy tasks. At each table there are six chairs and this arrangement serves to remind the children that only six children are allowed around each table. However, I observed Paul, a four-year-old boy, squeeze an additional chair into the arrangement (please see below). Paul then proceeded to sit close to another boy who was working with a set of teaching aids (Field notes, 11 October, 2016; KA, Amy).

A photo of Paul squeezing in an additional chair at the table (KA, Amy):

(photo 12)

What I want to suggest is that what is captured through this observation and captured by the photograph is a network. I will begin by focusing on the relationships between the social and the material that are caught within the scenario, before moving on to discuss how it is out of these relationships that forms of knowledge concerning learning can emerge.

In conceptualizing this scene as a network, we can understand its constitution in the following way: chairs + children + teaching objects + teacher. If I understand both the humans and the objects as actors, I can begin to consider what are they performing. I want to suggest that the performance operates on a number of levels; as an example, the chair serves

a pragmatic purpose – sitting – but it also serves a disciplinary role, in that one chair together with five others stipulates how many children should be seated at a table. The chair is implicated in the management of children's behavior and classroom management is a core feature of teacher professionalism and status. As noted previously, within Confucian cultures, there is an expectation that both the classroom and teacher-child relations will be characterized by degrees of authoritarianism. Children sitting on chairs are representative of the ideal child, one who is diligent, obedient, and attentive. Effectively, "discipline", "management", "professional status", "diligence", "obedience", "attentiveness", and "teacher-child relations" are all embedded within the chair and serve to trigger different actions within the network. The child who introduces the rogue additional chair into the network appreciates that, if he is to secure a place within the group, he has to enlist a chair because the chair and its performance will allow the boy to negotiate the discursive practice. Why the boy needed to become part of the group highlights another powerful actor – that of "affect". At its simplest, the verb "affect" means to influence something. It is a force that lies beneath and is *other than* conscious knowing, which we experience with our bodies rather than our minds. So, while it is possible to say that the boy simply wanted to sit by his friend, ANT allows me to go beyond simple explanations, so as to consider elements that are not part of conscious thinking, but are to do with embodied engagement. That is, a non-conscious experience of intensity; an experience that cannot be either explained or fully realized in

language because affect is always prior to or outside of consciousness (Massumi, 1987). Affect is the body's way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience (Shouse, 2005).

And what of learning? Jones (2013) suggests that objects such as a chair can form alliances with human actors, where "both are immersed in a changing state of affairs" (Jones, 2013, p. 609). In other words, together, they are a force. Latour's term for the micro-negotiations that have occurred is "translation" (see Chapter Three). Here, the different elements, which in this instance include a chair, a boy, affect, desire, and so on, become chains of interconnected activity, which, in settling, momentarily produce an outcome – inclusion into the group. In all, I would like to suggest that learning and knowledge have been produced in and among the network where objects as well as humans are equal partners. I would also like to suggest that this alliance constitutes a form of learning that is not readily attached to the Hong Kong preschooler – a preschooler who quietly and efficiently secures an outcome through understanding how the discursive practices of the classroom work and, importantly, how such practices can be resisted. This is also a preschooler who appreciates the performance and the power of the chair. It is because he has this recognition that the boy is able to act autonomously, independently, and thoughtfully, but nevertheless deviously.

In the next example, I focus initially on some children and a ball, before recognizing that there are many more actors involved.

Children and ball and space and teacher's flexibility and, and...

The following observation centers on some chairs, children, and balls.

There are some balls placed in a basket on the table. There are also two chairs placed near the table.

(photo 13)

Alice sits on a chair. She holds an orange ball and plays alone. Becky comes and tries to take Alice's ball. They both hold the orange ball. Alice finally gives up and leaves. Another girl,

Candy, comes and sits and plays with one of the other balls. The teacher sees the girls and teaches them how to play together. The children then try to pass the ball to each other. They throw and catch the ball while they are sitting on the chairs. Dick comes across and wants to join in. The teacher tells him "only two children can play; you go and play with another activity." The teacher then moves away. Dick, however, takes a ball and goes into the middle of the classroom. He invites another girl, Tammy, to play with him. He kicks the ball to the girl and the girl kicks it back. They laugh. The teacher sees the children playing but does not stop them. Dick and Tammy play together for a while thereafter.

(Field notes, 17 February, 2017; KA, Amy).

I want to begin the following analysis by first identifying the actors within the network, before moving on to discuss the repercussions of the network. Within the network, we can see the work of a discursive practice in which chairs dictate not only how many children can sit at the table where there are balls, but in which the chairs also insist that the children sit when playing. Thus, initially, we see Alice + ball + chair, who, as actors, together produced what the observation describes as "play". I want to suggest that "play" becomes part of the network; we now have Alice + ball + chair, but also the movements of both Alice and the ball. I also want to suggest that it is these movements, through which humans and non-humans interact, that attracted Becky to the network. While there are other balls that Becky could have taken,

it is the ball that Alice was playing with that she was prompted to have. The force that prompted Becky is, I believe, affect. That is, Becky experienced an intensity that is felt at the subconscious level and that was triggered by the two actors. That is, humans and non-humans produced movement, energy, rhythm, and flow, and it is all of this stuff that produced this intensity in Becky. So, while rationally, she could have played with another ball, she subconsciously preferred instead to claim the ball Alice was playing with. Alice could not win against such a force and so gave up her hold on the ball.

Meanwhile, the network expanded to include Candy, who was prompted to play with another ball from the basket. It also expanded to include the teacher, whose intervention meant that the ball became an actor whose job was to encourage cooperation between the two girls. The orange ball, which was an object of desire when being played with by Alice, then had to perform within the discourse of sharing and taking turns. The chairs, meanwhile, physically tied the children down, so that, apart from catching, their bodies were fixed.

The network was further expanded when Dick entered it. However, the teacher summoned the discursive practice of this particular space so that Dick could not play with Becky and Candy. However, rather than just giving up on ball play, Dick was prompted to take another ball and begin playing in an alternative space. He also invited Tammy to join him. In effect,

the two children, together with the ball, plus the space that is afforded in the center of the room, began a new network. This is a network that included the ball, space, moving legs, moving feet, laughter, skill, and cooperation. It is also a network that included teacher flexibility; rather than stopping the children, the teacher chose instead to allow them both the space and the freedom to play.

Within these two networks, what sort of preschooler can be seen?

We can first see the docile Alice, who respected the discursive practice of the room by sitting on a chair in order to play with a ball. While she momentarily tried to hold on to her ball, she quickly gave it up. Interestingly, she made no attempt to ask the teacher to intervene on her behalf, perhaps because Becky was so forceful beyond her conscious level in regard to claiming the ball that Alice was pushed to exit the network rather than seek adult help. Such a situation makes me realize that, while Alice might be seen within a stereotype as being passive, Becky interrupts such an assumption. However, what the observation also shows is that Becky can play with another child but, for this to happen, the network had to transform slightly, so as to allow for teacher intervention; the ball as an actor in this context encouraged cooperation. Dick, meanwhile, seemed at first to respect the discursive practice by moving away from the ball area. However, he then seemed to form an alliance with the space. As an object, this space allowed Dick to both initiate a game of football, as well as build an alliance

with Tammy. Briefly, we can see a preschooler who acts independently, is willing to share, and, together with Tammy + ball + laughter + space + teacher flexibility, can sustain a game.

Overall, teacher flexibility seems crucial in terms of allowing Dick a degree of freedom to play outside of the discursive practices of the classroom and, as a consequence, demonstrate different versions of who the preschooler can be within the Hong Kong classroom. Unlike Paul, who added another chair to the group of six, he did not have to be “devious”. He was completely open. The alliance that he had with Tammy and the ball, as well as with the space, demonstrates forms of learning, which include sharing and cooperating, as well as skills such as gross and fine motor skills. The teacher could not have predetermined the learning that Dick demonstrated and that he was allowed to display; it is only because she was flexible that it was allowed to happen. However, it is, I think, quite difficult for Hong Kong teachers to practice flexibility, given the heavy emphasis that is placed on academic work; play is seen as secondary to academic achievement.

In the following extract of data, I try to capture the movements of a network. In my journal, it was clear that my focus was initially on two boys.

Children and toy car pieces and Hollywood characters and a harmonious relationship and, and...

Two boys use toy road pieces to imitate swords that are swished in the air in the traffic play corner. While they are playing with the swords, they make a "chuchuchu" sound, which I recognize as the sound children make when imitating Jedi fighting, as seen in Star Wars. Neither boys are harmed by the swords; rather, they move harmoniously. When the teacher hears the noise and sees the sword fight, she stops it. The teacher takes the cars and the road pieces off the boys and does not allow them to play anymore.

(Field notes, 28 September, 2016; KB, Betty).

A photo of the children playing with swords (KB, Betty):

(photo 14)

In this particular area, it is expected that the children will build a car park together and that the cars will be pushed along the designated road. However, road pieces in this situation were transformed into swords and it was these swords that allowed the boys to also transform into Hollywood characters – Jedi. Though the children were clearly enjoying the play, the teacher stopped it.

In conceptualizing this scene as a network, we can see different human and non-human actors joining together to negotiating an outcome – make-believe play featuring Hollywood characters. However, while drivers, cars, and car parks are welcomed within early years pedagogy, it seems that the transformations of road tracks into swords and the transformation of boys into Jedi caused the teacher to stop the play. Interestingly, these transformations are expressions of the self and individuality; additionally, they indicate that the boys have imagination and that they can cooperate. Such qualities are all valued within early years education. The scene also indicates that the boys can have a harmonious relationship (Hsu, 1985; Lee, 1996, Starr, 2010; Ho et al., 2013) in which the swords, rather than being used to attack, merely mimic the movements made by Jedi. Indeed, such child-object interactions are associated with children's self-esteem (e.g., who they are, what they can become, and how and why they are important to other people).

However, swordplay, together with gunplay, occupies a curious position within early years pedagogy. In discussing weapons and superhero play, Grieshaber and McArdle (2010, p. 61) suggest that early years preschools often ban such play, because it could be too risky, "in that play could get out of control and children might get hurt". Holland (2003) suggests that weapon play is associated with aggressive behavior, which is why adults, including teachers, tend to discourage children from engaging in play of this kind; they adopt a zero-tolerance approach (see also Hucker & Tassoni, 2005; Cherney & London, 2006). Thus, the network can now include the teacher's anxiety around a form of play, which in some ways falls outside of what is considered ideal for young children. The road pieces, when transformed into swords, produced both play and a child that caused alarm in the teacher. Rather than diligently pushing the cars along the road or parking them in an appropriate manner, the boys took up a performance that was not, according to the teacher, ideal. The network is also composed of other stuff, including the allure, attraction, and desires that children have in relation to Hollywood films and characters. As commentators have noted, children and their immersion in popular culture can be understood as either victims of commercial manipulation or autonomous consumers with a strong desire to act and own similar products in order to express their selves and their individuality (Buckingham, 2011, pp. 19-20). The swords cross borders; each boy immediately recognizes the cultural reference and, additionally, the swords trigger internal sensations and qualities that are associated with being a Jedi warrior. The

swords are what Berlant refers to as “objects of desire”; they allow a “proximity to a cluster of things [that the object promises], some of which may be clear to us while others, not so much” (Berlant, 2010, p. 94).

By taking up ANT, I am able to go beyond binaries, including good/bad play and authoritative teacher/passive child; in so doing, I can appreciate how identity, knowledge, agency, and learning are caught within fluid movements.

As noted, children were given objects to play with. They were also given objects within the context of art and craft activities, where object were used in terms of representation.

Children and a “face” and friendship and, and…

The following observation centers on Jack, who began attending the preschool at the beginning of September.

Jack is at the art corner, putting as many items as possible on a face mask. Then, he tells the teacher to “look at it”. The teacher asks, “Who is this boy?” The boy replies, “He is my friend.” At the same time, he points at Tim. The teacher says, “He has so many eyes.” Jack replies, “Yes!” Then, he quickly removes all the items and leaves the corner. He goes to the

sharing basket.

(Field notes, 28 September, 2016; KB, Betty)

A photo of the child and the face mask (KB, Betty):

(photo 15)

I want to begin this analysis by thinking about the different actors and what each of the actor performs. There are the human actors, including Jack, Tim (who has been identified as a friend), and the teacher. There are also the non-human actors, which include the face mask, as well as all the items that can be stuck onto the mask, including eyes and mouths and so on. Following Law (1999), ANT does not focus on the meanings constructed by these humans

and non-humans; rather, it allows me to consider what these things "do". It allows me to consider what the associations or the connections are between, for example, the mask and the question "Who is this boy?" Given that ANT is relational rather than representational, I am able to ask: What sort of reality is performatively achieved? As Fenwick and Edwards (2010) note, "Material things are performative: They act, together with other types of things and forces, to exclude, invite and regulate particular forms of participation" (p. 7). It is the face mask that prompts the teacher to ask: "Who is this boy?" This question immediately attributes a gender to a face with a hairstyle that many might think of as being female. Such a question is interesting because, prior to it being asked, we can consider the relationship between the boy and the mask as an affiliation between hands, face, eyes, and so on. That is, it is a bodily encounter between the human and non-human. However, the teacher obliges the boy in making a cognitive move through which he has to name the face and, in so doing, make it represent "the real". Her question serves to ground the face mask and works to keep both as they really are; not only is the mask a "boy", but it is also a representation of a "friend". This brief observation allows me to appreciate the power of cultural and social representation; a so-called innocent question constrains the boy so that he gives an easily performed and easily enacted response to the teacher's question. Taking up an ANT approach allows me to notice how some things are invited. For example, the question "Who is this boy?" invited an immediate response. However, the teacher's other statement, "He has so

many eyes", forces the boy to make the link with the real (i.e., Tim has two eyes) and the multi-eyed face mask. It is because he cannot give a rational explanation for something that emerged relationally that he has to exit the network.

After the child exited the network of "face" art work, he went to the sharing basket. This is an interesting phenomenon which I shall briefly consider.

Sharing a basket and…

A photo of the sharing basket (KB, Betty):

(photo 16)

It is the policy of this class that, when children start school, they are encouraged to bring things from home into school "for sharing, making new friends, and to ensure that each child

has a familiar thing to play with so that they are more willing to go to school." (Teacher interview, May 2017)

As I have noted, an ANT approach allows me to consider how things are invited or excluded, how some links work and others don't, and how connections are bolstered to make them stable and durable by linking them to other networks (Fenwick, 2010). The sharing basket, with its objects from home, links two institutions, the school and the family, where both are bound in the endeavor to secure a positive future for the child. The objects, when shared, will persuade, coerce, and seduce the children into friendships. The familiar objects will connect the children to the collective endeavor of schooling, as well as helping to secure them within the classroom collective. While I was unable to observe the sharing basket being put into operation, I nevertheless think it is important to include it, as it suggests that, at some level, the teachers understood the relational power of objects, in that they have power to incite, forge, and secure relationships.

Children and a bucket of blocks and rhythms and noise and, and...

The following observation concerns two children, a boy, Alex, and a girl, Wendy. It also concerns a bucket of blocks and a piece of string. As I will detail, a network forms and things happen.

A boy, Alex, and a girl, Wendy, are playing with a bucket of blocks on a table (please see below). The two children work independently; they pull a string through the blocks. They are sitting on the opposite sides of a table. Suddenly, Wendy says, "I am faster than you! Ha ha ha!" She holds up her string of bricks. Alex looks at her but does not respond to her. Then, they both continue threading the bricks. Alex then starts to put his blocks back into the bucket. He shakes his bucket and hits the bucket onto the table to make sounds. It is evident that he likes the noise. He increases the banging to make a louder noise. Wendy copies Alex; she too bangs her bucket of blocks on the table. They don't have any verbal conversation. The teacher comes over and stops them. They are too loud and the banging goes against the class rule of "playing quietly and individually".

(Field notes, 6 October, 2016; KC, Chris)

A photo of children playing with the bucket of blocks (KC, Chris):

(photo 17)

It is common in preschools to see young children undertaking the sorts of activity that this observation captures. Ordinarily, the focus would be on the child and his or her mastery over materials such as bricks and thread. However, seeing this observation through the lens of ANT allows a number of shifts to occur. First, because ANT considers all the possible actors, including human and non-human, my attention can shift from the children to consider other relationships and connections. I can ask questions that might not be immediately relevant, such as how and why the task of pulling string through a series of bricks prompted the girl to declare that she was faster than the boy. Why too did she laugh? Especially given that the rule was to play or work quietly (children are required to sit and play quietly and individually, so as not to disturb other groups' learning; Teacher interview, June 2017). In general, tasks such as threading bricks are undertaken for a number of pedagogical reasons, including developing fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. Threading is also used to develop numeracy and pattern recognition. Something more is going on in this network, however. It is as if the bricks, together with the buckets, prompt the children to try out other performances. Through processes of translation, the network alters, so that hands pulling strings and bricks become entangled with buckets, noise, and rhythms. At this point, language does not seem necessary, as the sounds generated by buckets, bricks, and tabletops provide another way of communicating. As actors, the hands, bricks, buckets, and tabletops circumvent the discursive practice of playing quietly and independently. Thinking about these actors through the lens of

ANT allows me to appreciate ways of knowing and of being that happen in the moment and are always original (Rautio, 2013). Perceiving the children through a relational network allows me to know them differently. It dismantles any preconceived, stereotypical assumptions concerning girls and boys. The network relation allows me to appreciate that child-matter relations are complex and evolving, and that intra-actions between children and matter constitute each other.

Children and stickers and discipline and friendship and, and…

The following observation concerns children, stickers, discipline, and much more.

It is time for small group teaching. The children are assigned to a fixed seat in order to listen to the teacher. Two girls, Zoe and Joyce, do not look at the teacher. Instead, they play with some stickers. A boy, Jim, is sitting next to Zoe. He sees Zoe's stickers and asks her to give one to him. Zoe refuses to give him a sticker. The teacher notices that the three children, Zoe, Joyce, and Jim are not paying attention. The teacher goes over to the children and sees the stickers. She takes the stickers away from the girls. The two girls then hold hands while sitting side by side. Sometimes, one girl puts her hand across the other girl's back. The teacher notices the girls' actions. The teacher looks at the two girls and says, "You two will do the tidying up after the circle time." At the end of the circle time, the two girls stand aside.

All the other children put their chairs back and go to choose either a toy or a board game to play with at the tables. The two girls do the tidying up.

(Field notes, 19 November, 2016; KC, Chris)

A photo of children playing with a sticker (KC, Chris):

(photo 18)

One of the elements of working with ANT is that it allows me to appreciate that some of the actors, while present in the above observation, are not named. For example, the practice of giving young children stickers can be traced back to behaviorism, where leading proponents, such as Skinner (1904-1990), perceived learning as a process of conditioning in an

environment of stimulus, reward, and punishment. If we read the observation through the lens of behaviorism, it becomes possible to appreciate that the children have been arranged so that they can attend to the teacher, whose task is to stimulate the children. In general, stickers are given out in order to reward desirable outcomes, whether this is in terms of learning or behavior or both. Punishments vary but, in the observation, it is clear that tidying up is a punishment, especially when the other children get to play with a toy or a board game instead. It is also possible to discern another actor that circulates around the network: Confucian ideology. The practice of sitting on a designated child-sized chair reinforces the position of the child within the adult/child hierarchy, where the child's role is to obediently listen.

There are also other actors in circulation, which are sensed rather than seen. I am thinking here of feelings such as envy, desire, and longing, which are triggered by stickers. The loss of the stickers prompted the two girls to hold hands and pat each other's backs, suggesting that the network expanded to include consolation and comfort. Such acts, while valorized in another context, became a reason for the teacher to punish the two girls – rather than playing, they had to tidy up. Effectively, the girls were being punished because of their relationship with the stickers, as well as with one another, a relationship that caused them to be considered by the teacher as disobedient and inattentive (Teacher interview, June 2017) and which, within Confucian ideology, amounts to disrespect.

ANT allows me to appreciate that the preschooler is immersed in and entangled within multiple and messy relations (Rautio, 2014). It allows me to glimpse gentle actions between children that nevertheless trigger reprimands from the teacher. It also allows me to see how matter, including stickers, can wield significant power. Such power cuts through notions of docility, passivity, and obedience.

Conclusion

In all, Foucauldian ideas allow me to appreciate how everyday practices can regulate children, with the object being the "ideal" preschooler. Objects are also used to regulate parents, such as when it seems that only shoes with no laces are acceptable. Objects including chairs, desks, lines on the floor, and aprons are used to produce "docile bodies". Objects also give children the courage needed to momentarily step outside of a discourse in order to experience themselves differently.

In drawing on ANT, I have destabilized conventional perceptions of the Hong Kong preschooler. More conventional studies of the Hong Kong preschooler highlight children's cognitive attributes (see Opper, 1996). While this knowledge concerning children's cognitive skills is valuable, it is my contention that, by engaging with ANT, I have been able to discern how children, together with non-human matter, are caught within dynamic relations, in which

the emergence of the preschooler is perpetually changing as a consequence of interactions. These, in turn, create new conditions in which the self, agency, learning, and knowledge are in a constant state of emergence. Toys, buckets, bricks, stickers, Hollywood characters, chairs, classroom spaces, and so on have agency and, as agents, can and do generate force. They can be a form of communication in establishing relationships with peers, which subsequently influence the development of student identity. Indeed, various forms of associations and network effects are formed. In working with ANT, I have come to appreciate how, as an actor, the preschooler co-emerges via intra-actions with other non-human actors.

Chapter Seven

Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter, my intentions are to identify a number of significant points which, as I shall go on to detail, offer a number of insights into the phenomenon of young children's preschool identities within the context of Hong Kong. In taking up two theoretical frameworks – Foucault's theories in relation to discourses and disciplinary power, and actor network theory – I have sought to gain some understanding of how children's preschool identities are fashioned and acquired. I am, therefore, working from the premise that there are no universal or absolute truths in relation to acquiring a preschool identity (Burman, 1990; Weedon, 1987). My study has not produced "findings" in a scientific sense. I cannot, for example, claim to have identified "truths" that would hold true across the whole of the Hong Kong early years sector. Rather, by working with Foucault and with ANT, I have attempted to add to our understanding in relation to the processes by which children acquire a preschool identity. I have also attempted to understand the role of objects within this project.

Given that the analysis of the data was situated within two theoretical frameworks, the discussion will be organized into two sections. The first concerns the understanding that has emerged as a consequence of working with Foucault. Here, I highlight how objects are

incorporated into discourses that discipline young children and which shape how the young child experiences preschool education, which, in turn, works at defining identities.

The second section of this chapter will emphasize the understandings that have emerged as a consequence of working with ANT. As noted previously, ANT demanded that my focus was not predominantly on the child or children. Rather, I had to appreciate what was being *performed* within particular assemblages or networks (Law, 1997; Law & Singleton, 2000). Subsequently, I will detail how ANT as a tool has allowed me to unpick the performances within certain networks and, as a consequence, has opened up some of the more hidden complexities that are embedded in becoming a preschooler, which might not have become apparent if I had used more conventional forms of analysis. Throughout this chapter, I use photographs and extracts of data as a means of deepening the discussion and emphasizing particular points.

Section One

Disciplinary power and the production of the docile preschooler

In Chapter Six, I initially focused on an apron. Drawing on Foucault, I argued that, as an object, the apron was significant in that it emphasized the position of the child. That is, it was an object that was worn only by children and, moreover, it was an object that was specific to the preschool. It served to remind the children that they were no longer at home. It also emphasized the incompetence of the child, as opposed to the competence of the adults, who did not wear aprons. As reviewed in Chapter Three, Foucault's work (1977) places an emphasis on the techniques of institutionalized supervision and training, which he refers to as "disciplinary power", but which is not confined to punishment. Rather, such disciplinary power aims to employ numerous and diverse techniques so as to increase the docility of individuals, which in turn makes them more easily educated. Hence, the production of "docile bodies" is not achieved through coercion of force, but rather through self-governance, "so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines" (Foucault, 1977, p. 138). As mentioned in Chapter Six, aprons were worn to keep the school uniform clean.

Children with Aprons (KC, Chris):

(photo 19)

The school uniform physically constructs and gives the children a corporate school identity. Additionally, given the insistence on wearing aprons both when eating and when undertaking art activities (see above), these uniforms had to be kept clean. A clean uniform helped to produce the “normal” preschooler. As one teacher said to a child who had paint on his clothes: “You see, the other children are clean; you should be careful and keep your uniform clean” (field notes, 29 November, 2016). In other words, an apron ensures a preschool identity similar to the “others”, which involves keeping the uniform clean.

Just as aprons and uniforms were implicated in the discursive production of the preschool child, so too were other objects. In Chapter Six, I used a photograph that illustrated pink and blue lines on the floor, which insisted that the children arranged themselves according to their

gender when lining up. The colored lines are technologies of sign systems. As such, the pink and blue lines served to categorize the preschool girl and the preschool boy; they also imposed discipline. In another preschool, I recorded a similar practice, where color-coded dots and squares were used (see below).

(photo 20)

Again, the colors dictated which gender should use which line. The colored dots are also technology of sign system. Additionally, the layout of the dots, including the gaps between each block of color, regulated how the children should walk when transitioning from their chairs to the cupboards. In this way, the lines not only categorized the children, but also regulated how their bodies should move. Simple objects, including a line, not only tell the children who they are in terms of their gender, but also ensure that their walking style conforms to a “norm”.

In Chapter Six, I drew on empirical examples to show how objects are incorporated into disciplinary techniques in order to organize time, space, and daily practices. To emphasize this point, I would like to draw on three further empirical examples. The first concerns pots of Play-Doh. Here, each child was given a designated pot, which was labeled with a photograph (see below).

(photo 21)

Following Foucault, we can understand this practice as an example of power that comes "from below". That is, the pots and the photos are part of the normal practices of the classroom that serve to discipline the children; they will only use a particular pot of Play-Doh. The photos of children are also technologies of sign systems. The teacher does not have to discipline the children because they, together with the pots, are self-regulating. As Foucault noted, power is everywhere: It is "exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of

nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (Foucault, 1980, p. 94). Foucault also made the point that power is productive. In other words, through disciplinary techniques such as the individualized Play-Doh pots, a form of knowledge and a particular perspective concerning children is produced. That is, a child who will not share, squabble, or argue over Play-Doh. The Play-Doh pots help to produce the passive or docile child.

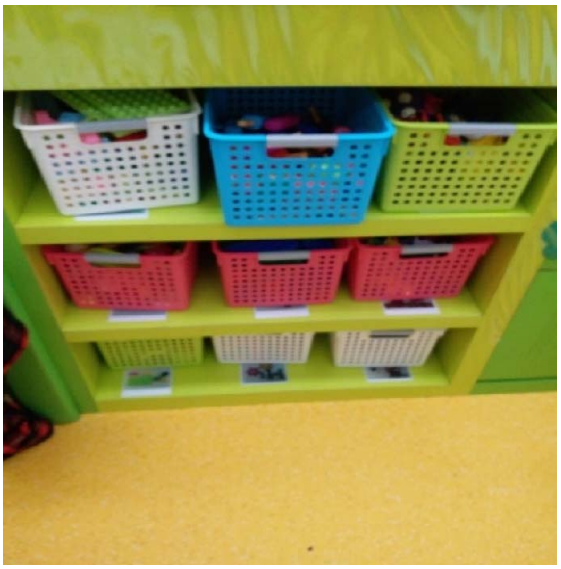
The second example illustrates how objects were significant in shaping a corporate identity. Each child had to wear a specific school bag (see below). Not only did these bags have to be worn by all the children, but they also had to be put away in a specific cupboard in a specific way.

(photo 22)

According to Foucault, “normalization” is a disciplinary method, that creates a means of conforming. Thus, in order to be considered a competent member of the preschool class, everybody has to conform to the norm. Children who found it difficult to comply with the norm seemed to suffer. For example, I observed a girl who, while she was able to locate her school bag, was unable to put it on her shoulder. She sat on the floor and cried (Field notes, 20 September, 2016).

The girl, while recognizing the dominant norm, was unable to fully comply with it. Perhaps her tears indicated that she was aware that she was not yet a competent member of the class. In this instance, her failure to manage the object highlighted that she was failing in terms of being a “proper” preschool student.

The third example also demonstrates the way in which objects are part of “disciplinary technologies”. In this example, different plastic baskets with different kinds of toys, blocks, and bricks were placed in the toy corner for children to choose from and play with (see below).



(photo 23)

During small group activities, the children could take the plastic basket to play with on a designated table. However, they could only take one basket each time. They also had to return it to the right area and had to ensure that they matched the basket with the photo showing the same kind of toys, blocks, or bricks, before taking another plastic basket to play with. Again, this practice was part of the disciplinary techniques that defined which children were or were not competent. The photos of toys are also technologies of sign systems. On one occasion, I observed a child who did not put the basket back according to the photo; the teacher came and told him to look at the photo and put it back correctly (field notes, 10 November, 2016). Early childhood education in Hong Kong seems to favor reductionist thoughts, for there is a tendency to over-simplify human behavior or cognitive processes and, in doing so, the early

childhood curriculum programs have neglected the complexities of the mind, as well as children's learning and development.

Disciplinary power and classroom architecture: Shaping the preschooler

In Chapter Six, a number of empirical examples focused on the chairs that were arranged around the tables. These chairs, because of their size, emphasized the hierarchical relationship between adults and children. The photograph below illustrates the size of the children's chairs.

(photo 24)

The chairs were also used to control the number of children who could undertake a specific activity (see below).

(photo 25)

Thus, the chairs and the tables were both implicated in discipline and order. The chairs also emphasized the children's status within the adult/child relationship.

(photo 26)

The chairs also indicated that each child was part of a larger community, which held the expectation that sitting in a group would foster relationships. Given that there is general

recognition that young children experience the world through relationships (e.g., Bornstein, 2002; Fogel, 1993; Cassidy & Slaver, 1999), objects such as chairs and tables are implicated in discourses that seek to contribute toward the construction of identity and a sense of belonging (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009, p. 20). As noted, “relationships engage children in the human community in ways that help them define who they are, what they can become, and how and why they are important to other people” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC), Working Paper I, p. 1).

Following Bronfenbrenner and Morris’s (2006) bio-ecological model of human development, it is suggested that children’s experiences in school through interactions with teachers and peers in the classroom are of significance. Within this model of development, it is argued that interactions with peers provide opportunities for children to learn effective conflict resolution; they may be more able to adapt to and integrated into groups (e.g., Pelligrini et al., 1997; Farmer & Oliver, 2004), where they learn “how to share, to engage in reciprocal interactions (e.g., take turns, giv and receive), to take the needs and desires of others into account, and to manage their own impulses” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC), Working paper 1, 2004, p. 2).

However, in following Foucault, I became very aware of how children used the discursive practices of the classroom not so much in terms of resolving conflicts, but rather in terms of pursuing their own agenda. This is illustrated in the following observation.

There are four children (four girls and one boy) playing with big blocks on the table. Two of the girls, Mandy and Nancy, are trying to make a car together.

A photo of children playing with big blocks on table (KA, Amy):

(photo 27)

Another girl, Jessica, tries to place the blocks as high as possible. Jimmy moves around the table. He holds a block in his hand. He tries to add the block onto the car that Mandy and Nancy are building, but they refuse to let him do it. Jimmy, Mandy, and Nancy begin a tug-of-war over the blocks. Jessica keep yelling "don't fight! Don't fight!" The teacher comes

over and tells them all to stop playing. She also reminds the children to play with the blocks individually. The teacher walks away and the four children continue to play. Jimmy sings while playing. The other three girls play separately and they chat. Their chatting is mainly about what and how to build, and they offer one another suggestions. Suddenly, Jessica shouts, "Tidy up! Tidy up!" She starts to tear apart her building and puts the blocks into the basket.

A photo of the girl tearing apart her building and putting the blocks into the basket (KA, Amy):

(photo 28)

After she puts her blocks away, she starts to tear at the other constructions. While she does this, she continues to yell, "Tidy up! Tidy up!" The teacher overhears and says, "No, it's not time to tidy up yet." Then, the children take the blocks out from the basket. They continue to

play. After a while, Jessica yells "tidy up" again and tries to break apart the buildings. Mandy says, "No, it's not tidy up!" She refuses to let Jessica break her building. Then, all three girls and Jimmy yell at Jessica, "It is not tidy up!" The four children start to play with the blocks again.

(Field notes, 4 October, 2016; KA, Amy)

In analyzing this extract, I want to focus mainly on Jessica, who used a loud voice to first demand that there was no fighting and then to communicate that it was time to tidy up. Fighting is not allowed within Hong Kong preschools. On those occasions when I observed fighting, it was immediately stopped and children were punished by forfeiting their play time (field notes, 20 September, 2016; 27 September, 2016). When the children began a fighting over the bricks, Jessica appreciated that if she yelled "stop fighting", it would immediately attract the teacher's attention. By tapping into the classroom rules, Jessica gained an immediate response from the teacher. However, her second attempt at trying to use the practices of the room was not so successful. By calling out "tidy up", she attempted to imitate the teacher, hijacking one of the disciplining technologies. Normally, upon hearing "tidy up", the entire class would stop working or playing. If they were playing with bricks, then these would have to be dismantled and put away in the basket provided. Her hijacking of the rule worked at first, but then the teacher clarified that it was not yet time to "tidy up". When

Jessica tried to highjack the rule again, the other children recognized that she does not have the power to call out the rule and turned on her. These preschool children were able to take action because they not only understood what the rules were, but also appreciated the power it could give them when they implemented the rules.

The practical management of the space and architecture of the preschools where I undertook my study was managed by the teachers. However, the children themselves were also adept in interrupting how specific spaces were managed. In the following observation, it is clear that a teacher has set up a band area.

A photo of a new band corner (KB, Betty):

(photo 29)

Children are trying to play with it and they are making different sounds. While they are playing, other children cover their ears and yell, "Too loud. The noise is very loud" (see below, where children are covering their ears).

A photo of children covering their ears (KB, Betty):

(photo 30)

The teacher makes a new rule for the band corner. The corner will be open for just five minutes per day.

(Field notes, 19 October, 2016; KB, Betty)

In general, I found that the preschool classrooms where I undertook my study preferred the children to be quiet. The teachers would remind the children when the noise level was too

much by calling out, “Very loud. The class is too loud”, so as to remind the children to make less noise (Field notes, 28 September, 2016; 5 October, 2016). However, in the above observation, it is the children themselves who are finding the noise too loud and, as we can see, some of the children have covered their ears. Effectively, it is the children themselves who have undertaken their own surveillance and, as a consequence of their reactions, the teacher alters the band time to five minutes per day. I would like to suggest that it is by internalizing the discursive practices of the classroom that the children are able to use a form of logic that the teacher has to accept because of her own immersion in the discursive practices. In instances such as the one that has been described above, the preschool child was able to access and use logic that then influenced the class teacher.

Disciplinary power and children’s resistance: Shaping the preschooler

The empirical examples that I have used in this chapter, together with several of those used in Chapter Six, illustrate how objects are incorporated into disciplinary techniques, where docility is the aim. However, sometimes it was possible to see that the children were capable of resisting disciplinary power. It may be recalled that, in Chapter Six, I described a girl called Judy who very much wanted to sit on a chair by her friend and, despite the teacher’s encouragement, refused to sit elsewhere. Finally, another child moved, enabling Judy to sit where she wanted to. She was able to resist.

The following examples allow me to further explore children's resistance to disciplinary power. Previously, I have used data concerning Play-Doh to argue that the practice of giving each child their own pot contributed toward the production of a school identity that was passive. However, in the following observation, it is possible to see a child who tries to resist the practice to a degree.

It is time to take part in creative activities with Play-Doh. Each child has a specific tub of Play-Doh, which has his or her name and picture on it. This means that each child can only have one color of Play-Doh. Jack looks around the table and the floor and picks up little bits of different colored Play-Doh that have been dropped by the other children. He mixes the other colors into his own. Then he shows it to other children at the table. The teacher sees him showing off his Play-Doh and stops him.

(Field notes, 10 November, 2016; KC, Chris)

In the second example, we see a boy who wanted to play with some Lego bricks:

A boy finishes his snacks and then he goes to pick up the basket of Lego right away. The teacher says, "Put in down; it's not time yet." The boy then holds on to the basket and stands still. The teacher sees him and says in a more demanding tone, "I said the table is not ready;

put it down!" The boy slowly goes to put down the basket and then goes back to the closest seat and sits down. He keeps looking at the basket. After a while, he leaves his seat and it is as if he says to himself, "The table seems clear now." The teacher doesn't see him leave his seat, as she is busy cleaning up the snack cart. The boy goes and takes the basket and slowly walks to the play table and stands beside it. He just stands there, holding the basket. Then, the teacher announces, "It's play time." The boy quickly sits down and starts playing.

(Field notes, 23 November, 2016; KB, Betty)

A photo of the child standing at the play table, holding the basket (KB, Betty):

(photo 31)

In my view, both the boy with the Play-Doh and the boy with the Lego, while recognizing discursive practices, can nevertheless make decisions, which can then be realized in actions that differ from the normal practices. If we focus on the boy waiting to play with Lego, we can see that, while it is normal in this classroom to wait for the teacher to decide when the table is ready, the boy was able to make his own judgment about the table. He also managed to move around the room without being noticed. He was able to dodge the disciplinary gaze of the teacher. Foucault suggests that we do not have to become docile bodies. He then goes on to suggest that we need to develop three practices (Bess, 1980, p. 3). The first is "refusal"; that is, to refuse "to accept as self-evident the things that are proposed to us". The second practice is "curiosity", which Foucault describes as "the need to analyze and to know, since we can accomplish nothing without reflection and knowledge". The third practice is "innovation", "to seek out in our reflections those things that have never been thought or imagined" (Bess, 1980, p. 3).

The boy who wanted to play refused to simply comply with the order "put it down; it's not time yet." Rather, he reflected and used his knowledge of the classroom in order to take the basket and slowly walk to the play table and stand beside it. Using innovation, he was able to quickly sit down and start playing. Similarly, it takes innovation to resist the practice of only playing with a designated lump of Play-Doh.

As Foucault pointed out, “individuals are also in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target, they are also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (1980, p. 96).

A Summary of Section One

Foucault has enabled me to understand the execution of disciplinary power in a preschool setting and the place of objects within this execution. Foucault has also allowed me to appreciate the interplay between Chinese culture, including Confucian ideology and the production of the ideal preschool student. His work has obliged me to become sensitive to and acknowledge the way in which the architecture of the classroom, in which chairs, tables, and floor space dispose certain actions while curtailing others. He has also alerted me to various relationships and the roles of objects within these.

Finally, he has called my attention to three practices: “refusal”, “curiosity”, and “innovation” (Bess, 1980, p. 3). Such practices can enable children to find opportunities to experience themselves differently. For instance, both the boy with the Play-Doh and the boy with the Lego may understand or perceive the student role as active and independent, rather than passive and dependent.

Section Two

Introduction

By working with Actor Network Theory, I have been able to shift my attention from "the child" to what was being performed within particular assemblages or networks (Law, 1997; Law & Singleton, 2000). Theoretically, ANT (e.g., John Law, 2009; Latour, 1987, 1996, 2005) treats everything in the social and natural world as being part of a web of relationships, which, because they are continuously generating, bring about different effects and consequences. ANT also considers the human and the non-human, including material objects, as having an egalitarian relationship, a relationship that is characterized by "symmetry" (Latour, 1987, 1996). Both humans and non-human matter are actors and both are assumed to be capable of exerting force by joining together; through flows of change, each is changed by the other. Assemblages are formed when human and non-human actors form networks. Such networks produce agency and effects, which might be temporary but nevertheless have consequences. Following Latour (1996, 2005) and Guattari (2000 [1989]), Bennett (2010) suggests that both human and non-human are "lively matter" and are governed by "an emergent rather than a linear or deterministic causality" (p. 112). Following on from this, it is argued that agencies emerge through entanglements and attachments – no agency exists in isolation.

Accordingly, by situating myself within ANT, I have been able to examine within each of the preschools the symmetry between all the actors of the classroom – a symmetry that creates what Bennett (2010) refers to as the vibrancy of matter. I would like to suggest that such vibrancy has consequences in relation to the preschooler, where human and non-human actors produce relations of power. However, this is not power in the sense of one person having power over another, but rather a power that affects each of the actors. It is by tracing certain networks that I am able to gain a deeper understanding of the "preschooler".

Examining the consequences of networks: A chair + a child + children +…

In the first section of the discussion, I have already unpicked how objects such as a chair serve to discipline the child and his or her body. Thus, an object such as a chair is matter, which does not simply have a pragmatic use. As an actor, it can command the children. Within the assemblage, chairs, together with the children and the teacher, perform scenes of order. The chair helps to produce a child who both looks like a school child and performs as a school child. Chairs also perform a gate-keeping role; for example, in one of the classrooms observed, they permitted just two children to undertake art activities.

Photos of chairs in different areas (KA, Amy):

(photo 32)

(photo 33)

Chairs were also responsible for instilling a certain atmosphere in the classrooms; for example, the relationship between the child and the object produced quiet in order to maximize listening.

A photo of chairs of different sizes in different settings (KB, Betty):

(photo 34)

Additionally, given that Hong Kong is a Confucian culture, the chair, while theoretically in a symmetrical relationship with human actors, nevertheless does offer a performance that can produce a teacher-child relationship in which the adult is characterized by degrees of authoritarianism (e.g., Cheng, 1998; Tobin & Hayashi, 2011). However, I sometimes observed children sitting in a circle, which is a practice that has been influenced by Western approaches. Traditionally, Hong Kong children sit in rows or columns, with the teacher standing in front giving instructions or perhaps reading a story. However, while there have been renovations in terms of seating arrangements within Hong Kong early years education, what seems clear to me is that the chair within any network always carries with it elements of the hierarchical relationship between adults and children. Certainly, the teachers in the preschools where I undertook my observations rarely sat but, when they did, often used a

chair that was larger than the children's. In this way, chairs not only instilled discipline but also carried the teacher's professional standing within the network. So, in the early years classroom, there were lively and continuously changing networks that included: chair + discipline + gatekeeper + professional status + behavior management. Moreover, besides taking on a number of roles, the chair was implicated in stuff that is very difficult to detect but which nevertheless is at work within the network. For example, in Chapter Six, I referred to Paul, who badly wanted to sit by his friend; a chair was a necessary part of fulfilling this desire. In this sense, the chair as an actor within the network could help to make things happen. According to Bennett (2010), humans never act alone and an event is never solely determined by the intention of a single body. She uses the term "agentic capacity" to remind us not to limit any event to human intention. She argues that agency should be understood as being "distributed across a wider range of ontological types" (2010, p. 9). She goes on to suggest that agency always emerges as the effect of ad hoc configurations of human and non-human forces. As she notes, "human and nonhuman bodies recorporealize in response to each other where both exercise formative power and both offer themselves as matter to be acted on" (Bennett, 2010, p. 49). Hence, as I described previously, chairs as actors were constantly caught in emerging events, where, as a consequence, they affected other actors within the network. By forming an alliance, Paul + chair effectively became a new body and, as such, could negotiate the discursive practices of the classroom. I want to suggest that

communication passed between the chair and the boy, but that this was communication that was sensed rather than physically actualized in words. Paul's sense of himself as a preschooler comes about in part because he can communicate with the chair and the chair communicates with him.

This view in which chair and boy are in a symmetrical relationship runs counter to the view of the human within humanism (Latour, 1996). Latour argues that, within humanism, it is the hu(man) who is understood as defining our understanding of the world. He argues that this view has been significantly influenced because "human beings are endowed with language", whereas within "a set of things communication cannot be established" (Descola, 1993, p. 399). Latour suggests that things like a chair can mediate agency. Kipnis (2015) offers further insights into the mediation of agency when he writes:

A surfer or a white-water kayaker might say that she struggles to become "one with the water," to sense through the surfboard or the kayak, the water's every movement. At the moment when she performs her most difficult manoeuvre, she could be said to have fully adjusted to the water's ebbs and flows and, therefore, to be following the water precisely. A violinist or guitarist may talk of the years it takes to learn "what his instrument may do." This may refer both to the years needed to learn to play the class of instrument in general, and to the micro

adjustments necessary to get the most out of the idiosyncrasies of the particular instrument he plays. (2015, p. 47)

Returning to the early years classroom, it was possible to see how children such as Alex and Wendy (who were referred to in Chapter Six), together with a bucket of plastic bricks, were caught in forms of communication and in a changing state of affairs. Bricks, together with children, formed a new body, one that was full of noise, rhythm, and joy.

Actor Network Theory: An alternative way of understanding children and their learning

ANT has allowed me to establish alternative concepts of children and their learning because it challenges how I normally think. It challenges my own common-sense ideas concerning children and their learning. ANT has unsettled how I conventionally thought of power. It has allowed me to see the consequences of alliances, where, as an example, a new body (boy + chair) could enact different relations. As a “body”, the chair and the boy could act independently and thoughtfully. Qualities such as independence and autonomy are not ones that I readily associate with my common-sense understanding of the Hong Kong preschool child.

Other alliances have also had the effect of impacting my everyday understanding of the preschool child. For example, as noted in Chapter Six, I observed how a ball and the desire to hold on to a ball had the effect of making a girl, Becky, behave so forcefully that Alice, who originally had the ball, was pushed to leave the network. Further morphing of the network occurred when Dick, Tammy, and the ball moved into a larger area of the classroom. Thus, classroom space became another actor implicated in the flow of play. However, the performance might well have altered if a further element had not come into play – that of teacher flexibility. It is because the teacher, as an actor, could behave with degrees of flexibility that something different could happen.

A photo of children playing with a ball in the center of the classroom (KA, Amy):

(photo 35)

It is this morphing of networks that has allowed me to catch sight of behaviors that confound some of my expectations concerning the Hong Kong preschooler. So, rather than regulated children, I became aware of children who could share and cooperate. I was also able to appreciate a teacher who didn't seem threatened by the boy and the girl and the ball; rather, the teacher exercised flexibility in terms of children's responses to objects and changing teaching objectives, and the use of time and space became another flow within the network. Noise was momentarily tolerated.

Conversely, ANT has also allowed me to appreciate how certain flows within the network could bring events to a close. For example, if we return to the boy who was making a mask with many eyes, it is possible to appreciate that the teacher's statement, "he has so many eyes", where the underlying focus is on the "correct" concept, brought the network to a halt. Jack had to exit the network because the mask emerged relationally, rather than being an effort in really depicting a face.

Immersing myself in ANT theory allows me to appreciate "children's learning" outside of my usual ways of perceiving it. Influenced by thinkers such as Piaget, I have understood learning as being incremental and following a linear trajectory. ANT theory has also allowed me to widen my understandings. Let me explain further by introducing another example of data.

It is small group teaching period and the children are sitting in two rows, making a semi-circle in front of the teacher. The teacher is talking about "family members". A boy, Joe, is sitting in the back row. He holds both hands together very tightly. When the teacher turns around in order to get her teaching kit, the boy opens both hands. There is a Disney sticker in his left hand. He puts a right-hand finger onto the sticker so as to keep it in the center of his left hand. When the teacher turns back to the children, Joe closes his hands tight together again. After a while, the teacher again turns. Joe opens his hands again. This time, he puts a right-hand finger to the sticker in his left hand and shows the sticker to the classmate sitting next to him. Then, he quickly closes both hands and looks at the teacher again.

(Field notes, 24 November, 2016; KC, Chris)

Photos of the child playing with a sticker (KC, Chris):

(photo 36)

(photo 37)

(photo 38)

As I have mentioned previously, stickers are lively agents within the early years classroom. They are given as rewards, but they are also confiscated if children fiddle with them when they should be paying attention. Joe would have been very aware of the practices that surround stickers. He knows that there are risks associated with playing with a sticker. In understanding the sticker as an agent within the network, it is possible to understand the power it has to distract or perhaps unsettle the children from the "real business" of the classroom, which, in this instance, involved listening to the teacher talk about family members. The sticker within this network of chairs, children, specific seating arrangements and teacher directed activities carried with it the potential for mischief. It also carried into the classroom the appeal and attraction of Disney. As commentators have noted, organizations such as Disney manufacture desire through commercial spins-offs and branded goods (Giroux, 1999). As Stallabrass (2009) notes, "in commodities, branding is the identification of the object as quasi-human, the embodiment of a principle…inexorable in its cheerfulness, reliability, protectiveness, or whatever quality is at the moment being marketed" (2009, p. 419). The sticker is an "object of desire" (Berlant, 2010), which has crossed borders from home to school, and it will stir among all the children immediate surface recognition, while simultaneously triggering internal sensations and qualities that circulate in and around specific Disney characters. The alliance between Joe and the sticker constitutes a new body that negotiates the discursive practice that flows through the network. On the one hand, Joe's

clasped hands convey an image of the quiet and obedient child. He, together with the sticker, undertakes an unorthodox performance.

Jane Bennett (2010) reminds me that the habits that I have in terms of understanding or knowing "the child" have been learned over time. That is, over time, I have learned to separate out the child from matter. Actor Network Theory does not make distinctions or prioritize between, for example, subject and object or nature and culture – distinctions that then become the foundations upon which all other knowledge is built. It is because it refuses to separate out human from the non-human that ANT can offer an unfamiliar take on aspects of education. If we return to the observation of Joe, we can begin to understand how the vitality of the sticker effectively and affectively works at setting in motion distributive agency. Such agency changed Joe, but it has also changed me because it challenges "what is commonly taken as distinctive or even unique about humans" (Bennett, 2003, p. 13).

Some concluding remarks

Working with ANT is not without challenges because, as I have explained above, it is a set of theoretical ideas that destabilizes how we think. In general terms, early years education is concerned with the individual needs of children; each child is understood as unique. However, what ANT has made me appreciate is that such needs, including the emotional, social,

physical, and intellectual, are always caught within the movements of specific networks. Rosie Braidotti (2012) points out that we live in a world in which distinctions between the human and non-human become either untenable or extremely hard to make. She points out that technological innovations, including advanced prosthetics, reproductive technologies, and genetically modified food, are not only commonplace, but they destabilize the line we like to draw between the human and non-human. Writing from within the world of early years education, Olsson and colleagues make the point that, despite such technological innovations and despite the overall complexities of a world, "where people…knowledge, values and ideas travel, cross national borders and encounter each other" (Olsson et al., 2015, p. 1), education – especially early years education – continues to favor reductionist thought (Jones et al., 2016; Moss, 2016; Canella, Salazar Pérez, & Lee; 2016; Åsén, 2015; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013 [1999]). In Hong Kong, such reductionist thinking results in programs that are developmentally appropriate (NAEYC, 2009) and, while policy guidance does highlight teacher flexibility, this is curtailed within the remit of carrying out curriculum experiences and within the confines of what is considered to be developmentally appropriate.

In working with ANT theory, I have come to realize that children become preschoolers through what Barad refers to as "intra-active becoming" (Barad, 2007, p. 392). As she notes, "all bodies, including but not limited to human bodies, come to matter through performativity"

(Barad, 2007 p. 392). She goes on to say, “Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not pre-exist their interactions; rather individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating” (Barad, 2007, p. ix). In working with actor network theory, I have come to recognize that the emergence of the preschool child is an act that takes place within a network that is already crowded with other actors, endeavors, and consequences. It is these tangled networks that I have tried to learn from.

Summary of Insights in Relation to the Evolving Research Questions

This chapter, following the rigorous analysis of the data shown in Chapter Six, further discusses the significant points within the two theoretical frameworks: Foucault and ANT. Indeed, the investigation is guided by questions that evolved from the literature, as well as from the fieldwork, and aims to offer a number of insights into the phenomenon of young children's preschool identities within the context of Hong Kong. Here, I would like to use a summary chart to highlight insights in relation to the evolving research questions, for the sake of easy reference.

Table 2

A Summary of the Research Questions Discussed in Chapter Seven

1. What are the conditions, circumstances, and discursive practices within the classroom that encourage or discourage social, emotional, and psychological interaction between children?	Please see Chapter Six, Section One, pp. 101-114 and Chapter Seven, Section One, pp. 155-168. The conditions include discipline brought into being through everyday practices including: putting on an apron "correctly", lining up on specific lines, and putting on and taking off shoes "correctly". Children

	were often judged as being competent/incompetent in relation to these practices. Such circumstances had a bearing on the formation of the preschool pupil. Certain social interactions were curtailed because of discursive practices, which in turn impacted the children's emotional and psychological well-being. However, children were also able to resist such practices, which in turn had a positive impact on their social, emotional, and psychological interactions.
2. What are the conditions, circumstances, and discursive practices within the classroom that encourage or discourage social, emotional, and psychological interaction between children and teachers?	The conditions included highly competitive examination systems and parental expectations that favored academic success. These conditions impacted teacher flexibility, which in turn impacted different forms of interactions

	between teachers and children. Importantly, Confucian ideology also discouraged certain interactions because of its underpinning hierarchy in relation to adult/child relations. Confucian ideology also stresses academic achievement and this, in turn, impacted the interactions between adults and children. Each of the settings catered for parental expectations in terms of academic learning. Additionally, at this point in time, early childhood education was not fully subsidized by the government and, because parents were financially contributing to their children's education, their feelings and expectations influenced the curriculum; for example, less time was spent on play.

3. In what ways do social, emotional, and psychological interactions assist children's identities in terms of becoming preschool students?	Given the above, children had less time to build social, emotional, and psychological bonds outside of the adult's gaze. That said, children were adept at negotiating different situations, including moving chairs, hiding stickers, altering Play-Doh arrangements, and so on, in order to fulfill their own agendas. Such actions contributed toward degrees of independence and autonomy.
4. What are the roles of verbal and non-verbal expressions when negotiating social, emotional, and psychological interactions?	Please see Chapter Six, Section One, pp. 115-128 and Chapter Seven, Section One, pp. 168-174. Verbal and non-verbal interactions were evident when children were negotiating interactions. Language and bodies were used to convey discomfort (e.g., a girl resisting help with her apron knot, a child helping another child to tie shoelaces).

	The loudness of an instruction ("You go away!") given by a girl meant that a boy was unable to join in.
5. What are the roles of verbal and non-verbal expressions when negotiating student identity?	Children could use language in order to determine aspects of their student identity (e.g., the boy who was desperate to maintain control of his belongings when obliged to line up and the teacher who could use language rationally in order to assist the boy in making choices). Language was also absent. For example, the girl with the shoes that had laces could not draw upon language in order to ask for help from the teacher. The teacher's rule concerning laces overrode discussion, which in turn impacted the child's ability to master the tying of laces.

6. What are the roles objects and other materials in facilitating social, emotional, and psychological interactions, and student identity? 7. What networks are formed between human and non-human actors and what is produced via this network?	Please see Chapter Six, Section Two, pp. 129-152 and Chapter Seven, pp. 175-186. Objects and non-human matter play a profound role in terms of shaping the preschool pupil. Human and non-human matter are understood as "actors" and, as actors, enter into networks. Here, within the child + other actors (e.g., objects + curriculum policies + teacher expectations + parent expectations + Confucian ideology + peer relationship + joy + desire + autonomy) network, "flows" enter, and it is in and among these "flows" that young children's preschool identities emerge as "always becoming".

As young children's preschool identities emerge as "always becoming", the above insights have repercussions in terms of claiming to be indisputable or final answers in terms of the evolving research questions. It is possible that there is always more that could be said (May,

2006). However, the efforts undertaken in trying to answer the questions allows me to think differently and gain a deeper understanding of discipline, cultural ideology (Confucian ideas), power, objects and other materials, "agency capacity" (Bennett, 2010), language, communication, identity, children and their learning, and research practice. These elements will be further elaborated upon in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight

Becoming a Preschooler: Looking Back in Order to Move Forward

Introduction

The aim of this study was to understand how young children become "preschool" students and what roles objects play in this endeavor. In trying to unpick the complexities in relation to this aim, I drew on two theoretical frameworks: Foucault's work in relation to discourses and Actor Network Theory (ANT). Because the study took place in three Hong Kong early years preschools, I also had to recognize the influence of Confucian ideology. Both Foucault's work and ANT have enabled me to disentangle some of the consequences in relation to children's identities.

The study drew on photographs as a methodological tool, as well as other qualitative methods, in order to capture and include the "liveliness" of children when they undertook interactions with adults, peers, and non-human materials. The study also worked from the premise that there are no universal truths or absolute truths in relation to acquiring a preschool identity (Burman, 1990; Weedom, 1987). As a consequence, my study has not produced "findings" in the scientific sense. As mentioned previously, I cannot, for example, claim to have identified a "truth" that would hold true across the whole of the Hong Kong early years sector. That said, I nevertheless believe that this study does add to our knowledge and understanding in relation

to the processes by which children acquire a preschool identity. I also believe the study illustrates the role and alignment of objects within the complexities of identity formation.

Challenges

This study has been challenging because I have struggled without the assistance of conventional forms of analysis, such as traditional structures, including sorting data into themes and coding systems. I have used interpretations that have been guided by the theoretical frameworks in which this study is located. It is these frameworks that have assisted me in making sense of the data and in trying to generate thoughtful insights (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b; Hatch, 2002). Following Elbow (1998), I found that writing helped me to think through the data. Writing became a "way to end up thinking something [I] couldn't have started out thinking" (p. 15).

Within this study, ANT was extremely powerful because, as I have noted previously, it allowed me to shift my attention from "the child" to what was being performed within particular assemblages or networks (Law, 1997; Law & Singleton, 2000). However, because I used both Foucault's work and ANT, I was reduced to a state that was a bit like Alice when travelling in Wonderland. Like Alice, my journey has been full of uncertainties and wonders, where photos and writing became temporary resting points that allowed me the time to ask:

What is going on here?

As previously discussed, there were degrees of similarities but also differences across the three kindergartens in which the fieldwork was undertaken. The similarities occurred mainly as a consequence of cultural expectations and, to a degree, government policies. But, as noted in Chapter Five, there were differences too. Following Foucault's reminder that discourses, including curricula and pedagogical practice, can and do control, regulate, and coerce children into becoming "normal" preschoolers, I looked at how everyday practices shaped normality. Additionally, ANT helped me to explore how different human and non-human elements are enacted as they become assembled into collectives of activity and what some of the consequences of such activities were. ANT obliged me to engage with messiness and, at times, non-rational processes. If Foucault enabled me to appreciate how children were disciplined and regulated into being preschool children, ANT allowed me to appreciate the relationships, flows, and movements between actors where the preschooler emerges, but who is never fully formed and is always susceptible to change and changes.

If, as I have suggested, preschoolers are always changing and reforming, this has repercussions in terms of answering the research questions that were established following the literature review and the fieldwork. It means that there are no indisputable or final

answers in terms of what is possible, because there is always more that could be said (May, 2006). That said, the efforts undertaken in trying to answer the questions do offer opportunities to gain a deeper understanding.

Understandings

Let me first look back to Foucault. Foucault has enabled me to understand the execution of "disciplinary power" in a preschool setting and the roles objects play in relation to this power. Aprons, for example, singled out children as incompetent. Moreover, because they had to be tied in particular ways, they became implicated in the reduction of children to "docile bodies". Aprons, together with colored gender lines, school bags, uniforms, Play-Doh pots, and photos, were all technologies (Foucault, 1978) used to shape the child into a preschool student. Objects helped to produce the "normal" school child.

This is not to say that all the children complied. As noted, the child who could not put on her bag "properly" cried. Capturing this moment made me confront the processes of regulation, where so-called innocent practices can cause certain children to experience deep distress. Why do we need children to conform so rigorously? If, as early years educators, we want children to show independence and degrees of autonomy, surely the manner in which children put on their bags can be left as something to be explored, rather than dictated?

Foucault has also made me aware of how the architecture of a classroom, including the way in which chairs and tables were arranged, was deeply significant in terms of shaping the children's behavior and their identities. Chairs and tables disciplined the children; they also contributed to relationships between children, where specific arrangements of chairs and tables predisposed some children to become friends (Jackson, 2013). Chairs and tables offered a sense of belonging, while also excluding.

Yet, the children could tamper with architectural discourses. As was noted, some children were able to manipulate certain discursive practices so as to position themselves in different ways. Certain children became adept at using classroom rules to secure their own goals. They were able to find alternative modes of being by following Foucault's three practices: "refusal", "curiosity", and "innovation" (Bess, 1980, p. 3).

Meanwhile, ANT has altered my ideas, especially in terms of relations between human and non-human matter. When analyzing the data, instead of focusing on "the child" or "the teacher", I had to think in terms of "symmetry" between the human and non-human (Law, 2009; Latour, 1997; Law & Singleton, 2000), where both were understood as "lively matter" that are governed by "emergent rather than a linear or deterministic causality" (Bennett, 2010, p. 112). Seeing identity as "emergent" meant seeing it in terms of movements and flows,

where a non-human actor such as a chair carried degrees of force and vibrancy. As I have highlighted, this has made me see power differently; rather than humans having power over objects, both are seen as powerful; both can and do affect the different actors within a network. Together, they have vibrancy and agency emerges as the effect of ad hoc configurations of human and non-human forces. As noted, chairs regulate children and help to manage behaviors, but they can also form alliances, enabling a new body to emerge (e.g., Paul + chair) – one that could negotiate the discursive practices of the classroom. By incorporating ANT into the study, I was able to understand how an event, including that of becoming a preschooler, is never solely determined by the intention of a single body (Bennett, 2010). “Agentic capacity” (Bennett, 2010) emerges and is not limited to human intention. “Agentic capacity” is rather “distributed across a wider range of ontological types” (Bennett, 2010, p. 9). As such, I am no longer able to privilege the “human”, nor am I able to privilege language and, as a consequence, my common-sense understandings in relation to children, identity, power, and so on have been destabilized.

Seeing the early years classroom in terms of different actors challenged my “habitual, familiar, repetitive and standardized ways of making sense” (Jones & Duncan, 2013, p. 203). I have been obliged to clear away a number of assumptions concerning the young child and, as a consequence, I am able to think differently about them. Many of these assumptions, as

noted in Chapter Two, have been influenced by the discipline of developmental psychology, which, for instance, stemmed from Piagetian ideas and concepts surrounding child development, in which the idea that children learn and develop through age-based stages and cognitive development has been significant. Foucault and ANT have allowed me to break away from this way of seeing children and their learning. I have been obliged to rethink what "normal" can mean and what the consequences are when we see some children as "normal" and others as "deficient". Are there such rigid expectations around what a two- or three-year-old child "should" be doing that other forms of behavior looks strange or odd (Luke, 1997; Brophy, 2016)? Do some children learn to be skilled at being "deficient"? Can early years practitioners develop such rigid ideas concerned with development so that, rather than seeing Piagetian ideas as guidelines, they are perceived as rules that have consequences for certain children (Burman, 2012)? As someone who would like one day to work within the context of teacher training, this study has provided me with insights concerning children's learning and development that lie outside linear models of "stage- and age-based development".

Similarly, Foucault, but more especially ANT, has allowed me to see beyond social constructivism. This is not to say that I am not influenced by the ideas that are embedded within social constructivism, including the idea that learning is influenced by interpersonal

and community learning (Rogoff, 2003). However, as Dewey (1910, p. 12) suggests, the task is not so much about “thinking harder”, but rather “thinking differently”. In many ways, this is what ANT has allowed. Thinking differently about the child, non-human matter, language, and power has allowed for different insights, with the consequence of knocking me off familiar ways of understanding the child. For instance, children playing of swords, which I formerly consider as a “bad” form play and forbidden for children upon my adult power, can actually be a “good” form of play for children, since joy + imagination + cooperation + harmonious relationships can be seen within the network relation. Such child-object interactions can indeed be associated with children’s self-esteem. Using ANT has allowed me to understand identity, learning, power, and communication as caught within movements and flows, where complex connections and relationships form and constantly evolve and adapt in processes of becoming. This has allowed me to abandon binaries, such as the powerful adult and the incompetent child. Rather, I am able to see adults and children as caught within networks, where frustrations, anxieties, desires, and so on became part of a network that, together with other actors, forges new alliances in which learning outcomes cannot be predicted but where learning nevertheless happens. Hargraves (2014, p. 324) describes these movements as “the emergence of ever-branching interpretive possibilities” that do not ascribe to “knowledge truths”, but are constantly moving and evolving, “creating thought anew with each act of knowing and thinking.” Thus, the flexibility of a teacher allowed a moment of

joyful ball play, where humor, cooperation, ball skills, and bodies could co-mingle so as to produce different insights concerning children, play, learning, and so on. ANT has also allowed me to appreciate how certain flows within the network could stop. For example, the teacher's statement "he has so many eyes", brought the symmetry between the face mask and the boy to a close. Indeed, I have investigated quite a number of play contexts and, actually, play or play-based learning and curricula have been advocated by colonial and post-colonial government policies in the past few decades. The educational ideologies behind these advocacies and play, to a certain extent, emphasize joyful learning, all-round development, exploratory thinking, innovation, and adapting to change (e.g., Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guidelines, HKSAR, 2017). Such government policies in turn encourage the "flexibility" of teachers, so that they can cater for the unique developmental needs of every child. However, as noted in Chapter Two, Bronfenbrenner (1994) highlights the influence of an entire ecological system in children's growth. Local teachers and their teaching practices seem caught between the dilemma of two cultures that can be seen in different layers or micro-systems. Yet, the cultural and social practices the children carry with them from their homes to school, which was also highlighted by Bronfenbrenner (1994), along with the teacher's flexibility in terms of children's responses to objects, changing teaching objectives, and the use of time and space, can afford or constrain the birth of the heterogeneous lives of preschoolers and the various forms of ANT assemblages.

Early years education is generally concerned with the individual needs of children, where each child is understood as unique. However, as demonstrated by the network comprising of Joe + sticker, we can appreciate that children's needs, including their emotional, social, physical, and intellectual needs, are always caught within the movement of a specific network. Understanding this made it possible for me to appreciate how the vitality of a sticker effectively and affectively worked at setting in motion distributive agency, where agency became a matter of "intra-active becoming" (Barad, 2007, p. 392) in which the emergence of the preschool child is an act that takes place within a network that is always already crowded with other actors, endeavors, and consequences.

Hong Kong is an interesting place to locate this study because education is so highly competitive there. This includes early years education; parents expect their child to "win at the starting line". This means that, in general, a high value is placed on academic leaning, while play tends to be undertaken quite passively and quietly. As a result, children's opportunities to interact with one another and with matter are limited. What Foucault's work and ANT theory have enabled me to further appreciate is that human and non-human actors are adept at interfering with networks, so that play occurs and other forms of interactions happen. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter Three, various disciplines have certain key claims for objects. For instance, objects have a significant role to play in children's learning (e.g.,

Froebel, 1782-1852; Montessori, 1870-1952; Dewey, 1859-1952). They have intimate and essential relations with subject (human) formation and social world building (Miller, 1998). They have psychic and social functions. They can assist moral and social development. They are valuable in terms of children's transitions (Winnicott, 1971) and implicated in people's intimate relations (Benjamin, 2009). Nevertheless, the traditional divide between subject and object has been contested (e.g., Ingold, 2000; Grosz, 2001; Brown, 2001). Besides, the equal actor role of non-human material objects has been highlighted (Latour, 2005). I am glad that I have taken up the challenge of working across the subject/object divide. My study has enabled me to further understand the significance of objects, as well as their equal actor role within social networks. Objects should not be ignored in my coming research practice.

Some pedagogical suggestions

As preschoolers are always changing and reforming, the following pedagogical suggestions are only proposed for consideration and, in many respects, are more to do with my own practice within early years education.

Interestingly, the latest early years curriculum guidance recommends "joyful learning through play" (Curriculum Development Council, HKSAR, 2017). This guidance aims to offer a more balanced curriculum, which in turn might offer more balanced development for children, with

a little less emphasis placed on stages and ages. Teachers are clearly important in achieving children's joyful learning; it is suggested that they should simultaneously ""interveners" in and "observers" of [children's] play…should solve problems for children during play at appropriate times…understand and interpret the performance of children…and analyze their progress in learning and development (Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide, 2017, p. 67).

Given such sentiments, it seems to me that my study is highly pertinent. As observers, teachers might become sensitive to how discourses operate. Equally, as observers, they might begin to appreciate how networks come together and what some of the consequences are when this occurs. If, as practitioners, we are to be both observers and interveners, then it seems to me that we have to develop degrees of reflexivity in order to appreciate the intricacies of the classroom. Such an appreciation has to stem from realizing how the "normal" child is produced and how the performance of the normal child inevitably produces children who are problematic. I am hopeful that studies such as mine, together with curriculum guidance that places an emphasis on joyfulness, can offer early years teachers a different lens that will allow them to reimagine what it can mean to be a preschool child. This study has helped me to develop a willingness to change and challenge my assumptions. This has created a space for an attitude that is able to accept the multiplicity of meanings behind

encounters with children; I am more able to see what is remarkable, interesting, and important about the young child (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This means that, rather than looking for "truth" through the familiar age-based stages of cognitive development, I am more able to appreciate how children and their learning are caught in flows and that, as an intervener, I can have a degree of influence over these flows. Here, I am reminded of the teacher who, because she was flexible, allowed children to behave in different ways and witnessed interactions and forms of learning for which she had not planned.

Discipline is always going to be part of the preschool teacher's role. However, what this study does allow for is an appreciation of the paradox in which, on the one hand, there is the desire for "docile" bodies, while, on the other hand, we want to nurture joyful, creative learners. This causes me to ask is it really necessary to paint gendered lines on the floor? How necessary is it to dictate so rigorously how children come into and leave a classroom? Should tables and chairs be rearranged on occasion so that different social relations might occur?

Some concluding thoughts: Travelling in Wonderland

I like driving. For the past few years, I have driven my little car to each of the three preschools in order to conduct my study. Before undertaking this project, I simply perceived

my car as being merely a tool for travelling.

(photo 39)

However, Foucault's work has enabled me to appreciate that, as a driver who owns their own car, I am immediately implicated in the discourses in which driving and owning a car are located. Various practices, including government policies, as well as rules concerning driving practices, regulate me into being a "normal driver". I am also implicit in regulating other road users. For example, I will flash my headlights at other drivers when I notice a police presence, so that they slow down.

ANT has also allowed me to appreciate the car as an actor. I can sense that my car has vibrancy. It is "living matter". The sound of the engine communicates. Its vibrations speak. It smells. It has the capacity to relax, excite, and lull. Air pressure differences in the tires trigger warning signals, so that security or daydreaming or excitement is suspended and something else enters the network. Hands and the steering wheel talk to one another so that bends are negotiated. This is bodily learning, where developing knowledge has little to do with

cognition.

The project has ended but I will continue to travel in Wonderland. I will continue to look at different episodes,

(photo 40)

moments,

(photo 41)

encounters,

(photo 42)

and engagements

(photo 43)

in order to 'think differently'.

This means I have to keep moving and travelling... beep beep...

(photo 44)

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Appendix I

Questions for the teacher interviews are prepared. Examples of children's interactions with teachers, peers, and objects, taken from my observations notes will be used in the interviews to understand issues regarding how teachers influence children's responses to peers and objects.

1. What is the teacher's education level? Professional experience? Teaching experience?

2.What is the school curriculum and teaching mode?
Guided questions: How is the curriculum plan developed? How is the teacher involved in the planning and mode of teaching? Is there any homework and what is it about? Do any parents have concerns about their children's learning or homework? What are they?

3. What are the children's social behaviors and relations with peers and objects at school?
Guided questions: What do you expect the children to do/learn? How far have the children progressed since September? Do you have any strategies to help children to adapt to school? Who/what do you expect the children to play with? How often do you expect the children to play with their friends/objects? Who is/are the children's friend/s in class? What do you expect the children to do or play with his/her friends/objects? What do you expect the children to do during their free time during the school day?

4. What are the children's strategies toward peer relations and objects at school?
Guided questions: What will the children do or say if they want access to another's ongoing interaction or play? What will the children do if other children want to play or join with their ongoing interaction or play? What will the children do to other children who want to take materials/objects such as toys or blocks from them? What will the children do if there is conflict between themselves and other children? What will the children do if others do not follow their views during play?

5. How does the teacher encourage children to join in with the group activities (e.g., group work, free play in various learning corners in class)?

6. How does the teacher respond to children's social relations with other children?

7. How does the teacher respond to children's interactions and play with objects?

Appendix II

A schedule detailing the steps that were taken during fieldwork.

Schedule of work	Content
Pre-visit to the school, at the beginning of the research in August 2016.	● To seek principals'/teachers' consent to conduct the study. ● To discuss the school program and children's backgrounds with principals/teachers.
Stationed at school for six months, from September 2016 to February 2017.	● To be stationed one day per week (from one to one-and-a-half hours) in three schools for six months. ● To make observations in various situations and class activities. ● To take photographs in the classroom. ● To write observation notes with photographs attached. ● To write journal. ● To read related literature and seek supervisor's advice.
Preparation and conducting of teacher interviews, from March to June 2017.	● To read and re-read observation notes and journal to identify issues that needed to be understood or clarified in regard to interviewing teachers. ● To read related literature and seek supervisor's advice. ● To conduct interviews with teachers at school; to provide photographs for the teachers in case there is a need to do so.

Appendix III

A general teaching timetable of a K1 class (half-day AM or PM/whole day program) for the three kindergartens.

9:00 am/1:00 pm	Morning or afternoon exercise/school assembly
9:15 am/1:15 pm	Class theme teaching
9:30 am/1:30 pm	English/Putonghua
9:45 am/1:45 pm	Toilet
9:50 am/1:50 pm	Physical play and music
10:20 am/2:20 pm	Toilet
10:30 am/2:30 pm	Snack
10:45 am/2:45 pm	Group activities (free choice of language, math, art, toys, home corner, reading corner, exploration corner, etc.)
11:45 am/3:45 pm	Round up and class dismissed for half-day program children
12:00 pm	Lunch for whole-day program children
12:45 pm	Toilet
1:00pm	Afternoon Nap
2:15 pm	Toilet and outdoor or indoor free play (free choice of toys, teaching aids, blocks, etc.)
3:00 pm	Group activities (free choice of language, math, art, toys, home corner, reading corner, exploration corner, etc.)
3:45 pm	Round up and class dismissed for whole-day program children