

PECERA (Hong Kong) Launching Ceremony

Draft Speech by Prof. Bernard Spodek Founder of PECERA

The Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association, or PECERA as we call it, is a fairly new organization. Its first conference was held in 2000 in Kobe Japan. I joined with colleagues in countries in the Pacific Rim Area to help establish the organization and I serve as its president

PECERA is dedicated to disseminating and supporting research in early childhood education within the Pacific area. The principle aims of PECERA are to:

- (a) To provide an academic forum in the Pacific region for the development and dissemination of high quality research in early childhood education;
- (b) To facilitate cooperation and collaboration among researchers in the Pacific area working in the field;
- (c) To promote links between research and practice in early childhood education; and
- (d) To raise the visibility and status of research in early childhood education in the Pacific region.

PECERA accomplished these aims are to be through:

- (a) Holding an annual international conference and other meetings;
- (b) Establishing a network of researchers and scholars in the Pacific area in order to facilitate communication, cooperation, and collaboration among them;
- (c) Providing a database of member's research interests, areas of expertise, and current research activity; and
- (d) Engaging in such other activities that might facilitate the development of research, policy and practice in early childhood education

We began holding conferences in Kobe, Japan n the summer of 2000. In 2001 our conference was in Christchurch, New Zealand, followed by the 2002 conference in Shanghai, China. In 2003, our conference was cancelled due to the SARS epidemic. The

next conference we held was in Melbourne, Australia in 2004. Last year, 2005, our conference was held in Taipei, Taiwan. The next two conferences will be in Seoul Korea this July and in Hong Kong in 2007. We have not yet determined where future international conference will be

While PECERA sponsors no publications, it cooperates with the Korean Association for Early Childhood Education which publishes the International Journal in Early Childhood Education twice each year. Many of the best research papers presented at the PECERA conferences appear in that journal.

Why are these aims important and why is it important for such activities to be focused in the Pacific area? Early Childhood Education in both an international activity and a very local activity. Ideas related to early childhood education are often disseminated throughout the world. New ideas are often adopted by local agencies and adapted to local conditions. Historically we have had the kindergarten first established in Germany. We have had the nursery school first established in England and we have had the Montessori school first established in Italy. All these historical approaches to early childhood education which were first established in a single country can be found today in many countries throughout the world.

But the kindergartens, nursery schools or preschools, and even the Montessori schools are different today from the ones that were first established. And they also differ from country to country.

More recently we have had ideas about early childhood education that came from Reggio Emilia in Italy and the Progressive Education idea of projects that came from the United States and Britain also disseminated throughout the world. These ideas were introduced to Hong Kong as well.

But programs and practices are not adopted and adapted in many places merely because they are attractive ideas. They also need to be tested for their effectiveness and carefully assessed to see that they are consistent with the values of communities. Research does that for us. It helps us by testing ideas for effectiveness and by suggesting local modifications.

Early Childhood Education practice has been evolving over the past 200 years. Early Childhood Education research has been developing only over the last 50 years. Early childhood programs were established later in Asia than they were in Western countries. Early Childhood Education research was established later than practice as well and it was established later in Asia than in Western countries.

However, there is now a considerable group of early childhood education researchers working in many countries in Asia. PECERA gives them a chance to share their work with others and to network with researchers and practitioners in the region,

rather than having to travel thousands of miles away to accomplish this in conferences held in America and Europe. Scholars from Hong Kong as well as from other countries in the region have been conducting research in early childhood education over the last several years.

Through the establishment of PECERA-HK we can bring that work closer to the field here and improve the ways in which we can share our knowledge among scholars, researchers and practitioners.

The creation of PECERA-Hong Kong will add a new dimension to early childhood education in this region. It will also help to further the purposes of PECERA. It will be an important step in building a bridge between researchers and practitioners in the Pacific region. It will enrich the knowledge base available to early childhood educators here. Hopefully, it will also stimulate inquiry into early childhood education among professionals in Hong Kong. I believe this is another opportunity to improve early childhood education here and to serve young children and their families in this region.

Thank you.