Exploration of Quality Early Childhood Education:
The Soka Kindergarten Education Model

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the most important people in my life: my husband, Patrick, my sons, Ryan and Kieran, and my father, Cheng Pui-kwan and mother, Takeo Ikegami.

Acknowledgements

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Ikegami, K., & Rivalland, C. (2017, in press). Exploring the quality of teacher-child interactions: The Soka discourse in practice. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 25*(1), [n.p.].

Ikegami, K., & Agbenyega, J. S. (2014). Exploring educator's perspectives: How does learning through 'happiness' promote quality early childhood education? *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 39*(3), 46-55.

Klibthong, S., Fridani, L., **Ikegami, K**. & Agbenyega, J. S. (2014). The relationship between quality early childhood programs and transition services in inclusive education of young children. *Asian Journal of Inclusive Education, 2*(1), 35-55.

Abstract

Conceptualisations of quality early childhood education vary contextually and culturally. The aim of this research is to explore how early childhood educators working at three Soka kindergartens in Sapporo (Japan), Hong Kong and Singapore, conceptualise quality early childhood education and how this is implemented in practice. This study did not seek to define 'best quality' early childhood education but rather to provide an alternative view of quality through openness and diversity within the early childhood education field. The Soka education model is derived from Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a worldwide Buddhist organisation with a vision of a better world through the empowerment of individuals and the promotion of peace, culture and humanist education. Soka education emphasises fostering educated, cultured people who have a profound awareness of the relationship between nature, society and the individual, which assists them to perceive the nature of existing problems and to resolve them.

Qualitative interpretive methodology and data collection tools were used for data generation and analysis which was underpinned by Michel Foucault's concepts/ theory of discourse, power and knowledge. The study provides a substantial and significant contribution to knowledge within three domains. Firstly, this study contributes to the knowledge and understanding that quality early childhood education is not just about physical resources and the output of children's learning. Rather, quality is about a form of human revolution as a way of inner self-development. Thus quality early childhood education cannot be conceptualised merely as a product: it is a process of value creation through which educators support children to add value to themselves and subsequently the

wider society. This study shows that every child has the potential to create value when supported. Quality can be viewed beyond academic achievements to include children's internal happiness and a sense of hope. Internal happiness is not just on the surface, but through this understanding we can go deeper to create a sense of compassion, hope and appreciation of each child.

Secondly, the study contributes to knowledge and understanding regarding the importance of developing flexible early childhood policy around curriculum. When policy has flexibility, educators are able to adapt or modify the curriculum to assist children to attain inner self-development, create value, achieve internal happiness and achieve their unlimited potential.

Thirdly, the study contributes to knowledge and understanding in terms of professional development so that we strive to go beyond just training educators to teach skills and develop the educator's vision of the value embedded in each child. Teacher education that foregrounds the needs of people beyond academic tangents can lead to a broader understanding of human capabilities such as inner self-development, value creation, happiness, hope and unlimited potential.

In conclusion, this study has highlighted how quality is a complex and evolving construct. Quality is an important concept that cannot be avoided in early childhood education research and practice. In order to implement quality practice across cultures, early childhood educators and researchers need to be aware of their own selves and what they bring to early childhood education.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Education at its best is a process of liberation from prejudice which frees the human heart from its violent passions. It is through education that young people can be delivered from powerlessness and from the burden of mistrust against themselves. And those who have learned to trust in themselves are then naturally able to believe in the latent capacities of others.

(Ikeda, cited in Beri, 2011, p. 21)

Research Background

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives and practices of early childhood educators who work in three Soka kindergartens with respect to their understanding of 'quality' early childhood education. This study was necessitated by the rapid global changes in economics, politics, work force demands and epistemic levels which have accelerated the demand for early childhood education and care (Deynoot-Schaub & Riksen-Walraven, 2005; Newport, 2000; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005; Shirakawa, 2009; Wrohlich, 2008; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). These global changes are exerting pressure on various family units due to rising costs of living and inflation ("Global inflation", 2008). In the past in many societies, mothers worked mostly in the informal sector such as farm, market and home. These informal professions gave them more time to look after children and maintain the home. However, due to financial and economic stresses, coupled with women taking their rightful place in society, often it is no longer possible to maintain existing lifestyles and living standards on a single income. It is thus necessary for both parents to enter the work force in order to provide sufficient income to support rising family living costs (Azzi-Lessing, 2009; Chesky, 2011; Deynoot-Schaub & Riksen-Walraven 2005; Newport, 2000; Shirakawa, 2009;

Zhu & Zhang, 2008). This has culminated in greater demand for increased placement of children into early childhood institutions such as crèche, childcare, kindergarten or preschool. Invariably, this has caused a significant increase in the number of early childhood education facilities (Azzi-Lessing, 2009; Fleer, Anning, & Cullen, 2009; Newport, 2000).

Social change has also led to more women entering the workforce as their status in labour markets has increased (International Labour Organisation, 2008). As career opportunities for women have led to many women delaying childbirth, women who wish to have children and a career face difficulties reconciling these two aspirations. Time spent on being educated and having a career limits the available time for having children (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Mothers having children later may lead to families of only one or two children and this smaller family structure could influence parents sending their children to early childhood institutions to enrich social contact with others (Chesky, 2011; Newport, 2000).

Coupled with economics and social change, international legislation recognises that early childhood education contributes to the success of children at school in later life and this significantly impacts a child's overall long-term development (Campbell et al., 2008; Curriculum Development Council, 2006; Ng et al., 2006; Snowman, 2009; UNESCO, 2004; Yamamoto & Li, 2012). Research demonstrates that social competition has driven many parents to send their children to early learning institutions earlier, as many of them believe this may enhance their child's academic performance, resulting in a better life in the future (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Mardell, 2002; Wylie, Hodgen, Feerral, & Thompson, 2006).

Another justification and benefit for children educated at an early age can be found from a neuroscience perspective. Neuroscience is the scientific study of the

connection between the nervous system and brain development. Miller and Cummings (2007) elucidated that a stimulating environment and human interaction can enhance brain development during the early years because a child's brain contains billions of neurons which develop rapidly until the age of five. These connections are significantly aided through early childhood education and social interaction. Previous neuroscience studies provided significant evidence to show that early childhood experiences have a high impact on brain development and long-term effects on a child's wellbeing, learning, behaviour and social development (Rushton, 2011; Winter, 2010). The quality early childhood education forms a fundamental part of the development of a young child's brain, its function and capacity which influences them throughout their lifetime (Winter, 2010). This evidence supports the notion that young children gain long-term benefits when they receive quality early childhood education.

Due to the above reasons there has been an increase in the demand for a greater number of early childhood education and care institutions globally. This demand and tremendous growth in early education centres has raised concerns by various stakeholders such as governments, researchers, educators and parents regarding the quality of service delivery by these institutions (Wong, Wang, & Li, 2010).

Many early childhood education and care institutions are intended to provide a basic level of service or operate principally for economic or profit-making purposes. Whilst it is important to increase the number of children entering early childhood institutions, this increase in institutional numbers is likely to compromise the quality of care and educational services for young children. As the demands for early childhood and child care institutions increase in a society, this creates a commercial market to cater for these demands. Some of these ventures are likely to be purely profit making in nature and not established by educators but by business minded people (Hearman,

2008). The proliferation of early childhood institutions for the purposes of making a profit would likely lead to a reduction in quality rather than if the majority of institutions were purely established by educators (Morris, 1999; Neugebauer, 2008).

Current increases in early childhood institutions need to be matched with increase in the number of quality educators to deliver early childhood education. Some staff may not be well trained or lack necessary qualifications. The literature indicates that having less training may lead to poor quality programmes, and previous research argues that more training leads to better practice (Riney, Thomas, Williams, & Kelley, 2006). Thus it can be seen that increases in the number of early childhood institutions may lead to quality issues (Azzi-Lessing, 2009; Logan & Sumsion, 2010). If quality is compromised the goal of supporting child development may not be satisfactory. Research shows that simply enrolling children into early childhood education institutions is not what matters: the quality of practice and extent of services is of greater significance (Yamamoto & Li, 2012).

During the previous decade, governments and early childhood educators globally became aware of the importance of quality within the early childhood education field. Many governments established quality, dynamic and educational reforms with the aim of raising quality standards and improving early childhood education and care for young children (ACECQA, 2009; Department of Education, 2011; Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2006; MOE, 2003; UNESCO, 2004).

In this research, I have conceptualised quality of early childhood education to include appreciation of culture, individual diversity and humanity. The goal of quality early childhood education is to nurture young children to become globally capable people, allowing them to face future challenges over a lifetime. As a result of this widely held belief that the quality of early childhood education plays a vital role in the

overall development of children and society, in general the question arises: what is quality early childhood education? Is it possible to conceptualise quality universally across cultures and practices?

The majority of research exploring issues of quality early childhood education has been conducted in western countries (Fenech, 2011). This has resulted in narrow and one- sided evidence, which does not allow us to understand how quality can be conceptualised within different countries, cultures and models (Costello, 2000; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Genishi, Huang, & Glupczynski, 2005; Giroux, 2010; Goodfellow, 2001; Hicks, 2004; Lobman, 2005; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008; Sumsion, 2005; Tobin, 2005). Therefore the purpose of this research was to explore the quality of early childhood education through Soka kindergartens at three sites in different Asian countries and territories; this presents a multisite case study in which the subject Soka kindergartens are located in Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore respectively.

This research is not a comparative study but rather an exploration of key practices within these three sites to inform other models. There is only one Soka kindergarten in each of the selected countries. These kindergartens have been selected for this research as the Soka model is not well known in western countries and subsequently, exploration at a single location would not provide satisfactory evidence to support the purpose of this research.

Thus the objectives of this chapter are to: (1) provide an explanation regarding my motivation for this research, (2) provide an overview and background of Nichiren Buddhism and Soka education system, (3) provide an understanding of the social-cultural contexts of Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore, (4) justify my research problems

and the research purpose, (5) state the structure of this thesis, and (6) clarify and define key education and Buddhist terms related to this research.

Motivation for this Research

Motivation for this research derives from both professional and personal experiences. As an early childhood educator and a parent with young children, I was fortunate to be provided with opportunities to visit and observe numerous kindergarten practices in Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. During my career as a kindergarten educator I experienced the implementation of quality educational reform in Hong Kong in 2004. I thus gained insights and experiences regarding internal and external institutional evaluation of quality issues within early childhood education. The nature of this educational evaluation was generally in respect of how kindergartens in Hong Kong delivered quality early childhood education to the community. This was of considerable professional benefit to me as an early childhood educator.

I have personally experienced a number of alternative teaching perspectives that have comprised of interviews and observations in order to evaluate quality early childhood education. These personal experiences allowed me to better understand the importance of this study and how this fits into the early childhood education field. Through these personal experiences I realised there were two contrasting issues which developed my motivation for studying issues of quality, which are discussed below.

Firstly, I found many kindergartens in East Asian countries to be limited by resources of available space to cater for large numbers of children in the centres. These resource issues naturally raise the question of kindergartens in East Asia facing difficulties when seeking to provide good quality programmes for children. How can

small preschool centres accommodate large numbers of children within the boundaries of limited space resources and still provide any level of quality? This issue was initially at the forefront of my mind during my initial visit to the Soka kindergartens; however, following my first half day at the schools I gradually began to understand how the educators had created a systematic plan, curriculum and activities in order to provide various learning experiences for the children.

I noted that educators demonstrated an understanding of the structural limitations of their respective centres but still managed to carefully plan their activities and use of the environment to gain maximum benefit. The children and parents appeared to be happy with their Soka kindergartens and, surprisingly, some parents told me this was one of the reasons why their Soka kindergarten was so popular. This naturally raised another question in my mind: so what is quality after all? How should we define quality within these physical constraints, cultural context and country? These two questions were prominent in my thoughts during my research.

Secondly, I have found that many children in the various child care centres and kindergartens I visited in East Asia during my career did not appear to sufficiently stimulate the children, nor did they receive enough support in respect of their culture, ways of learning and development. The national quality standards framework for early childhood education in Australia has endorsed seven quality areas to improve early childhood education and child care (ACECQA, 2009). These areas include: educational programs and practices, children's health and safety, the physical environment, staffing arrangements, relationships with children, partnerships with families, communities and leadership management (ACECQA, 2009). The framework particularly addresses the issue of creating stimulating educational programs and practices, and highlighted the importance of how this can enhance young children's learning and development.

I believe one of the foundations for achieving a quality educational program is the interrelationship between educators' beliefs and values and subsequent delivery of quality practice. In my personal observations of kindergartens and childcare centres this was a problematic area. I believe educators often appear to lack understanding of theory and how this should be implemented practically in their classrooms.

My personal experience of visiting early childhood institutions has expanded my thoughts with respect to the following four points relating to quality. Firstly, in general educators appear to be over reliant on their institution and experience rather than knowledge based on any particular educational theory to support their teaching practices. Secondly, culture is an important aspect that potentially impacts the promotion of quality early childhood education. Thirdly, any studies on quality should not be limited by structural components (e.g. educator to children ratios) but rather focus on the educator's skills to extend the children's interests and scaffold their learning. Finally, many educators appear to be focused on basic elements of education and care without providing challenging experiences to allow children to develop holistically in such areas as intellect, social skills, and moral, physical, emotional, cultural and spiritual aspects.

Overview of Soka

This study is based on Nichiren Buddhist perspectives. As Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Buddhism are not well known within western countries I offer an overview of Soka, Nichiren Buddhism, Soka Gakkai International (SGI), and Soka education. This section will provide the reader with a better understanding of the rationale for participating educators' discourse in this research.

Introduction to Nichiren Buddhism. Nichiren Daishonin (1222-1282 CE) was a Japanese Buddhist priest who studied and reinterpreted the Lotus Sutra. The

Lotus Sutra is widely believed to be the final teaching of Shakyamuni (also known as Siddhartha Gautama in Sanskrit) who was the historical founder of Buddhism. Shakyamuni is believed to have lived in an area that today constitutes the border of India and Nepal approximately 2,500 years ago. Shakyamuni was the original source of many Sutras (teachings). The Lotus Sutra, as the final teaching, explains how common people can attain enlightenment without any distinction between levels of education, gender or social status (SGI, 2013a; Soka Gakkai, 2002). The essence of the Lotus Sutra is that "all people equally and without exception possess Buddha nature. The message of the Lotus Sutra is to encourage people's faith in their own Buddha nature, their own inherent capacity for wisdom, courage and compassion" (SGI, 2013b, para. 1).

Nichiren Daishonin (original name Zennichimaro) was born in 1222. At this time Japan was experiencing significant social unrest, social change and a number of natural disasters leading to hardship among the general population. It is understood that Nichiren became an ordained priest in a nearby Buddhist temple and studied numerous Sutras. He concluded that the Lotus Sutra was the essential essence of Buddhist enlightenment and this Sutra would provide the answer to the suffering of all people in Japan (SGI, 2014a). Nichiren proposed that the Lotus Sutra would lead people to become enlightened and create happiness (SGI, 2014a; Soka Gakkai, 2002).

Introduction to Soka Gakkai International (SGI). Soka Gakkai International (SGI) was established in 1974. The organisation was founded on Nichiren Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra. Currently SGI has a membership of approximately 12 million people located around the world. However, the majority of SGI members live in Japan. SGI has its headquarters in Tokyo and the organisation was originally named Soka (SGI, 2013c). The original Soka organisation (which literally means 'society for value creation') was established in 1930 by a group of reformist educators (SGI, 2013c).

SGI members believe that Nichiren Buddhism is a straightforward path which leads to personal empowerment. SGI states that they are seeking to create value in their respective societies and contribute to social harmony and ultimately world peace. The major goals of SGI are peace, culture and education. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda are key people in the development of SGI.

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944). Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was the first president of Soka. Makiguchi was an educator and author. He was the founder of Soka Kyoiku Gakkai in 1930. Throughout his adult life Makiguchi faced frequent obstacles from government authority. Through Soka, Makiguchi proposed a humanistic approach for children's education. During the Second World War he was sent to prison for openly objecting to the then military government. Makiguchi died whilst in prison aged 73 (SGI, 2013d).

Makiguchi sought to reform educational systems in Japan at that time, which he believed did not encourage independence of thought by children, and which he stated did not create happiness but rather focused on fulfilling the commercial needs of society. He proposed a theory of value-creation (Soka) as a form of pedagogy contained in his 1930 work *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* (The Theory of Value-Creating Pedagogy). Makiguchi faced opposition from the military government which considered education as a tool of the state: to mould and create a compliant population (SGI, 2013d).

Makiguchi believed that Nichiren Buddhist philosophy was in line with his proposed humanistic and holistic education. Makiguchi and a colleague, Josei Toda, established the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Society for Value-creating Education) which was the predecessor to today's Soka Gakkai International. The original Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was formed by a small number of educators who were also seeking education reform. Soka subsequently expanded and became a broad-based group expounding the teachings

of Nichiren Buddhism to effect change in Japanese society and to create positive social change through education (SGI, 2013d).

Josei Toda (1900–1958). The second president of Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was Josei Toda, an educator but also a publisher and entrepreneur who re-established the organisation after the war in 1945. Toda was originally from the north island of Hokkaido but he moved to Tokyo in his early twenties. In Tokyo he worked at a school where Makiguchi was the principal. Impressed by Makiguchi's educational ideals, he soon became his protégé. In 1928 he followed Makiguchi in his decision to practice Nichiren Buddhism (SGI, 2013e).

In 1943 Toda and Makiguchi were arrested and imprisoned for opposing government policies and whilst in prison Toda became dedicated to Nichiren Buddhism and studied its principles. His efforts brought him to a clear realisation that Buddhahood is a potential inherent in all life, and this belief deepened his confidence that all people could manifest this enlightened life condition through practising Nichiren's teachings (SGI, 2013e).

Whilst Makiguchi died in prison, Toda was released at the end of the war at which point he began to rebuild the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai organisation, which was renamed Soka Gakkai (Society for the Creation of Value). Toda believed that by practising Nichiren Buddhism people could achieve positive personal changes through "human revolution" (SGI, 2013e, para. 1). This message of hope became very popular with many people in Japan who had suffered significant hardship during and immediately after World War Two. At the time of Toda's death in 1958 Soka Gakkai had close to one million members and laid the foundation for the dramatic spread of Nichiren Buddhism in Japan and abroad (SGI, 2013e).

Daisaku Ikeda (1928 – present). Daisaku Ikeda is the third and current president of SGI. Ikeda was born in Tokyo in 1928. He was raised during the period when Japan was at war with China and four of his older brothers joined the Imperial Japanese Army, with his eldest brother being killed during the war. Ikeda learnt about the dreadful treatment of Chinese people by the Japanese military during this campaign and this left a lasting impression (SGI, 2013f).

Ikeda was a young teenager when Japan entered into the Second World War and he twice experienced the destruction of his home as a result of air raids and firebombing air raids on Tokyo (SGI, 2013f).

Following the end of the war Ikeda met Toda and he joined Soka Gakkai in 1947. Ikeda became a strong supporter of Toda who he describes as his mentor in life. Ikeda supported Toda following the collapse of his business during the war, and played a major role in the increase of Soka Gakkai membership, from just 3,000 households in 1951 to 750,000 by 1957 (SGI, 2013f).

Introduction to Soka education. As noted previously, the founding president of Soka Gakkai was Makiguchi, who developed a theory of education based on his experience, study of contemporary educational theorists (e.g. John Dewey) and Buddhism embraced late in life (Ikeda, 2010). Makiguchi's theory of value-creating education was published as *Soka kyoikugaku taikei* (The theory of value-creating pedagogy) in 1930 and focused on belief in the unlimited potential of every person. The philosophy of Soka regards education as a lifelong pursuit of self-awareness, wisdom and development (Bethel, 1989; Goulah & Ito, 2012).

The fundamental terms used by Makiguchi in an educational context were value-creating pedagogy, value creation and happiness. Makiguchi's ideas on education were based on a combination of these concepts and rooted in humanistic thought (Goulah &

Ito, 2012; Ikeda, 2010). His theory of value creation was influenced by two major schools from modern Europe. The first was the philosophy of Neo-Kantianism with its origins in the philosophy of Kant, known as the father of German idealism (Kumagai, 2000). Neo-Kantianism designates the reviewed modified types of Kantian philosophy that identified with the "back to Kant" movement in the late nineteenth century. Many thinkers used Kant's views and methods as a foundation theory, which subsequently made Neo-Kantianism the predominant philosophical school of that period. The overall concept of Neo-Kantianism remained a moderate idealism and had been Kant's own philosophy. Neo-Kantianism came to encompass perspectives as diverse as those of empiricism and realism (Gilbert, 1990).

Makiguchi was introduced to the value philosophy of neo-Kantians through the writings of the Japanese economic philosopher, Kiichiro Soda. Makiguchi subsequently developed a unique theory termed 'kachiron' which means, 'philosophy of value creation' (Bethel, 1989; SGI, 2013d; Goulah & Ito, 2012).

The second influence was the utilitarianism of Britain. Utilitarianism is an ethical and moral theory, in which the proper course of action is the one that maximises overall 'happiness'. It deemed happiness to be the goal of life and the ultimate aim of human behaviour (Gebert & Joffee, 2007). In a philosophical context utilitarianism refers to what is food for thought for human beings (Gilbert, 1990).

Makiguchi spent many years studying and implementing pragmatic methods of education highlighted in his books *The geography of human life*, *The principles of the natural world and human life*, and *The system of value-creating pedagogy*, which focused on humanistic education (Goulah & Ito, 2012; Ikeda, 2010; SGI, 2013d). These works were written and based upon voluminous records of Makiguchi's own teaching experience. The core belief was that the aim of education should be the happiness and

fulfilment of the student. From the idea of value creation as the precondition for happiness in life, Makiguchi declared that the purpose of education was for living life and defined value-creating pedagogy as "a knowledge system for teaching people to create the value that is the goal of life" (1997, p. 13).

The basis of 'humanistic education' lies in helping each child to bring forth his or her potential from deep within and focuses on developing the wish to lead a life of contribution and the ability to empathise with others (Goulah & Ito, 2012; Ikeda, 2010; Lyotard, 1984). Dewey elucidated that educators do not just teach subject matter but also how to live in society and educators do not just teach individual children, but also shape society (Douglas, 2001; Mooney, 2000).

Makiguchi (1943) explains value may be considered as the relevance or impact an object or event can be assumed by the individual and that:

> Value arises from the relationship between the evaluating subject and the object of evaluation. If either changes it is only obvious that the perceived value will change. The differences and shifts in ethical codes throughout history provide but one of the more outstanding proofs of the mutability of value (Ikeda, 2010, p. 16).

Soka education emphasises the goal of fostering global citizens. It comprises institutions ranging from kindergartens through to the university in Japan. There is also a global network of educational institutions, such as kindergartens, in Brazil, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and South Korea and this also includes the Soka Elementary School in Brazil (Soka Gakuen Educational Foundation, 2009). The Soka University of America, with undergraduate and postgraduate courses, was opened in 2001 in California (Soka Gakuen Educational Foundation, 2009).

Soka education emphasises fostering educated, cultured people who have a profound awareness of the relationships between nature, society and the individual

which assists them to perceive the nature of existing problems in order to resolve them (Goulah & Ito, 2012; Soka Gakuen Educational Foundation, 2009).

Sociocultural and Early Childhood Education Contexts in Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore

This study is an exploration of Soka kindergartens in Japan (Sapporo), Hong Kong and Singapore and therefore a brief overview of sociocultural and early childhood educational contexts of these three locations is presented as a foreground for the reader.

Japan. Japan is located in East Asia, comprising an island chain between the North Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan, east of the Korean Peninsula. Japan consists of a number of islands of which the four largest are Honshū, Hokkaidō, Kyūshū and Shikoku. The population of Japan was approximately 127 million people in 2014 (CIA World Fact Book Japan, 2014; Inside Japan, 2012).

The economic trend of households requiring two incomes has changed traditional gender roles and the division of labour in the family and this has increased Japanese women's participation in the work force. This has lead to an increase in kindergartens and childcare centres (Chesky, 2011; Shirakakwa, 2009).

Japan has a culture full of traditions dating back thousands of years and yet also is full of technological development. Manners and customs are important facets of Japanese life. There are different words for many verbs, depending on whether you are talking to an older, younger or similarly aged person. However, the Japanese are well aware of these differences and indeed, often talk up the uniqueness of Japanese culture and customs, thus they expect foreigners to stand out and not understand (Inside Japan, 2012).

Japanese early childhood education typically begins at home with numerous books and television shows aimed at helping parents of preschool children to educate

their children more effectively. Much of the home education focuses on teaching manners, appropriate social behaviour, and structured play, although verbal and number skills are also popular themes. Parents are strongly committed to early education and frequently enrol their children in preschools (Shirakawa, 2009).

Japanese early childhood institutions include kindergartens and day-care centres. Public and private day care centres accept children from under age one up to five years' old. The programs for these children (aged 3–5) are similar to kindergartens in other countries (Chesky, 2011). The educational approach at kindergartens ranges from unstructured situations that emphasise play, to highly structured environments that are focused on having the child pass the entrance exam at a private elementary school (Shirakawa, 2009).

Kindergartens are typically staffed by young, female, junior college graduates; however, following the 1990s a third category of kindergarten classification was added. This was a 'specialised' certification for those having finished graduate study Class 1 for university graduates and Class for junior college graduates. The revision of the Fundamentals of Education Law in 2006 addressed that certification must be valid (Liu, Nakata, Hiraiwa, Niwa, & Shishido, 2011). Kindergartens are supervised by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology but are not technically part of the official education system. In addition to kindergartens there is also a well-developed system of government supervised day care centres that comes under the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

Whilst kindergartens in Japan follow educational aims; day care centres are predominately concerned with providing care for infants and toddlers. There are also both public and privately run preschools and together they enrol over 90 percent of all preschool-age children, prior to their entrance into the formal education system at first

grade. The Ministry of Education's 1990 Course of Study for Preschools, which applies to both public and private institutions, covers such subject areas as human relationships, health, environment, words (language), and expression. From March 2008 the new revised curriculum guidelines for kindergartens as well as for preschools came into effect (Shirakawa, 2009).

Since 1988 the childcare system in Japan has changed with the goal of improving the quality of early childhood curriculum-based education. The child's activities are now organised and systemised under the same curriculum for all child to child centred education allowing children to make choices regarding their interests and needs (Uchida, 2009). The essential idea is that early childhood education is to educate young children through their environment (Oda & Mori, 2006; Shirkawa, 2012). Japanese childcare workers are encouraged not to guide a child's direction but rather scaffold them during their learning (Shirkawa, 2012).

In Japan there is a single Soka kindergarten located in Sapporo on the northern island of Hokkaido. This institution was the first Soka kindergarten established in 1976 and currently provides early childhood services for approximately 130 students. Whilst there is only one Soka kindergarten the overall Soka education model in Japan also includes a number of elementary, junior and senior high schools. There is also a Soka college and university. In Japan, knowledge of the Soka education model is quite widespread as Soka Gakkai membership consists of over 8 million households (as of 2011) (SGI, 2011).

Hong Kong. Hong Kong is located in south-eastern China, adjacent to the mainland. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region includes Hong Kong Island, Lantau Island, the Kowloon Peninsula, the New Territories and 262 outlying islands.

The population of Hong Kong is approximately 7.1 million people (CIA World Fact Book, Hong Kong, 2014).

Hong Kong has a unique history due to the 1997 transfer of sovereignty from a colonial British administration to the People's Republic of China. This is in contrast to the majority of British colonial territories which achieved full independence. China assumed sovereignty under the 'one country, two systems' principle (Koo, Kam, & Choi, 2003). The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's constitutional document, the Basic Law, ensures that the current political situation will remain in effect for 50 years from 1997. The rights and freedom of people in Hong Kong are based on the impartial rule of law and an independent judiciary (Hong Kong SAR Government, 2010).

Hong Kong therefore is strongly influenced by Chinese cultural values, such as 'family solidarity' and 'courtesy', which in turn has created an environment generally considered unacceptable for young children to question or challenge traditional figures of authority such as educators and parents. Cantonese is the most widely spoken language in Hong Kong and post the 1997 transfer of sovereignty the Hong Kong Special Administration Region Government has officially adopted a 'Biliterate and Trilingual' policy. Under this policy Chinese and English are acknowledged as official languages (Hong Kong SAR Government, 2010; Koo, et al., 2003). Children are required to learn English, Mandarin and Cantonese from a young age. In a highly competitive society like Hong Kong both the educational system and parents have very high expectations regarding their child's academic achievements, creating additional pressures on students to also excel in these languages (Banyan, 2011; Callick, 2012; Rauhala, 2011).

Due to the high cost of living in Hong Kong, typically both parents are often compelled to work in full-time employment and subsequently have to arrange activities

for their children after school hours (Callick, 2012; Rauhala, 2011). These arrangements are often supervised by 'domestic helpers', the majority of which are from the Philippines or Indonesia and live with the families that employ them. Such circumstances may influence how kindergartens in Hong Kong cater for both parents' work commitments and the interactions of domestic helpers when interfacing with collecting pre-primary students (Hunt, 2012).

The Hong Kong Education Department is aware of these social issues and in 2006 the Curriculum Development Council Committee on Early Childhood Education published the new *Guide to the pre-primary curriculum* which has been fully implemented in all pre-primary institutions since 2007 (Ng et al., 2006). The Guide emphasises early childhood education lays at the foundation for lifelong learning and whole personal development. The focus of early childhood education has been on 'child-centeredness' and the Education Department emphasised the basic principles of 'children's development' and 'children's learning' (Curriculum Development Council, 2006).

The Hong Kong Education Department stresses that children's learning interests, needs and abilities should also be taken into consideration. This should include a diversified learning environment that provides sufficient learning opportunities in order to facilitate children to develop multiple intelligences. Through play, meaningful life experiences as well as sensory, exploratory and interesting activities, children's holistic development can be fostered.

Pre-primary services in Hong Kong refer to the provision of education and care to young children by kindergarten and childcare centres. In Hong Kong kindergartens are registered with the Education Bureau (formerly the Education Department) and provide services for children from three to six years' old.

At present most kindergartens operate on a half-day basis and offer upper kindergarten (UKG), lower kindergarten (LKG) and Nursery (N) classes while some kindergartens also offer day classes. Kindergartens in Hong Kong are all privately managed and operate with some government funding, standards and regulations. Kindergartens are categorised as either non-profit making (NPM) or private independent (PI) depending on their sponsoring organisations which can be either voluntary agencies or private enterprise (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2006).

In July 2000 in line with ECE aims the Education Department published a set of Performance Indicators (PIs) (for kindergartens) as a reference for self and external evaluation. These PIs have had a significant impact on Hong Kong's pre-primary institutions and, in particular, for school principals and educators (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2006). The ultimate goal is to formulate a set of comprehensive, practicable, reliable and valid PIs as a reference for evaluating quality performance of pre-primary institutions (Hong Kong Education Department, 2000).

Hong Kong kindergartens have various educational curriculums which strongly influence the student's transition from kindergarten to primary school. A majority of kindergartens advocate a 'school based' curriculum and 'theme based' approach. Typically a kindergarten management will form a group of educators drawn from each level in rotation, who will meet to determine various student activities according to a range of educational theories. However, some educators may not have a clear understanding of the theory they are attempting to apply but understand the outcomes. Class educators apply activities in their daily practice and they may modify this to suit their students. After a particular theme is finished, educators will hold meetings to review and critique the activities for improvement. Because kindergarten management only provides a general activity plan, individual educators are required to prepare a

daily plan in addition to a record of each individual child's progress. Educators' knowledge and beliefs guide their practice, verified substantially to implement a framework for pedagogy, knowledge of students and the curriculum (Carrington, Deppeler, & Moss, 2010).

Hong Kong's educational reforms were initiated in order to improve quality through modernisation and the introduction of globalised approaches to teching and learning. The assumed link between quality and modernisation is widespread as benchmarks of quality which tend, in early childhood, to contrast progressive child-centred approaches to learning with traditional educator-directed approaches (Darling, 1994). This is despite the clear grounding of such approaches, in particular, European-American value systems (Pearson, 2011).

In Hong Kong there is a single Soka kindergarten located on the Kowloon peninsula. This institution was the second Soka kindergarten established after Japan in 1992 and currently provides early childhood services for approximately 540 students. Apart from this Soka kindergarten there are no other educational institutions in Hong Kong modelled on Soka. In 2009 the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten was granted the Hong Kong Special Administration Government Chief Executive's Award for Teaching Excellence. Only two early childhood institutions in Hong Kong were granted this award (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2009).

Singapore. Singapore is located in South-East Asia, and is an island located between Malaysia and Indonesia. The population of Singapore is approximately 5.5 million people and made up of Chinese, Malays, Indians, Caucasians, Eurasians and other Asians of different origins in line with the nation's history as a crossroads for various ethnic and racial groups (CIA World Fact Book Singapore, 2014).

Singapore is derived from the Malay word 'Singa-pura' meaning city of the lion (Cortfield, 2011). Singapore was an integral part of British Malaya during the colonial period, and subsequently gained the status of a self-governing state within the British Commonwealth in 1959 and declared full independence from the UK in 1963 (CIA World Fact Book Singapore, 2014). Singaporean culture is best described as a melting pot of mainly Chinese, British, Malay and Indian cultures. English is the first language of Singapore and most of the population speak another language such as Mandarin, Malay or Tamil (Nehlsen, 2012).

Singapore has some broad similarities with Hong Kong due to global rapid changes in economics and social factors which have led to basic household units being a typically small family structure. Many families also employ a domestic helper mainly from the Philippines or Indonesia to assist with household cleaning, cooking and looking after the children (Göransson, 2009).

Due to recent economic changes an increasing number of Singaporean couples are now both working, causing an issue of childrearing responsibility. The Singapore government is making every effort to encourage more Singaporeans to get married and have children while integrating suitable foreigners (Yamato & Jogakuin, 2010).

Kindergartens in Singapore provide up to three years of pre-school for children aged three to six. These years are commonly called Nursery, Kindergarten 1 (K1) and Kindergarten 2 (K2). Kindergartens are operated by the private sector with more than 200 kindergartens registered with the Ministry of Education (MOE).

Kindergartens provide an environment for children to learn how to interact with others and to prepare them for formal education at primary school. Activities include learning languages, literacy and numeracy. This also includes development of personal and social skills, games, music and outdoor play. Children learn at least two languages,

that is, English and their official mother tongue (Chinese, Malay or Tamil respectively). Many private or church-based kindergartens may not offer Malay or Tamil, so non-Chinese pupils may also learn some Chinese at kindergarten (MOE, 2014; UNESCO, 2006).

Singapore launched the Preschool Curriculum Framework in 2003. The resultant new curriculum focuses on developing the child holistically on learning through play and experimentation, and on interacting with the educator (MOE, 2014).

As a part of these reforms the Ministry of Education (MOE) mandated that all preschool educators must obtain an accredited teaching diploma by 2008. The aim of this reform was to promote a shift in practice, knowledge and beliefs in pre-school educators (MOE, 2014).

In Singapore there is a single Soka kindergarten located in the north east of the island in the district of Tampines. This institution was the third Soka kindergarten established after Japan and Hong Kong in 1993 and currently provides early childhood services for approximately 330 students. Apart from this Soka kindergarten there are no other Soka educational institutions in Singapore. In 2011 the Singapore Ministry of Education granted the Outstanding Kindergarten Teacher Award to two Soka kindergarten teachers for their significant contributions to teaching and learning in their kindergarten (MOE, 2010).

Research Problems and Purpose

As previously discussed in the introduction, the quantity of early childhood institutions has rapidly increased and quality has now become a major concern for educators and researchers (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fenech, Harrison, & Sumsion, 2011; Lambert, Abbott-Shim, & Sibley, 2006). Research has indicated that young children gain considerable lifelong benefits and outcomes when they receive good quality early

childhood education (Campbell et al., 2008; Snowman, 2009; Yamamoto & Li, 2012). Although there has been a growing body of empirical research investigating quality early childhood education, the majority of these studies have been conducted in western countries using universal quantitative measuring standards (Fenech, 2011). Additionally, due to allocation of education funding models used in many countries; there is a tendency to measure early childhood quality through quantity measurements which provide numerical and statistical evidence to support resource allocation decisions (Hu & Li, 2012). Consequently, the investigation of quality early childhood education tends to become hegemonic with findings only applicable for specific nations or particular agendas (Pearson & Rao, 2006; Pearson, 2011). One sided and non-holistic accounts of quality early childhood education cannot allow us to understand the complexities of the quality of early childhood education conceptualised through different models, in different nations and within a diversity of cultural constructs.

Contemporary researchers in postmodern perspectives found that the quality of early childhood education cannot be deemed universal, decontextualised or standardised across cultures (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Goodfellow, 2001; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2011; Tobin, 2005). In general, the current policy climate of quality early childhood education has a strong focus on quantitative indicators with standard measurements of quality widely accepted. Illustrated examples include the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), Program Quality Assessment (PQA) and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Buysse, Wesley, Bryant, & Gardner, 1999; Fenech, 2011; Huntsman, 2008; Lambert et al., 2006). On the other hand, Pence and Moss (1994) arguing from a postmodernism lens claimed that quality is "a constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs and interests, rather than an objective and universal reality" (p. 172). Therefore, the use of box-ticking

and standard criteria measurement methods will not adequately address the dimensions of quality within early childhood education across cultures.

The purpose of this study was to explore the quality of early childhood education at three kindergartens in terms of Soka education philosophy. This exploration is theorised through postmodernism to reconceptualise quality within culturally diverse influences. Subsequently, it presents research findings that contribute to knowledge and understanding which may possibly lead to a paradigm shift in the way we think and enact quality early childhood education across cultures.

Significance of the Study and Research Questions

The main significance of this study was the provision of insights into a range of diverse concepts of quality, situated within different cultures and histories reflecting a range of social and cultural values which influence perceptions of quality. In this study the Soka educational model demonstrated how Buddhist philosophy foregrounded quality through being conceptualised within different countries and cultures. This study has highlighted how quality early childhood education needs to take into consideration various aspects such as humanity, diversity, spiritual, beliefs, traditions and culture perspectives. This exploration of educators' ontology and epistemology of quality has provided opportunities to investigate how quality has become a social construct within different nations and ethnic groups. In these respects, the findings of this study will become significant for various stakeholders who work in or are associated with early childhood education (i.e. government officials, policy makers, researchers, educators and parents).

Other significant aspects of this study include theoretical significance, professional learning significance, policy and practical significance. Firstly, this thesis has a theoretical significance as it contributes to expanding postmodern ideas in the

investigation of quality early childhood education. The study delivers recommendations for educators to deconstruct traditional conceptions of quality which are often defined in unified and objective terms. The process of critical analysis and the reflection of educators' discourse and daily classroom practice provide a lens for openness to new alternatives, new interpretations, new meanings and new configurations of knowledge relations (Sumsion, 2005). This study advances the importance of human capabilities such as inner self-development, value creation, internal happiness and humanity.

Secondly, as an extension of the above paragraph, policy and practical significance for researchers and educators is related to revisiting essentialist perspectives of quality early childhood education practice within humanist dimensions such as fostering educators and children to develop a sense of hope, respect, appreciation and compassion.

Ikeda (2010) argues that an important requirement for quality education is to develop children with a strong personality, skills and a positive attitude in order to face and positively overcome any difficulties or dilemmas in their lifetime. Importantly, a sense of respect, compassion and appreciation of others is one of the elements leading to the creation of a harmonious society (Ikeda, 2010). Therefore, this study is bringing a new direction and an alternative perspective into defining and creating quality early childhood education, and how this can impact oneself and others, as well as society at large to live in peace and harmony with the environment (Ikeda, 2010).

This study was conducted as a qualitative multisite case study and the following questions are derived from ontology and epistemology knowledge:

Main research question:

- *What conceptions of quality early childhood education are held by kindergarten educators working in the Soka education model and how do these conceptions influence practice?*

Sub-questions:

- *What is the nature of the practices of educators working in the early childhood Soka education model?*

- *What are the professional needs of early childhood educators working in the Soka education model?*

- *What lessons from the data on the Soka model are pivotal to children's quality learning and development that can be used to enhance quality early childhood practice in other contexts?*

Definition of Terms

Many of terms used throughout this thesis are widely discussed in the literature and some are difficult to define. I have therefore provided explanations on educational and Soka Buddhist terms as well as key people related to this research for the reader's clarification.

Terms within an educational context.

Deconstruction: Deconstruction is a method used during the critical analysis of social constructions of power and meaning and often related to cultural and political issues.

Diffusion: I conceptualised the term diffusion to explicate the intricate and complex flow of power relations which became defused through interactions between people.

Discourse: Michel Foucault (1972) argued that discourse is a concept derived from the way people think, their values, beliefs, verbal and written language and practices which allow us to talk about a topic or share concepts. The term 'discourse' when referring to social constructions left by history describes a "way of speaking" (Foucault, 1972, p. 193). In the *Archaeology of knowledge*, Foucault (1972) identified discourse practices through language which is constructed through societal practices, history and the culture of everyday experiences consciously or unconsciously.

Grand narrative: The context of this study refers to the overarching Soka philosophy based upon Nichiren Buddhism. It is concerned with the interconnection between events, an inner connection between events related to one another, and how the Soka philosophy based upon Nichiren Buddhism operates as a succession of social systems, replicating the gradual development of social conditions.

Kindergarten: This means an early childhood institution for the purposes of children aged from three to five years old.

Knowledge: Foucault (1980b) illustrated that knowledge not only detaches itself from its empirical roots but that the initial need arose from the demands of reason. He further explained that "the contents of knowledge in terms of their diversity and heterogeneity, view them in the context of the effects of power they generate in as much as they are validated by their belonging to a system of knowledge" (1990, p. 274).

Postmodern: Postmodern theory is located as a critical theory. This theory is polysemic and draws upon different aspects of knowledge according to the perceptions and episteme of individuals.

Power: Foucault (2003a) argued power is not a thing but a relation, power is everywhere, power is exercised throughout society, power cannot practice itself but only act on others and, most importantly, power can be productive not just repressive.

Foucault (2003a) argued we should not view power as a negative force only with the associated repressive effects but identify positive and productive effects of power. He further reiterates, the "relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others ... it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present action" (Foucault, 2003a, p. 137).

Process of quality: Educators' beliefs, practices, curriculum and pedagogy, and interactions between educators and children.

Quality: A social construction which may have its origins in politics, economics, culture and history which in turn influences education.

Structural quality: Within western perspectives generally the elements of structural quality are related to policies, a safe and stimulating environment, low educator-child ratios, high educators' qualifications and professional development.

Soka terms

Buddhahood: This term refers to the supreme state of life in Buddhism characterised by boundless wisdom and compassion. Buddhahood is not a static condition but rather an experience in which people are continually developing.

Happiness: From a Soka philosophy context happiness is an internal construction rather than something to be gained through an external cause. This is an important Soka term frequently used in this thesis.

Human revolution: This term is drawn from Josei Toda and describes a process in which individuals gradually expand their lives, conquer negative and destructive tendencies and ultimately attain Buddhahood as their dominant life condition.

Humanity: From Soka philosophy; a term which not only considers respect and compassion for others but ultimately the perfection of oneself.

Lotus Sutra: The Lotus Sutra was the final teaching, or sutra, of Shakyamuni (Siddhārtha Gautama in Sanskrit) who was the historical founder of Buddhism.

Mentor and disciple: This term is frequently used within a Soka Gakkai context as a fundamental relationship concerned with human happiness and development. The foundation of the relationship between mentor and disciple is the shared pledge to work together for the happiness of people and to alleviate suffering.

Nichiren Buddhist: Buddhism based on Nichiren Daishonin teachings.

Soka Gakkai International (SGI): A Buddhist organisation based on the teachings of Nichiren. SGI has more than 12 million members in 192 countries and territories which uphold the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism. The purposes and principles of SGI are to contribute to peace, culture and education based on the philosophy and ideals of Nichiren Buddhism.

Unlimited potential: This term refers to a situation in which each person has the capacity to construct happiness in their lifetime. Nichiren Buddhism advocates unlimited potential through human practice to develop an individual's 'Buddha nature' which includes courage, wisdom and compassion through overcoming one's challenges, transforming one's life and contributing to the happiness of others (2014g).

Value creation: The idea of value creation was central to the philosophy of Makiguchi. The translated name Soka Gakkai in fact means "society for the creation of value". SGI focuses on human happiness, responsibility and the empowerment of lives.

Key people in this research.

Daisaku Ikeda (1928–present): A Buddhist leader, a prolific writer, poet and educator. The founder of a number of cultural, educational and peace research institutions around the world. Ikeda has published numerous works on the Buddhist

philosophy of Nichiren, the Lotus Sutra and peace in an educational context. Ikeda is third and current president of Soka Gakkai International.

Josei Toda (1900–1958): An educator, publisher and entrepreneur, second president of Soka Gakkai, revived Soka Gakkai organisation after World War II, building it into a dynamic popular movement.

Nichiren Daishonin (1222–1282 C.E.): A Buddhist monk who lived in 13th-century Japan. His study of Buddhist sutras convinced him that the Lotus Sutra contained the essence of the Buddha's enlightenment and that it held the key to transforming people's suffering and enabling society to flourish.

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944): A reformist educator, author and philosopher who founded the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (the forerunner of Soka Gakkai) in 1930. Makiguchi believed that education should serve the happiness of the students, rather than the needs of the state.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter One provides background information, a rationale for the research, statement of the research problems, research questions and the significance of the research. This chapter also includes broad context of the background of Nichiren Buddhism and Soka Gakkai which underpins this research.

Chapter Two is divided into two parts. Part A focuses on the theoretical and conceptual framework, which scaffolds this research and outlines the importance of postmodern theory and Michel Foucault's ideas of discourse, power and knowledge for informing my approach to analysis of the qualitative data. Part B is the literature review which includes a brief historical overview of quality and practitioner literature regarding concepts of quality early childhood education. Part B also discusses the aims of early

childhood education, outlining three domains of quality, and the benefits of and barriers to quality early childhood education.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology and design informed by the nature of this research, the research problems and postmodern theoretical perspectives. A qualitative, interpretive multisite case study approach underpinned this research. This chapter explains and justifies the design and methodological options within the selected theoretical framework of a qualitative research paradigm; in order to understand human actions and meaning constructions, interpretation of people's views and belief must be given prominence in research. It also presents data generation and analysis strategies are presented as well as my role as a researcher, which is commensurate with this theoretical framework and the research context.

Chapter Four is divided into two parts. Part A presents Soka educators' beliefs through three themes: concepts of value creation, happiness and humanism. The findings of part A are mainly drawn from informal conversations and semi-structured interviews with educators and supported by site images. Part B relates to Soka practices which include five themes: 'kindergarten policy', 'structured environment', 'learning environment', 'health and wellbeing' and 'relationships'. The findings of part B are not only drawn from semi-structured interviews with educators but also include parent group interviews, classroom observations and support images.

Chapter Five provides an extensive explanation of the findings in relation to the research questions with further illumination through postmodern theories and related relevant literature.

Chapter Six is the conclusion and discusses the research findings. It includes key recommendations and limitations of the research. I also provide recommendations for

future research in this chapter and conclude with comments about my personal transformation gained through this research.

Chapter 2 Literature review
Part A – Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an in-depth understanding of the postmodern theory underpinning this study and the empirical literature regarding quality early childhood education, resulting in the literature review being divided into two parts. Part A presents the theoretical and conceptual framework that scaffolds this study. Part B reviews contemporary literature regarding concepts of quality early childhood education and three dimensions of quality. In addition, the benefits of quality early learning experience and the barriers to quality early childhood education are discussed.

My objectives for Part A are: (1) illustrate the significance of selecting a postmodern theoretical framework for this study, (2) discuss postmodern theory as eclectic knowledge, (3) explain the justification for framing this study within postmodern theory, and (4) illustrate how a postmodern conceptual framework influenced this study.

Theoretical Framework

The selection of a theoretical framework is an important and critical component of research work, as this choice subsequently supports and sustains the entire study. The selection of a theoretical framework depends upon the research questions and problems of each specific study (Ary, Cheser Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010; Creswell, 2012; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). A clear and strong theoretical framework can support a researcher's clarity and assist in seeing the variables of the study (Khan, 2011). This also provides guidance for the researcher in the design of a credible research methodology and systematic process of data analysis.

I spent the first year of my PhD journey reading a wide range of articles relating to theory in order to better understand various theoretical frameworks. The topic of this study is an exploration of quality early childhood education. Through my reading of the theoretical literature, it became clear that several and different theoretical paradigms have been used in the past to investigate this area including postmodern theory (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Koo, 2002; Sumsion, 2005), feminist theory (Cott, 1987; D'Souza, 2010; Thornton & Goldstein, 2006), poststructuralist theory (Mac Naughton, 2005), critical theory (Fenech, 2011; Kincheloe, 2008; Lambert et al., 2006), sociocultural-historical theory (Fleer et al., 2009) and widely used positivist perspectives (Fenech et al., 2011; Ishimine, Tayler, & Bennett, 2010; Sheridan, 2001).

Considering the nature of this study (i.e. being located within other cultures and the issues to be explored), this research has utilised the lens of postmodern theoretical perspectives. Postmodern theory provides me with multiple perspectives, which are a useful alternative to universal quantitative measures when exploring quality within different nations and cultures. Additionally, a postmodern lens not only shaped my vision and allowed me to view daily complex relationships, but most importantly this lens helped me in seeking reasons for and qualitative evidence of my study. Whilst I appreciated the flexibility of this lens, I was also aware that complex relations viewed through a postmodern lens may lead to contradictions within me. In fact, a process of personal transformation fostered my appreciation of postmodern theory and led to me questioning and viewing phenomena in a new way during this study.

Postmodern Theory as Eclectic Knowledge

Postmodern theory is a profound theory in which there is a polysemy of perspectives defining the term 'postmodern'. These can be interpreted in different ways according to the perceptions and episteme of the researcher (Taylor, 2005). Postmodern

perspectives have influenced many cultural fields in the areas of religion, criticism, feminisim, sociology, architecture, history, anthropology, psychology, education, art and music (Best & Kellner, 1991). Postmodern theory is located within a critical theory paradigm (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006) and the main idea of postmodern theory is the critique and review of modernist approaches such as scientific quantitative measures and universal concepts of knowing (Fenech, 2011; Fenech et al., 2011; Hicks, 2004; Logan & Sumsion, 2010). Modernist approaches do not provide a holistic or full picture of all aspects of any particular study but postmodern perspectives provide a lens for openness to new alternatives, new interpretations, new meanings and new configurations of knowledge relations (Sumsion, 2005).

Amongst well-known and familiar theorists that have influenced postmodernism are Michel Foucault (1926–1984), Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924–1998) and Richard Rorty (1931–2007).

These scholars have set the pace and direction for postmodern perspectives in the postmodern world (Hicks, 2004). This study will make use of the postmodern ideas of Michel Foucault, focusing on three specific concepts – discourse, power and knowledge – to explore the quality of early childhood education.

This section does not emphasise the historical retrospective study of modernism and postmodernism, but rather the main purpose here is to identify the keys ideas of postmodern theory and highlight how this theory and its key concepts can be applied to this study. Below, the two key ideas of the use of postmodern perspectives are discussed.

Critique enlightenment and scientific positivism. The first key idea in using postmodern theory for this study is that it offers a platform for critiquing enlightenment and scientific positivism that ascribe universal concepts to the concept of

quality and consider truth to be discovered through universal reason (Agbenyega, 2012b; Buysee & Hollingsworth, 2009; Deynoot-Schaub & Riksen-Walraven, 2005; Graham, 2005; Jalongo et al., 2004; Lambert et al., 2006; Sheridan, 2001). Dahlberg et al. (2007) argue that from a postmodernist perspective "there is no absolute knowledge, no absolute reality waiting 'out there' to be discovered" (p. 23). This was explained by Foucault, who stated that knowledge was only partial because knowledge is inextricably tied up when power is exercised (1980a). For example, a school may produce forms of knowledge such as a curriculum or regulations; however, the particular educators who practise this knowledge may establish their authority and legitimacy over other educators or children. This indicates that knowledge may be shaped by educators' ontological and epistemological knowledge. Therefore, no knowledge is true knowledge; all knowledge is subjective and is subject to cultural and historical constructions (Brownlee, Petriwkyj, Thorpe, Stacey, & Gibson, 2011).

As a result, postmodern theory offers a new lens to enable researchers to analyse and deconstruct the traditional conceptions of quality which are often defined in unified and objective terms (Mac Naughton, 2005; Taylor, 2005). Deconstruction refers to an action of critical analysis of a social construction of power and meaning which often relates to cultural and political issues (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006).

Multilogical knowing. The flexibility of postmodernist perspectives allows me, as the researcher, to explore early childhood education multilogically. Kincheloe, a critical theory scholar, used the term 'multilogicality' as referring to "gaining the capability and the resolve to explore the world not from a western imperial vantage point, but from diverse perspectives, often standpoints forged by pain, suffering, and degradation" (Kincheloe, 2011, p. 388). Multilogical also refers to the notion of not depending upon one piece of logic to view the concept of quality but to rather use

different, logical existence of quality education. Using a multilogical construct, postmodern theory becomes an epistemological tool for interrogating, questioning and reviewing universal and previous theoretical lenses, such as positivist knowledge, which constructs quality as a universal concept (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

The use of a postmodern lens often challenges traditional practices and intellectual pillars of western civilisation and secularism which have influenced various understandings of quality for decades (Dahlberg et al., 2007). In this study I argue that since human nature is unstable, fluid and shifting, a monolithic conception of quality such as universal rationalist perspectives are unable to provide a complete insight into what constitutes quality early childhood education (Logan & Sumsion, 2010). A diverse system of early childhood education undoubtedly calls for diversity in understanding the quality of practice and delivery of services for children. Therefore, multiple perspectives must always be considered when investigating the quality of early childhood education (Novinger, O'Brien, & Sweigman, 2005). This is illustrated where postmodern perspectives offer a kaleidoscope of windows through which to look at quality and provide different views instead of a single, narrow conception of quality.

Framing this Study within Postmodern Theory

The value of postmodernism for this study lies in contemporary 'scientific' and 'evidence-based' paradigms (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Fenech, 2011; Rao & Li, 2009). As previously mentioned, postmodernism can be used to provide various perspectives to explore quality early childhood education rather than a reliance upon modernist universal and standardised measurements which problematise the investigation of quality when human beliefs are at the centre of scrutiny. The widespread phenomenon in the use of standard norms can lead to tensions in the quality

of early childhood educational research (Graham, 2005). Quality is not a unitary word, but rather a social construct drawn from cultural and historical contexts.

Aside from early childhood education being situated historically, ideologically, micropolitically and socially; quality early childhood education is beset with dilemmas and tensions on all sides (Agbenyega, 2012b). These four aspects are explained as follows. Historical aspects refer to the foundation of social constructions and epistemology which form part of knowledge of the quality of early childhood education. Ideology refers to philosophy and what is important to people in their culture which may influence what is considered as quality. Micropolitical refers to the ideological politics of government including government aspirations, both national and local, which influence quality constructs. Social constructs may shift the discourse of quality within particular groups or communities.

Quality beyond positivism. The above explanation demonstrates the value of using postmodernist perspectives to investigate quality rather than applying scientific positivist constructions which, as previously argued, can become problematic because standard measurements do not provide a holistic picture of the complex dynamics of quality. Positivist perspectives can still be valuable and favourable when researchers are looking at structured aspects of quality, for example, educator-child ratios, physical environment, safety and health practices and staff qualification standards (Fenech et al., 2011; Hu & Li, 2012; Sheridan, 2001). However, positivist perspectives have limitations and difficulties in the investigation of quality in terms of all human beliefs and cultural influences (Lubeck, 1994). Such universal ratings do not necessarily capture all educators' beliefs and their discourses regarding quality. This is because quality is not out there to be discovered, it is a socially constructed discourse. Beliefs, values, politics, philosophy, and cultural factors have influenced the way quality

discourse has been constructed (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Thus utilising scientific positivism will not provide alternative and personal explanations of quality.

Conceptualising this study through postmodern theory is beneficial to the methodological analysis of quality using these new perspectives. This is illustrated by Tobin (2005) whose work in early childhood education settings in Japan and France demonstrated that quality standards should reflect local values and cultural constructs and reject universal, positivist rationalist perspectives. He argues:

> The student/teacher ratio issue alone would place Japanese preschools totally beyond the pale of American quality standards. Thirty-children-to-one-adult is so far in excess of American quality standards as to preclude these programs being able to meet other criteria of quality. With such a ratio how could there be adequate time for children to be observed, talk to, listened to, scaffolded, supervised, and protected from various kinds of harm, as they should be in a quality program (Tobin, 2005, p. 422).

However, Tobin also argues that ratio and class size may not necessarily affect children's educational outcomes but rather greater substantial importance can be found in culture, diversity and local values (2005).

Locating quality in diversity, culture and history. Postmodern theory plays a significant role in researching quality because it offers an opportunity to investigate the complex relationships of contemporary conditions that construct understandings of quality (Taylor, 2005). Contradictions frequently appear when a person with different values, cultures or an ethnic background disputes other ideas or practices. Educators have their own beliefs about what constitutes quality but often what they practice is different, leading to contradictory situations. Human experience and practice is relatively infused with discourse and knowledge (Foucault, 1972). In essence the old lies alongside the new, historically and ideologically (Agbenyega, 2012b). This

means new discourses and practices in early childhood education are carved out of old discourses.

Needless to say, there cannot be just one way to construct quality in postmodern perspectives because the values of a society are different from place to place due to history, geographical location, socialisation and norms. Working with postmodern epistemology, researchers and educators become empowered to liberate themselves from the mastery model of education and instead pursue how knowledge creates boundaries and possibilities (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005). These boundaries and possibilities are located in the concepts of discourse, power and knowledge. Robinson and Jones Diaz state that "discourse provides ... understanding of how the world operated in terms of identity and power ... knowledge is constituted within discourses operating in society" (2006, p. 29). In this regard, power and knowledge are intimately related and operate through our discourse. Foucault pointed out, so persuasively, that "in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse" (1980a, p. 93). As Foucault argues, power is not something tangible to be possessed by an individual or an institution, but rather it is a complex system of forged relations in effect within a particular society at a particular point in time. This means, power is exercised everywhere and manifested in every discourse at any moment in time.

Proposed Postmodern Conceptual Framework

I have developed a proposed theoretical conceptual framework for this research, which is illustrated in Figure 2.1. In this figure, the proposed framework elucidates quality as perceived through postmodern theory and perspectives with a focus on

concepts of discourse, power and knowledge (highlighted in blue). The use of this theoretical lens and three concepts enabled me to closely and critically analyse each one (highlighted in green). This provided me with another perspective in exploring new knowledge to add to our understanding of the concept of quality early childhood education. These three concepts are not separated, as I discussed in a previous section, but rather these concepts are interactive. Furthermore, educators working in Soka kindergartens conceptualise quality (highlighted in green) as constructed via three interrelated components which include value creation, humanity and happiness. For instance, educators working in Soka kindergartens discussed the creation of positive values, such as good relationships with the children, which contribute to their happiness as well as forming an integral part of humanist education. A detailed explanation of these three Soka quality components is discussed in the data presentation chapter. Prior to investigating quality, it is important to clarify that this work does not aim to discuss the ontological tensions between postmodernism and humanism or indeed Foucault's rejection of humanist thoughts. I am fully aware of these tensions and that humanist thoughts provide the dominant discursive regimes that framed the field of possibilities within these three participating kindergartens. On the other hand, these three Soka kindergartens have all been identified as makers of quality practice in early childhood education in their respective countries. Therefore, I was interested to understand the defining pedagogical practices at play within these contexts with the aim of adding a multiplicity of perspectives to an otherwise dominant minority world understanding of what constitutes 'quality' early childhood practices. Having clarified my thinking in order to approach the study, it became clear that I should explore how discourse, power and knowledge shape the construction of quality in Soka kindergartens.
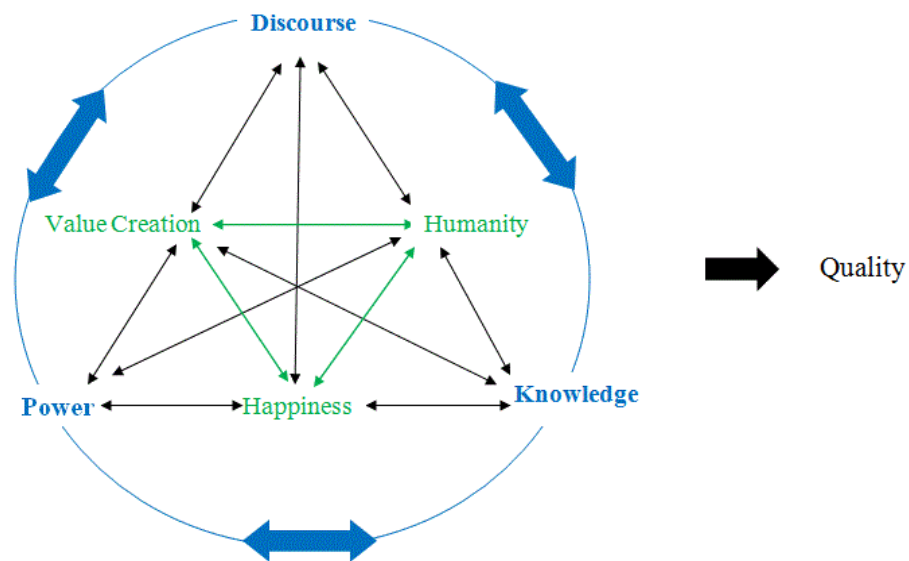
Figure 2.1: Proposed conceptual framework model of quality early childhood education

Conceptualising discourse through postmodernism. Postmodern perspectives emphasise that the world is constructed through "complex relationships of power, knowledge, and discourse created in the struggle between social groups" (Taylor, 2005, p. 113). Discourse is a concept derived from the way we think, our values, beliefs, verbal and/or written language and practices which allow us to talk about a topic or share concepts (Foucault, 1972). Foucault also uses the term 'discourse' when referring to social constructs left by history and describes a "way of speaking" (1972, p. 193). In the Archaeology of Knowledge, Foucault (1972) identified discourse practices through language which is constructed through societal practices, history and culture of everyday experience, consciously or unconsciously. People construct discourse through their socialisation with others. Discourse constructions are also drawn by people doing things over and over again through daily experiences. Discourse provides "a useful tool for explaining and exploring social meanings, arrangements and power relations" which are situated "socially, culturally and are historically negotiated, contested and produced" (Macartney, Ord, & Robinson, 2008, p. 138). From a postmodernist perspective the key function of discourse is that it allows us to critique and deconstruct the enlightenment of

the modern world and uses various points of view to comprehend a matter or situation (Macartney et al., 2008).

Dahlberg et al. (2007) agreed with Foucault regarding discourse construction, arguing that 'quality' is a discourse, as this is created through social constructions in which people define the term through their knowledge of quality within their existence and experience in the world. The term 'quality' in and of itself has become a cultural, social and political construct, because the way discourse is constructed depends upon the socio-political and economic structure at the time (Best & Kellner, 1991). It is argued, "Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers carried with it" (Foucault, 1972, p. 227). For instance, there are clear differences with respect to the discourse of quality within early childhood education between today and fifty years ago.

People may have the same knowledge and similar experiences; however, the discourse of individual people can be quite different. Although educators may receive the same level of early childhood pre-service training; student educators' practice may be quite different in the classroom based on their knowledge, values, beliefs, expectations, life experience, social position and cultural influences. This suggests why quality discourse cannot be unified within different countries as well as among individuals. Dahlberg et al. (2007) illustrated that contemporary definitions of quality are "embedded in the tradition and epistemology of logical positivism" (p. 93) which focuses on universal reason and a unified subject. This modern discourse in quality has been inherited from history and will be explained further in Part B of this literature review.

Postmodern theory has been deconstructed and resisted ascribing to such universal connotations of quality thus inevitably the discourse of quality leads us to

redefine and reconceptualise quality. Postmodernist perspectives are controversial and challenge the boundaries in which the modern World has developed its discourses of universality, totalisation and individualism (Hicks, 2004; Lincoln, 1994). Quality early childhood education needs to be considered together with cultural and social aspects. Dahlberg et al. (2007) elucidated that postmodernism challenges modernity by introducing multiple perspectives for looking at quality. These differences and diversities may lead to contradictions when looking at quality early childhood education. This encourages the consideration of the process of practice in early childhood education rather than evaluating its conformity norm (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

For instance, the participating educators' discourse of quality early childhood education was closely embedded within Nichiren Buddhist philosophy in three domains: value creation, happiness and humanity. An ideological construction of Nichiren Buddhism is creating value in our daily life and happiness in oneself. These principles fit well with the worldview of humanism. Humanist perspectives consider that "everyone is unique and that all people are equal" (UNESCO, 2004, Chapter 1, p. 32). The revealing of the essence of education should be respect for individual rights, diversity, culture, personality, needs and thoughts based on equality and humanity (Ikeda, 2010; Makiguchi, 1989a, 2004; UNESCO, 2011). To support the concept of a humanist view of education, educators encourage children to develop their own voice in order to acquire skills, knowledge and values, as well as a sense of responsibility, and strive to become an active and productive citizen (Makiguchi, 2004, 2010; UNESCO, 2004).

I would argue that the discourse of educator's beliefs and values cannot be quantified and have different meanings from universal standards as defined in modernist perspectives. With such cultural and language diversities, it is vital to discover

educators' discourse of quality as this will inform us in the identification, comprehension and perspectives of educators' beliefs. As a result, this conceptualising is intended to examine what and how early childhood principles and educators' discourse in respect of quality influences on their practices. In addition, I explore how the other two concepts of power and knowledge were circulated within discourse and constructions of Soka education practice.

Conceptualising power through postmodernism. The second postmodern concept associated with this study is 'power' which has become an important subject of discussion within both modern and postmodern perspectives. A number of Foucault's supporters have applied the concept of power specifically in the field of education (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Macartney et al., 2008; McNicol-Jardine, 2005; O'Farrell, 2005; Pacini-Ketchabaw, White, & Armstrong de Almeida, 2006). Foucault's concept of power as discussed in this section has been a major contributing factor to my thinking.

Within historical trends, former ideas of power stem from sovereignty and concepts, such as obedience to the law, the monarch or other authority, which created concepts such as ruler and ruled, rich and poor, strong and weak, etc. (Dahlberg et al., 2007). From the sixteenth century, new ideas arose in which people were not only affected by power, but they often exercised power within the wider society. It is recognised that "in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body" (Foucault, 1980a, p. 93). Foucault explains relations of power to be located in social structures, economics, politics and discourse. He posits:

The form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity,

imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. (Foucault, 2003a, p. 130)

Foucault (2003a) argues, power is not a thing but a relation, power is everywhere and is exercised throughout society, power cannot practice itself but only act on others and most importantly, power can be productive and not only repressive. Foucault (2003a) advised us not to look at power only negatively and the associated repressive effects on our society's practices but also to identify the positive, productive effects of power. He further reiterates, the "relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others ... it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present action" (Foucault, 2003a, p. 137). This explains that human thinking and actions are constantly influenced by different interactions with other people, subjects, objects and the environment; wherever human interaction occurs, power is exercised in one form or another. According to Foucault's arguments about power, all interactions are often found to be exercising power and are circulating at different levels in our daily life.

Undoubtedly as a researcher undertaking this study I am situated within a discourse of power. I was aware this may influence participants during the data generation and analysis process. Therefore, I constantly adapted my personal, positional and theoretical reflexivity to support accountability in this research. On the other hand, I also explored how power was exercised and circulated within Soka educators' discourses and knowledge in respect of quality early childhood education. Beliefs and values may be consciously or subconsciously demonstrated within educators' practice such as the relationships between educators and children and educators and parents, curriculum planning, classroom settings, children's work displays, and even found in detailed seating plans for children. The concept of power is very complex and is the

interplay between individual discourse and knowledge (Foucault, 1990). Power also determines norms and leads to the development of various measures and practices which subsequently shape normative standards influenced by individual nations, culture and history.

In an important piece of work known as *Discipline and punishment: The birth of the prison* (1977) Foucault claims that the discipline of power in society introduces the control of criminal behaviour and improves performance inside the prison environment. The purpose of disciplinary power is to ensure people become a more efficient unit, which would require minimal time in performing useful activities (O'Farrell, 2005). Foucault (1990) argued that disciplinary power is easily found within educational policies and practices, and these powers are exercised in the monitoring, classifying and control of daily educational practices. This is also reflected in daily life with social rules, government laws, school systems and the work force. For instance, in school, there are timetables for all children to follow; children are taught to hold a pen correctly and to sit at their school desks in a particular way. All of these easily illustrate how disciplinary power is exercised even in contemporary times. However, children in Soka kindergartens are also taught within a set of rules and timetables with specific values in respect of becoming good citizens which include respect, gratitude, compassion for others and the environment. The Soka educators have decided upon this set of rules as a way to foster children to become good citizens.

Foucault (1980a) argues that there are several ways to control actions through disciplinary power and monitor behaviour, such as the term 'Panopticon', which is an architectural design that provides the supervision of information gathering and surveillance control of every act of every person by their superiors. This architectural

design of building can still be easily found in contemporary schools, kindergartens and childcare centres.

McNicol-Jardine, a Foucault supporter, reconceptualised Foucault's work regarding early examinations of the transformation of systems of knowledge as societies change, offering a critical analysis of the relationship of knowledge–power, and applying this within educational settings. McNicol-Jardine (2005) referred to disciplinary powers (e.g. 'school examinations') as an instrument of power to monitor students and as a tool to gain knowledge, and this is illustrated within a number of educational systems such as Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Taiwan, etc. Examination results can be used to classify individuals and results can be a reward or a punishment to control students. Exam knowledge can manifest as a predictable knowledge and effort in the society in a controlled way (McNicol-Jardine, 2005). For example, dictation requirements (memorising vocabulary) are often found in early childhood institutions throughout East Asian nations.

Disciplinary power has also been used to create social norms where there are groups of authority who determine the normality or otherwise of individuals and who define their very identity in terms of their deviation from the norm. McNicol-Jardine (2005) classified disciplinary power in school through examinations or curriculum expectations which create 'norms' in order to serve, to integrate and to control children and educators. These norms guide educators and children to act and think in certain ways to ensure they become good citizens in the future and fit in with society. Norms affect teaching practices as indicated by dividing children into age group grades, what and how educators teach in the classroom and how children's knowledge is assessed. These norms demonstrate control of each child and the educators themselves, which is now deeply embedded within cultural and social expectations.

The final measure of control is disciplinary 'reward and punishment'. Disciplinary societies not only formulate norms for the actions and abilities they seek; they also enforce conformity to these norms (McNicol-Jardine, 2005). Individuals are rewarded for success and punished for failing to conform to the criteria of the norm. The above examples show how disciplinary power is constantly exercised as a method of control and monitoring individual children within our society (Foucault, 1980a). It could be argued that control and monitoring are mechanisms and processes used by educators to ensure quality standards are achieved.

However, there are few considerations provided regarding disciplinary power at schools where children receive low grades whilst trying their best in exams. What happens if children don't like exams? Moreover, this exam knowledge adopted by those being examined and gathered by their examiners, have powerful effects (McNicol-Jardine, 2005). Therefore the exploration of relations between discourse and power has provided the researcher with a deeper understanding of the dilemmas and challenges faced in defining quality early childhood education.

Many East Asian countries are heavily influenced by Confucian thoughts originating from China, in which power is manifested at senior levels in society, and the power of relations and connection is important in society and an integral part of the culture. This is illustrated by the example of Hong Kong, where I worked as an early childhood educator for 14 years, and where the majority of children are not allowed to question authorities such as educators, parents or adults. When children criticise social seniors this is interpreted as a child with poor manners, uncultivated, and is unacceptable. In contrast, this power also produces a sense of morality in which children learn to respect others and consider their feelings. This is reflected in Foucault's expression that power can be either negative or positive or both (2000). This

also creates social norms in which power is used to "shape individuals towards a particular norm, a norm being a standard of some kind" (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 29).

Evidence of social power in Japan for example, is provided within Japanese language structures and different words/terms reserved for people of social seniority and older people, which indicate their status in that culture. In the Japanese language a social junior will speak differently when addressing a peer group when compared to an adult such as a parent or elder. Some Japanese terms may have the same meaning but they are actually different words to be used appropriately in different social settings. These examples highlight that power relations is an important inclusion within this study in which historical, cultural and diversity factors are important.

Conceptualising knowledge through postmodernism. Since the concept of power is highly complex and is an interplay between an individual's discourse and knowledge (Foucault, 1990), to apply concepts of power and knowledge to investigate the relationships in a classroom setting is appropriate. Foucault (1980a) argues that power can be constructive and produce knowledge; as knowledge emerges independently of complex networks of power and that subsequently the exercise of power produces certain types of knowledge. Mechanisms of power produce different types of knowledge which collate information regarding people's activities; knowledge gathered in this way further reinforces power. Foucault (2000) refutes the idea that 'knowledge is power' but rather there is a complex relationship between power and knowledge.

Regarding this study, Nichiren Buddhism is based on a set of knowledge leading to the belief that "all living beings have the potential to achieve enlightenment" (Soka Gakkai, 1999, p. 3). Enlightenment in Nichiren Buddhist philosophy is not a mystical or transcendental state; rather it is a condition in which one enjoys the highest

wisdom, vitality, good fortune, confidence, and other positive qualities. Ultimately, the purpose for all human activities should be to achieve happiness and strive towards World peace. The knowledge of Buddhist philosophy could be considered as an exercise of power among the believers of the practice, and this demonstrates how knowledge plays an important role in shaping Buddhist norms in society.

Foucault (1980b) argued that knowledge not only detaches itself from its empirical roots but that the initial need arose from the demands of reason. He further explained that "the contents of knowledge in terms of their diversity and heterogeneity, view them in the context of the effects of power they generate in as much as they are validated by their belonging to a system of knowledge" (2003c, p. 274). Knowledge constructed through individual ontology and epistemology accumulated throughout history, can change throughout different historical periods (Kincheloe, 2004). New knowledge, for example, might be created when new counter discursive elements begin to receive wide attention. Kincheloe (1993) argues that educators are empowered to learn and produce their own knowledge and not just deliver knowledge to children. As Kincheloe explained: "Teachers never see the same classroom twice, as teaching conditions change from day to day" (1993, p. 22).

Foucault was not simply focused on the way knowledge influenced different subject areas, he was also interested in the mechanisms by which this happened and in which one way of looking at the world changed into another. In this study, Soka philosophy has demonstrated how a sense of power circulates within Soka Education. The knowledge and discourse of value creation, happiness and humanity have strongly influenced the policies and practices of Soka kindergartens. If, as Foucault states (in the previous sections regarding conceptualising power), there is no absolute truth and knowledge, all knowledge is situated within culture and is subjective. Therefore, this

study will explore how Soka discourse demonstrates how power and knowledge are related and interact.

Foucault argued that general knowledge of "what is the world, of what is the necessity of the world, the relation between worlds" (1990, p. 116) are all very important for taking care of one's self. To continue Foucault's discussion on applying general knowledge to understanding the contemporary world; Kincheloe, a postmodern critical thinker, specifically addressed normative knowledge as important because normative knowledge "concerns … 'what should be' in relation to moral and ethical aspects" (2004, p. 55). Postmodernism addressed that knowledge is not fixed but grounded in diverse cultural backgrounds. Understanding normative knowledge has relevance to some ontology questions such as what are the "nature of education and the role of schools" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 55). Some normative knowledge grounds educational curriculum and programs but it is often difficult for educators to demonstrate this consciously (Kincheloe, 2004). Therefore, the philosophical issues of quality through normative knowledge provide a vision to investigate what form of power mechanisms influence individual discourse and knowledge in quality early childhood education. This provides a valuable opportunity to explore the norms and ethnical influences within a range of East Asian countries and investigate how these cultures synthesise with educators' knowledge and practice. To understand normative knowledge allows us to reflect on the necessity to explore the effects of power in shaping individual identity and educational purpose (Kincheloe, 2004). Therefore the provision of normative knowledge to explore how educators shape their individual discourse is related to the vision of moral and ethical standards.

The second perspective is ontological knowledge which is defined as the root of knowledge and how this knowledge has been constructed in the first place.

Ontological knowledge is vital in this study as the researcher will provide ontological questions through an exploration of educator's knowledge regarding quality early childhood education. To determine ontological knowledge in this study will assist in the exploration of how educators confront their relationship with historical trends. The questions related to this research (through interviewing educators) will allow researchers to explore concepts based on ontology and investigate the discourse of quality grounded in historical processes, as well as to analyse power relations which are rooted in the whole network of our society (Foucault, 1990).

The last perspective (i.e. providing a link and connection to knowledge and relationships) is reflective knowledge. The discourse of quality is situated within various contexts such as cultural, historical, personal experience and knowledge. Those reflections allow educators to consider in-depth investigations into complex teaching practices. Kincheloe explained that through reflective knowledge educators have "in this process … develop[ed] a reflective awareness that allows them to discern the ways that teacher and student perceptions are shaped by the social education context with its accompanying linguistic codes, cultural signs, and tacit views of the world" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 64). Therefore quality early childhood education depends largely upon educators reflecting on their own practices in the classroom.

An awareness of various applications of knowledge and who exercises this knowledge has become central to this study. This can allow us to explore how educators conceptualise quality and also the practices of educator's groundings through their discourse of quality and how knowledge is constructed in these societies. This study is not intended to discover an ultimate goal or universal definition of quality early childhood education, nor does it aim to clarify the tensions between humanism and postmodernism. Rather it offers insight into postmodernist theory as an alternative

perspective, and as a discursive analysis of educator's thoughts, discourses and practices. This study also provides an insight into quality early childhood education within a range of East Asian national cultures and environments.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided justification for the use of postmodern theory in this study. In particular, this review has framed postmodern concepts of discourse, power and knowledge within the context of Soka education. The literature has been of significance in referring to postmodern perspectives as a powerful tool to view progressive social changes, leading to educators and researchers becoming open to new alternatives, new interpretations, new meanings and new configurations in respect of defining quality practice in early childhood education.

Part B – Contemporary Literature of Quality Early Childhood Education

Introduction

The literature review in part B discusses a range of significant issues regarding quality early childhood education practice, which has amplitude and is complex (Pianta et al., 2005). In this section, I provide a brief review of the historical perspectives regarding concepts of quality. This historical perspective allows the contextualisation of various social constructs of quality early childhood education which influence contemporary practice. This review also frames the range of research in respect of conceptualisation the constituents of quality early childhood education. Importantly, reviewing relevant literature highlighted gaps for the further investigation of the topic of quality which has subsequently become a significant contribution to this study.

This literature review focuses on the following areas: (1) historical perspectives and concepts of quality, (2) defining the aims of early childhood education, (3) looking at three dimensions of quality and how these have been conceptualised within early childhood education settings, (4) benefits of implementing quality elements including individual, social and global, and (5) the barriers and challenges currently faced in promoting quality early childhood education.

Historical Concepts of Quality

Historically, concepts of quality have been with us for many centuries. Evidence indicates that measurements and inspections were used during the B.C. era, when structures in India and Egypt were built with stones cut to size to make pyramids and other stone structures (Chandrupathla, 2009; Ross, 2009). This concept was later taken up and adapted throughout medieval Europe, where groups of craftsmen formed

unions to develop strict rules for making products and providing quality service (Chandrupathla, 2009; Ross, 2009). Whilst the concept of quality started in India and Egypt, over time, concepts of quality have been taken and adapted by other mostly European countries. These countries, because of language, colonial history or dominance have led to quality concepts being spread globally. During the early nineteenth century, with the advent of the industrial revolution worldwide, such concepts of quality became an economic pillar of production for goods and services (Chandrupathla, 2009). The quality movement spread to Great Britain where there was emphasis on product inspection (Chandrupathla, 2009) and manufacturers began to include quality processes in all aspects of human endeavour during the early twentieth century.

Following the Second World War the United States realised that quality had been a critical component of the war effort, as the armed forces were required to check and conform to military specification standards, and this spread into post war Japan. Japan had been strongly influenced by American ideas of quality but the country mainly focused on improving organisational processes (Levinson & Rerick, 2002).

Industrial sectors in the United States (e.g. automobiles and electronics), had been broadsided by Japan's high quality competition during the 1970s. The US response, emphasising not only statistics but approaches that embraced the entire organisation, became known as total quality management (Levinson & Rerick, 2002). During the latter part of the twentieth century quality was used globally by many business leaders, particularly in the United States. During this period quality had moved beyond manufacturing and management into different settings such as service, healthcare, education and government sectors (Chandrupathla, 2009). The functions of quality were demonstrated as control, assurance and to maintain standards of products

or services in order to set up efficient systems that increased business production, which is still the case today.

As a result, the history of quality concepts clearly demonstrates that the term 'quality' had been imported from the powerful industrial nations of Europe, the United States and Great Britain. The concept of quality is not an educational construction and the majority of these quality concepts are well established in the industrial West in management and economic settings. In fact, these concepts of quality have only started infiltrating the education field over the past thirty years (Chandrupathla, 2009). These circumstances have created awareness by educators of the reflex of hermeneutic quality. The knowledge of quality needs to be reconstructed and re-conceptualised appropriately for educational settings. Unavoidably, the concepts of quality need to be investigated within the domain of educational perspectives rather than business and engineering environments.

Concepts of Quality Early Childhood Education

As previously stated, economic constructions of quality have been impacting how we define the concept of quality in education. Whilst quality early childhood education remains a major concern globally there are increasing tensions between various definitions and methods (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fenech, 2011; Gullo, 2006; Huntsman, 2008; Jalongo et al., 2004; Logan & Sumsion, 2010; Myers, 2006; Poon, 2008; Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2013). Over recent decades, social constructs of quality early childhood education have resulted in various definitions with wide ranging views. These different views are the result of held beliefs, different discourses, philosophical thought, and different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Lambert et al., 2006; Rivalland, 2007). In spite of diverse concepts, much literature shows that the concepts of quality are still closely linked with modernist perspectives and situated within universal

paradigms. In the following section I provide further literature as a review of these criticisms within my early childhood education study.

Inherited quality from modernist perspectives and universal paradigms. Thus far, the majority of definitions of quality early childhood education are inherited from the past. They are situated within modernist perspectives that emphasise universal measurable outcomes of child development and learning (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2005; Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2003; UNESCO, 2004), educators' practice competence (Fenech et al., 2011), and achievement and standardisation embedded in a universal norm criterion (Espinosa, 2002; Hu & Li, 2012; Logan & Sumsion, 2010; Sheridan, 2001; UNESCO, 2004).

International research suggests that current social constructivist or social ideologist theories on quality early childhood education have been strongly influenced by the past and has focused on quantitative indicators. These have been based upon scientific positivism, standardised assessments and universal measurements, which have been widely implemented by various nations (ACECQA, 2009; Agbenyega, 2009; Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Chan, Lee, & Choy, 2009; Deynoot-Schaub & Riksen-Walraven, 2005; Fenech et al., 2011; Hu & Li, 2012; Lambert et al., 2006; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008; Poon, 2008; Rao & Li, 2009; Sheridan, 2001). Karoly, Zellman and Perlman (2013) addressed potential measurement errors with respect to the accuracy of scientific truth. This has led to an argument for increasing researchers' consideration and the rise of rigorous questioning regarding the reliability of specific observational measures used to assess classroom quality (Karoly et al., 2013). This highlights issues of accuracy and accountability associated with the instruments of data collection and subsequent findings during the scientific research process.

Even though the concept of quality is interpreted as "improving every aspect of education and ensuring their excellence ... recognized and measurable learning outcomes" (Dakar Framework, UNESCO, 2000, p. 17), there has been considerable research indicating trends of standardisation and universal norms which have been commonly applied within early childhood education institutions (Fenech, 2011; Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Halle & Vick, 2007; Huntsman, 2008; Lambert et al., 2006; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008).

In the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (2005) it is stated that:

Although there is no single definition of quality; two principles characterize most attempts to define quality in education: the first identifies learners' cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all educational systems; accordingly, the success with which systems achieve this is one indicator of their quality. The second emphasises an education's role in promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development. The achievement of these objectives is more difficult to assess and compare across countries (UNESCO, 2004, p. 17).

The concept of quality as expounded by UNESCO above focuses on children's cognitive development and the role of educators. It provides a clear understanding of 'process quality' dimensions which are situated within a vital position to construct the concept of quality. Examples include how children learn and receive knowledge, what activities support children's daily learning, and how educators' can scaffold children's knowledge which is an important role in quality practice in early childhood education. No matter how UNESCO defines quality in the EFA Report; this demonstrates an important point in that we would all find it challenging to assess a universal quality within different countries and nations.

This literature review has also shown that a number of critical scholars have contributed to the formation of new definitions of quality early childhood education.

Two important arguments proposed are: (1) providing different voices in defining the concept of quality, and (2) decontextualising the western dominance of the discourse of quality early childhood education (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fenech, 2011; Logan & Sumsion, 2010; Mac Naughton, 2005; Myers, 2006; Poon, 2008; Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2013). This has resulted in increased debate about quality early childhood education as to whether it should take a universal approach. This universal approach excluded a wide range of stakeholders such as children, educators and parents (Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2013).

Dahlberg et al. (2007) had rejected the universal approach of modernist perspectives and defined quality as needing to be located within an environment of diversity, subjectivity and multiple perspectives. Quality early childhood education would become vital, when educators reflected on their own experiences and constructed a new set of practices which contributed to benefits for all children (Sylva & Roberts, 2010).

Challenging the concept of quality from postmodern perspectives. Since the prevailing voices of many researchers and scholars have argued that modernist perspectives are derived from scientific positivism, there is a need for alternative perspectives and diverse orientations such as postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial, critical and anthropological views to refute quality as a unitary and narrow concept and that such positivist perspectives are one-sided and non-holistic (Costello, 2000; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Genishi et al., 2005; Giroux, 2010; Goodfellow, 2001; Hicks, 2004; Lobman, 2005; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008; Sumsion, 2005; Tobin, 2005). There is no doubt that considering quality of early childhood education within postmodern perspectives results in a drastic denial of universal, decontextualised and

external standardisations (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Goodfellow, 2001; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008; Tobin, 2005). Postmodern perspectives lead to contradictions and they are incompatible with modernist concepts of quality being universal and made up of standard norms. There have been alternative declarations and definitions by various researchers who state that it is necessary to re-conceptualise quality in terms of process and context rather than evaluating confirmative norms (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Goodfellow, 2001). Focusing on the "relative and subjective nature of quality requires definitions to be negotiated through a contextualized process of 'meaning making' in which all interested parties have a say" (UNESCO, 2006, p. 9). It is not hyperbole to argue that when conceptualising quality, individual beliefs and perceptions need to be explored.

In this context diverse approaches to quality elucidate the need to view quality in terms of culture and history (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Pearson, 2011; Tobin, 2005), as ecological (Deynoot-Schaub & Riksen-Walraven, 2005; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008), and as located within individual culture, values and beliefs (Clarke-Stewart, Lee, Allhusen, Kim, & McDowell, 2006; Grey, 1999). The alternative conceptualisations of quality can be noted within The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) Articles 29 and 30, which state that education is a strong aspect of human rights and freedom. Therefore it is imperative that the concept of quality education should comprise an individual child's cultural identity, religion, language and values. In fact, these concepts have called for policymakers, educationists, researchers and parents to deliberately re-conceptualise quality discourse through alternative or plural theoretical perspectives that are situated within a particular local context, culture and/or historical aspects (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fenech, 2011; Tobin, 2005).

In response to these arguments drawn from modernist and postmodernist perspectives in defining quality early childhood education, the implications lead to a fundamental question: what are the aims of early childhood education? This question would help educators to confirm and understand the direction for the achievement of quality early childhood education situated in their respective cultures and nations. Thus the aim of early childhood education is for educators to construct the important components contributing to children's quality learning and wellbeing.

Aims of Early Childhood Education

Ige (2011) argues that the word 'education' is not universally defined and we borrow this word from the Greek word 'educare' meaning 'knowledge' (p. 161). This can be perceived to have different meanings. For instance, the novice would refer to education as reading and writing. Education scholars, however, consider education to be wider in scope and include far more than simply reading and writing. Moss (2010) also adds that education is for democracy and for individual and collective sustainability. He pointed out that it is crucial to define the aim of education, as this would help us to be open to new thoughts and practices. There is constant exploration of classroom practice and the different ways in which these aims can be successfully pursued within diverse contexts (Moss, 2010).

There were various sources that discussed the aim of early childhood education (Anning, 2009; Dewey, 1961; Lloyd, 1983; Makiguchi, 2004). Dewey for example, , expressed in his book '*Democracy and Education'* (Dewey, 1961), that the application of rigid terms and aims in education settings should be avoided. As Dewey argued the 'aim' is always related to results and not the process, which often limits different possibilities of an outcome. In which case, the characteristics of aims in early childhood education denote "the result of any natural process brought to consciousness and made a

factor in determining present observation and choice of ways of acting" (p. 110). The main features Dewey identified were that aims must be firstly an "outgrowth of existing conditions", secondly be flexible and "capable of alteration to meet (different) circumstances" and lastly always "represent a freeing of activities" (pp. 104-105). All three features as a function of education are to "enable individuals to continue their education or that the object and rewards of learning are the continued capacity for growth" (Dewey, 1961, p. 100). The words continue, reward and growth were illustrated in understanding early childhood education experience for children to develop an attitude towards lifelong learning. The most important being pleasure and the rewards gained during the process of the learning experience.

Dewey's ideas on defining aims in education were reviewed because the progressive educational movements which sprang up in many countries in the first half of the twentieth century acknowledged their debt to Dewey (Pound, 2006). Dewey's concept fits well within postmodern perspectives in which there is no absolute truth in education practice. Like this study, the founder of Soka education, Makiguchi, is located within this conception. Makiguchi's (2004) application of his view is to create positive value in everyday life and, importantly, children's happiness. Anning (2009) also concurred with Dewey and Makiguchi's ideas: that education should be about process. However, she illustrated the influence education has on the extrinsic aims of early childhood education, having been constructed within traditional perspectives such as Piaget's theories of the stages of development in children (Anning, 2009; Pound, 2006). This explains the aim of education is to function as a universality and standardisation in which children grow in step by step based on various stages of development. Given the recent influence of sociocultural theory, the aims of education are to either develop children's learning ability through individual support or through adults or capable peers

(Dolya & Palmer, 2004; Edwards, 2010). Therefore education should include planning, implementation, reflection, re-planning and re-implemention. These will continuously change and shift due to influence from individuals' beliefs and values (Edwards, 2010). This creates an opening for me to explore the aims of early childhood education to define quality in different nations. Based on the above understanding, in the section below I have drawn on three dimensions.

Three Dimensions of Quality Early Childhood Education

There is a large body of research discussing quality dimensions frequently discussed within the context of western expectations and societies (Fenech, 2011; Fenech et al., 2011) and with universal connotations with disregard to traditions, values, cultures and characteristics of other nations (Rao & Li, 2009). For instance, within Anglo-Saxon heritage that early childhood education consists of two dimensions: structural quality and process quality. This has also impacted some Asian locations such as Hong Kong and Singapore. It is not intended here to compare western and Asian dimensions of quality, but instead to discuss global relevant literature to elucidate the elements of quality early childhood education, and to identify "distinguishing contexts from each other" (Gibbs, 2010, p. 11).

The literature focuses on variations in conceptualisations and terminology regarding quality dimensions (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Deynoot-Schaub & Riksen-Walraven, 2005; Fenech et al., 2011; Huntsman, 2008). In this review, three dimensions of quality early childhood education are provided: structural quality and process quality (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Deynoot-Schaub & Riksen-Walraven, 2005; Fenech et al., 2011; Huntsman, 2008; Tayler, Ishimine, Cloney, Cleveland, & Thorpe, 2013) and spirituality quality (Bone, Cullen, & Loveridge, 2007; Makiguchi, 2004; Mashford-Scott, Church, & Tayler, 2012; Snowman, 2009; Statham & Chase,

2010). This section not only shows my understanding of this topic but also foregrounded my investigation and argument in this study.

Dimension one – structural quality. Structural quality is defined as "aspects of the child care setting" (Huntsman, 2008 p. 3). Within western perspectives generally the elements of structural quality are related to policy, a safe and stimulating environment, low educator–child ratios, high educators' qualifications and professional development (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Espinosa, 2002; Fenech et al., 2011; Huntsman, 2008; Rao & Li, 2009). These structural elements represent the signposts for facilitating programs in various early education institutions (Burgess & Fleet, 2009; Espinosa, 2002; Fenech 2011; Podmore, 2009; Rao & Li, 2009).

Quality dimensions in kindergarten policy. The literature on policy mandates in education has always been a source of major debate in western societies (Tayler, 2011). However, over the past recent decades, a robust body of literature in kindergarten policy has been widely discussed and advocated by various Asian nation governments (Liu & Pan, 2013; Rao & Li, 2009). This could be due to the fact that numerous studies indicate a direct association between education policies and quality practice outcomes (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013). This has resulted in the idea that policy plays an important role and is constantly manifested within education institutions. Most commonly, policy choices vary across different policy makers including government and the management of education institutions. Examples of areas subject to debate in early childhood education include funding use, kindergarten and class size, class ratios, educator's salary, regulations, and teacher's professional development as well as classroom practice (e.g. teaching methods, curricular content, and student assessment).

Since policy makers need a broader perspective than just finance, they often ask important questions that relate to, for example, the value of kindergartens (Barnett,

2008). This would provide examples of early childhood policy which consequently made a positive impact on quality outcomes of education. For example, if the government allocated more funding into education institutions, perhaps kindergartens would hire better qualified teachers or institutions would seek to provide professional training for existing educators. This example illustrates a straightforward way to see how policy could impact the quality of education. However, policy makers are rarely so straightforward. Power relations, in other words 'politics' (Kincheloe, 1993), comes into play when making and implementing policy decisions. This argues from postmodernist perspectives that policy makers exercise a powerful role. After years of advocating for quality early childhood practice, government policies on education have come to "dominate teachers' professional landscapes, [thus] it is important to note that teachers are also decision makers on matters relating to educational policy" (Goldstein, 2008, p. 451).

Unfortunately, nowadays modernist perspectives also drive many government policies in attempting to lift standards and practices to assure quality early childhood education (Fenech, Giugni, & Bown, 2012). For instance, in Australia, the quality assurance documents used to guide early childhood educators and institutions were overseen by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA, 2009). This top-down policy making and regulation from such an authority focuses on Australia being "economically competitive in an increasingly globalised marketplace" (Pearson, 2011, p. 214). This means quality education becomes a tool to develop a satisfactory economic outcome for Australia's position in the global economic market. Notably, quality early childhood education places "continued reliance on regulatory reform in the absence of much needed structural policy can lead to cosmetic change and improvements" (Fenech et al., 2012, p. 12). Not surprisingly, the

concept of quality remains fragmented because the voices of children, parents and educators regarding policy and practices have been neglected (Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2013).

Mobilising for a vision beyond government or state, the voices of various stakeholders have a growing interest in influencing education policy, making it work and becoming more accountable for quality early childhood education. For instance, the Australian Education Union (newsletter) encourages all early childhood educators to voice their concerns to government. For example, Menz (2014) stated "sharing your story is so important, this is a chance for all of us to describe the important work we do and the factors that contribute to quality programs and outcomes for children and families" (p. 4). She continued "we must educate this government about the elements that make up a quality system and the resourcing that supports it" (p. 4). This would increase awareness of the diverse voices of children, families and educators, and how they influence education policy regarding the short- and long-term development of young children.

Quality dimensions in a safe and stimulating environment. Quality early learning environments are contingent on social constructivist perspectives and practices. In stimulating learning environments, children can develop physical, psychosocial and spiritual well-being (ACEI, 2006; Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Lambert et al., 2006; UNICEF, 2000). It is argued that a good structural environment enhances a child's sense of learning, belonging and wellbeing (ACEI, 2006). Such structural quality should include a stimulating, hygienic and safe educational environment, educator–child ratios and educator's qualifications as components of structural quality.

A recent study on preschool children's perspectives on structural elements in some Australian childcare centres suggest that children were able to develop a sense of

autonomy, feel a sense of safety and are active learners when the structural elements of their learning environments are relevant to their needs (Agbenyega, 2011). This implies that the quality of the environment should empower children to have opportunities to explore, play and practice life skills (ACEI, 2006; Theobald, Danby, & Ailwood, 2011).

In response, Sheridan (2000) argues that increasingly the literature is focusing on a high quality standard of materials and more physical space. However, at the same time there are evaluations and findings into the low quality of educators' pedagogy, interactions and relationships with children. This is reminiscent of the positive indicators shown in high structural quality environments and materials. There is no guarantee however that these resources constitute quality early childhood education settings (Sheridan, 2000). It is not surprising that educator's beliefs, values and interactions with children have become a crucial process in evaluating quality practice (Gregoriadis & Grammatikopoulos, 2014).

Quality dimensions in educator-child ratios and class size. Much literature has focused on the aspect of educator-child ratios and class size. It is documented that small class sizes appear to lead to positive outcomes in respect of educator-child relationships and educator's classroom practice (Espinosa, 2002; Gibbs, 2010; Goodfellow, 2001; Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2013; UNESCO, 2004). It has been argued that low educator-child ratios and small class sizes have been associated with quality learning, and therefore high educator-child ratios and large class sizes were considered to lead to poor quality (Gibbs, 2010; Huntsman, 2008; UNESCO, 2004). These perspectives have been challenged in a Grattan Institute report stating "nor do smaller class sizes guarantee good education outcomes" (Hall, 2012, para. 4). As previously stated in part A of this chapter, an anthropologist's perspective indicated that teacher-child ratios and class size

may not necessarily negatively impact children as there are other important influencing factors such as cultural values (Tobin, 2005).

As these perspectives have become significant regarding quality early childhood education, stakeholders are focusing their attention on alternative quality dimensions, to be discussed in more detail in Dimension two – Process Quality (pp. 76-80). These dimensions include educators' beliefs and practices (Agbenyega, 2012a; Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000; Daugherty, Fuligni, Howes, Karoly, & Lara-Cinisomo, 2009; Gibbs, 2010; Lau & Cheng, 2010; Makiguchi, 1989b; Rao & Li, 2009; UNESCO, 2004), and curriculum and pedagogy (Edwards, 2003; Edwards & Loveridge, 2011; Fleer, 2011; Rao & Li, 2009; Snowman, 2009).

Quality dimension pertaining to educators' qualifications and professional development. Educator qualifications and teacher training are found to have a significant influence on practice (Saracho & Spodek, 2006; Wood & Bennett, 2000). Educators play an important role in disseminating wider concerns in respect of educators' qualifications, experience and professional development (Berry, 2005). The requirement for early childhood educators to be properly qualified has increased over the past three decades (Chan et al., 2009; Ebbeck, Chan, & Yim, 2011; Huntsman, 2008; Podmore, 2009; Rao & Li, 2009). A number of researchers have found that educators' qualifications and experience are not necessarily linked to greater congruence in their classroom practice (Agbenyega, 2012a; Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000; Reynolds, 2007). Having educators with higher qualifications does not always relate to connectedness with quality practice (Agbenyega, 2012a; Reynolds, 2007).

In response to these criticisms various scholars have indicated a disconnection between educators' qualifications and practice, possibly due to educator's beliefs (Daugherty et al., 2009; Wood & Bennett, 2000), and curriculum and pedagogies

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constructed from their beliefs (Chan et al., 2009; Lau & Cheng, 2010; Rivalland, 2007). Another study found differences between experienced and newer educators and how these educators interact with people and their environments (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013). This could explain why experienced educators with less education make use of their previous teaching experience and communication skills to deliver their classroom practice. In addition, experienced educators also have higher expectations in respect of quality organisational policies, practices, and relationships which impact their practices (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013). On the other hand, newer, less experienced educators may seek to settle into their new position and institutional culture. This means they focus more on their own practices rather than developing positive interactions with other educators and their environments (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013).

Apart from the wider discussion on the importance of educators' qualifications the 'professionalism' of educators is also discussed in this section. Firstly, it is necessary to define the term 'professional' to help us understand what this means in an educational context. Moss (2010) argued the concept of professionalism in early childhood education often focuses on the scandalous low pay, working conditions or a professional body of knowledge. However, he also argues that professionalism refers to educators being able to "construct knowledge from diverse sources, involving awareness of paradigmatic plurality, curiosity and border crossing, and acknowledging that knowledge is always partial, perspectival and provisional" (Moss, 2010, p. 15). From this perspective, the concept of professionalism is not embodying or reproducing knowledge for children. Fenech, Sumsion and Shepherd (2010) supported Moss's view in that professionalism has been shaping educators' roles since professionalism has become a "technical standardized application of top-down, expert knowledge that meets objective accountability measures for the purpose of attaining optimal developmental

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outcomes for children" (p. 89) rather than educators themselves considering and developing an appreciation for diversity, choice and complexity.

In Australia, recent early childhood education reforms such as the Early Years Framework, the National Quality Framework, the National Quality Standard and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (DEEWR, 2009), focused on teacher's qualifications and made reference to educators as professionals. The Australian government made an investment of AUD $126.6 million to improve the quality of the early childhood workforce. This package also included an increase in the number of University early childhood teaching places and the removal of vocational training fees for childcare diplomas and advanced diplomas (Fenech et al., 2010). These upgrades in teacher's qualifications indicate future trajectories of quality early childhood education.

Many researchers advocate that educator's professionalism is an important contribution to quality teaching practice. A large body of research indicates that ongoing professional development is especially beneficial for early childhood educators with significant and positive effects on children's learning (Carrington et al., 2010; Saracho & Spodek, 2006; UNICEF, 2000; Wood & Bennett, 2000). Wood and Bennett (2000) state that "a high quality professional development course which supports the process of change in educators' thinking and practice at different career points" (2000, p. 646) has a better chance of success in improving early childhood education. This means a deeper understanding of the philosophy of teaching is rooted in ongoing educator development as an important element for quality early childhood education (Reynolds, 2007; Saracho & Spodek, 2006).

Dimension two – process quality. A succinct definition of process quality relates to "what actually happens in a child care setting" (Huntsman, 2008, p. 3).

Process quality has been of worldwide concern because this is a main factor that drives and achieves quality education (French et al., 2011). Previous studies have confirmed a majority of parents are concerned about process quality as they believe this is an important part of the early learning experience and children's future outcomes (da Silva & Wise, 2006; Fenech et al., 2011). A large number of studies have specifically focused on process quality factors which encompass educators' beliefs and practices, curriculum and pedagogy, and interactions between educators and children (ACEI, 2006; Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Fenech et al., 2011; Hativa, Barak, & Simhi, 2001; Huntsman, 2008; Tayler et al., 2013; UNESCO, 2006; Wood & Bennett, 1998).

Educator's epistemological beliefs and classroom practice. Beliefs and values held by educators about quality lead to a major impact and play a substantial role in the creation of quality early childhood education (Fleer, 2010; Grey, 1999; Leung, 2012; Logan & Sumsion 2010; Rivalland, 2007). Epistemology refers to "individual beliefs about the nature of knowing and knowledge" (Brownlee et al., 2011, p. 478). This means educators apply multidimensional perspectives based upon their beliefs and knowledge when defining quality (Brownlee et al., 2011; Maloney & Barblett, 2002). In this regard, to drive towards quality one should consider educator's multidimensional beliefs, their understanding of how they conceptualise quality and translate this into effective implementation (Brownlee et al., 2011; Daugherty et al., 2009; Ip & Ho, 2009; Rivalland, 2007; Wood & Bennett, 2000).

Educators' epistemological beliefs and values of quality early childhood education are influenced by social constructions including personal skills, social environments, professional experience, family and traditional cultural values, economic influences, mistake acquisitions during teaching experiences and internal and external expectations (Bae, 2009; Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000; Fang, 1996; Lau & Cheng, 2010;

Rivalland, 2007). Numerous studies have shown that many educators demonstrate incongruence between their beliefs and practices (Agbenyega 2012a; Brady, 2011; Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000; Fleer, 1995; Reynolds, 2007). Some educators rely heavily on either personal or professional experience and this may not always lead to best practice (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000). In a recent study by Agbenyega (2012a) it was argued that when early childhood educators base their teaching on established educational theories they are able to bring innovation to their practice in the classroom. This has been supported by Brownlee et al. (2011), whose research indicated that educators' beliefs are integrated with their knowledge. It can therefore be argued that educator's beliefs and values have a direct impact on their quality practice such as curriculum development and pedagogy (Agbenyega, 2012a; Brownlee et al., 2011; Leung, 2012; Rivalland, 2007).

Makiguchi (1930) posits that the Japanese education system, during a period when educators typically depended upon philosophy and psychological theories without any synthesis with their own teaching experiences, would not lead to quality (Bethel, 1989). Makiguchi encouraged educators to prioritise their daily practice and to reflect on the need to understand how to use research to inform such practice (Bethel, 1989), recognising that theory and practice are interrelated and overlap (Jalongo et al., 2004; Saracho & Spodek, 2006; Snowman, 2009).

Conversely, Agbenyega (2012a) argues that educational theories invoke educator's practices in the classroom. On the other hand, it is claimed that religious ideological beliefs strongly influence educators. Research conducted by Holloway (1999), for example, regarding the impact of religious beliefs in Japanese preschools interestingly showed a clear link between educators' religious beliefs and classroom practice. Religious beliefs are framed within different cultures and these may have a

strong influence on the educator's classroom practices. Individuals involved in the socialisation and education of young children are presumed to hold cultural models that guide their actions (Holloway, 1999). Various beliefs in different cultures provide new perspectives in quality early childhood education. Culture refers to "interactive knowing through which we construct relationships and interpret our surrounding world" (Adamson, 2012, p. 641), therefore culture is part of our knowledge and shapes our actions. This raises awareness of the implications of different spiritual thoughts of which very little research has been conducted, in particular across different nations.

Curriculum and pedagogy. The discourse of quality construction has been a guide for curriculum development and pedagogy in early childhood education (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2011). The term 'curriculum' had been interpreted to "describe any framework to support young children's learning ... and ensure that it is defined in ways that stress responsiveness to particular needs of children in the early years" (Duffy, 2010, p. 96).

This is illustrated, as an example, in the early childhood education curriculum framework in Hong Kong which refers to the notion of nurturing children's all-round development. This framework provides for a central vision to promote values in various aspects such as ethics, intellect, physique, social and aesthetics (Hong Kong Education Department, 2000). The quality early childhood curriculum has been influenced by social values and knowledge situated within different nations (Fleer, 2011).

On the other hand, Capel (2012) argues that curriculum in early childhood education can be implemented as a comprehensive guide and may lead to enhanced positive learning outcomes for children. Educators often assess children's skills collectively. Sadly, children who do not meet the standard are sometimes labeled as slow learners or with possible learning difficulties. The pressure on children to fulfill

such expectations may result in low self-esteem or losing interest in learning (Capel, 2012). Therefore, when educators implement a curriculum through their classroom practice they should pay particular attention to children's needs, skills and thoughts as well as contemporary changes in society.

To enhance the quality of pedagogy and curriculum in the classroom, Sheridan states, "the pedagogues must be aware of how changes in society as well as new theories of learning and development influence the content and working methods in their own practice" (2001, p. 9). Research shows that a quality curriculum and pedagogy can benefit children in later academic experiences (Jalongo et al., 2004) as well as cognitive and social development (Edwards, 2003; Saracho, 1991).

Educator-child and child-child interactions and relationships. Positive relationships with children can contribute to social, emotional and academic outcomes (Downer, Sabol, & Hamre, 2010; Ostrosky, Laumann, & Hsieh, 2006; Smidt, 2009; Thijs, Koomen, Roorda, & Hagen, 2011). Dunkin and Hanna (2001) elucidate that the interaction between educators and children can be classified into two categories. The first interaction is called 'surface interest' in which educators show limited interest and often use 'closed' questions. The second interaction is called 'genuine interest', in which adults extend the child's knowledge and often use 'open-ended' questions (Dunkin & Hanna, 2001).

Supportive and encouraging educator-child relationships can reduce the risk of a child failing at school and is correlated with successful schooling (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Similarly, positive relationships can contribute to children's cognitive, social and emotional outcomes (Gregoriadis & Grammatikopoulos, 2014; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Spilt, Koomen, & Mantzicopoulos, 2010). A recent study confirmed that interrelated educator-child relationships encourage the

child to actively participate and make active decisions, which is also an important element of quality early childhood education (Theobald et al., 2011). Rey, Smith, Yoon, Somers, and Barnett (2007) predicted that positive reinforcement for young children will lead to a greater interest and involvement in learning as well as resulting in better classroom compliance. Gregoriadis and Gramatikopoulos (2014) stated that close and positive relationships between educators and children can be viewed as secure and emotional support, especially for young children. Undoubtedly, the literature on quality educator-child relationships are correlated significantly to accomplishing quality early childhood education (Rey et al. 2007).

In contrast to this burgeoning literature, there have been very few studies which have explored interactions and relationships between children. For instance, Petriwskyj, Thorpe and Tayler (2005) argue that the importance of fostering friendships between children has immediate benefits in quality early childhood education, which create better long-term outcomes for children and their social relationships. A small body of intervention research also indicates that positive relationships in the classroom develop a "distinct and unique atmosphere" (Dennis & O'Conner, 2013, p. 75) and this is important for classroom quality and positive outcomes for children. Friendships provide social support and a sense of belonging which can support children's short- and long-term wellbeing (Danby, Thompson, Theobald, & Thorpe, 2012).

Dimension three – spirituality quality. During my literature review of quality early childhood education, the spiritual dimension often lacked discussion (Zhang, 2012). This could be because the concept of spirituality is obscure and constructed through multi-perspectives, which have different meanings (Bone et al., 2007). Nonetheless, spirituality is often linked to the religious search for meaning in life (Thomas & Lockwood, 2009; Zhang, 2012). Bailey (1971) argued that "the word

'spiritual' does not refer to religious matters, so-called. All activity which drives the human being forward towards some form of development – physical, emotional, mental, institutional, social – if it is in advance of his present state is essentially spiritual in nature and is indicative of the livingness of the inner divine entity" (1971, p. 1). The key element here reveals a new discussion regarding spiritual aspects which assists educators to move away from religious content and instead focus on self-improvement for an alternative life.

The argument of defining spirituality is also found in empirical studies. Zhang (2012) illustrated that spiritual quality can have a high impact on the development of one's self. In this context spirituality refers to the quality of human life in terms of "emotional and physical wellbeing, relationships and social inclusion" (Zhang, 2012, p. 39). He further argues that it is an important task for educators to foster children's wellbeing and bring out their potential. Zhang's argument is supported within the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) which uses the term 'holistic approaches' to argue that spiritual wellbeing is just as important as cognitive aspects of learning within early childhood education, and serves as an important principle for quality early childhood practice (DEEWR, 2009). This was also confirmed in a study conducted by Betawi (2013) in which the worldview of educators, within a spiritual quality such as social and emotional development, are critical elements contributing to quality practice.

Despite much talk about the wellbeing and self-development of children, the definition of spirituality conceptualised within Soka educational philosophy refers to humanist quality (Makiguchi, 1989a, 2004, 2006, 2010). Humanism emphasises the creation of wellbeing through the development of internal happiness. Within Soka philosophy humanism and spiritual quality consider that:

Recognising that all is change within a framework of interdependence, we see harmony and oneness as expressions of our interconnectedness. But we can even look at contradiction and conflict in the same way. Refusing to discriminate on the basis of stereotypes or imposed limitations, we can engage with the full force of our lives in the kind of dialogue that will transform even conflict into positive connection. It is in this challenge that the true contribution of a Buddhist-based humanism is to be found (Ikeda, 2005, p.10).

This quote indicates how Soka considers not only *what* happiness and wellbeing is but also *how* these components are created. Soka philosophy argues that the process of building relationships and interactions with others ultimately leads to wellbeing of oneself as well as the wider community. Positive relationships between educators and children would increase the child's sense of security. When children feel respected and valued their self-confidence as well as social and emotional wellbeing are fostered (Owens, 2012). I view humanism as a complex concept which cannot be simply discussed in isolation. This is to say how each person interacts with others and the environment creates wellbeing in daily life.

I now turn to the literature associated with three inconspicuous aspects of early childhood education: wellbeing, happiness and humanity.

Wellbeing. The importance of children's wellbeing is undisputed and fundamentally connected to quality early childhood education (Mashford-Scott et al., 2012). However, there is a vague and multi-dimensional perspective to what constitutes childhood wellbeing. In an educational context the domains of wellbeing consolidate the integration of physical, emotional, social, cognitive, educational/intellectual (Moore et al., 2011), health and safety. It is widely acknowledged that a strong sense of wellbeing enables children to "engage positively and confidently with their environment and therefore take full advantage of learning opportunities" (Mashford-Scott et al., 2012, p. 233). Indeed wellbeing is defined as "the quality of people's lives, it is a dynamic state

that is enhanced when people can fulfil their personal and social goals" (Statham & Chase, 2010, p. 2). This may include how a person's engagement and involvement in daily life lead to positive relationships with others and show flexibility in coping with various situations. In an educational context it is recognised that wellbeing affects children's learning, attitudes, behaviours and development (Mashford-Scott et al., 2012).

Positive educator-child relationships are viewed as an important component in the construction of general wellbeing in classroom and other educational settings. While educators may show support and care for children, they also feel respected and valued. This fosters a sense of self-confidence and inclusion. Owens (2012) argues that "children who become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing are resilient and confident learners" (p. 2). Thus they are able to deal with difficulties and feel good about themselves. The happiness of children is fostered by this positive relationship. In the next section, the concept of happiness is drawn from Soka philosophy which focuses on psychological (inner-self) wellbeing. This means that happiness is generally gained from oneself and not simply from external forces or other people.

Happiness. Happiness is a mental or emotional state of wellbeing characterised by positive, pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. Happiness is a concept that can mean many things to many people. Part of the challenge related to the science of happiness is to identify different concepts of happiness and where applicable split them into individual components. Related concepts include wellbeing, quality of life and being able to flourish. Deci and Ryan (2008) illustrated the differences between the hedonistic tradition of seeking pleasure and avoiding unpleasant experiences and the "eudaimonia tradition of living life in a full and deeply satisfying way" (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 1). Eudaimonia refers to a contented state of being happy, healthy and

prosperous. A study by Holder and Coleman (2009) argued that social relationships can affect children's happiness. This includes children's peers, friends, family and others. For example, how children receive verbal, physical support and positive reinforcement impacts their level of happiness. In this sense, positive social relationships may increase children's happiness.

In contrast, Eaude (2009) argued that an important aspect of happiness "is an active state, not simply the absence of pain" (p. 186). That is to say the process to achieve happiness is to face challenges. For example, we may be happy when we achieve our goals but unhappy about how we struggled to achieve this level of happiness.

Makiguchi elucidated that happiness was "not just for basic needs and security, but for everything that constitutes happiness" (Bethel, 1989, p. 5). This happiness is not just about external causes but internal causes such as personal satisfaction or self-actualisation (based upon Maslow's hierarchy theory), which include children's achievements, successes, facing challenges and confidence (Bethel, 1989; Makiguchi, 2004; Snowman, 2009). Theorising from a postmodern perspective, it can be argued there is no universal truth regarding what constitutes happiness (Foucault, 2003b), and this uncertainty has led to negative impacts for society as a whole. Makiguchi explained, "true happiness comes only through sharing in the trials and successes of other people and of our community; hence it is essential that any true conception of happiness contains the promise of full commitment to the life of the society" (1989a, pp. 24-25).

Humanism. A humanist quality and approach to confronting the problems of mankind is very complex. Working with humanist perspectives educators have to reflect on their teaching with diverse possibilities in mind, and this process of reflection may

influence their beliefs and practice (Makiguchi, 2010; UNESCO, 2004). To support the concept of humanist views of education, educators should encourage children to develop various approaches toward acquiring skills, knowledge and values, a sense of responsibility, and to strive to become an active and productive citizen (Makiguchi, 2004, 2010; UNESCO, 2004).

Makiguchi (1989a, 2004, 2006, 2010) emphasised that quality of education should be embedded in humanity in order to enhance happiness and values in society. With this philosophy education focuses on the primacy of the child and not simply fulfilling the needs of authority, commerce, and educators' or parents' expectations and demands.

Another related concept to humanism is value creation. The fundamental criterion of value is "whether something adds to or detracts from advances or hinders the human condition with its emphasis on manifesting one's innate human dignity amidst the challenges of everyday life" (Ikeda, 2010, pp. 16-17).

Makiguchi (1930) implores us to

… begin with the recognition that humans cannot create matter. We can, however, create value. Creating value is, in fact, our very humanity. When we praise people for their 'strength of character', we are really acknowledging their superior ability to create value (cited in Bethel, 1989, pp. 5-6).

The significance of humanist quality education is when educators have to set goals regardless of specific educational needs, and adopt the concept of applied science to logical thinking, planning carefully, observing others' experience, adopting self-reflection, and being in synchrony with one's beliefs in order to demonstrate creative action through daily practice (Makiguchi, 1989c, 2006). This correlated relationship is one of the key concepts in the philosophy of value creation for education (Makiguchi, 2006). Therefore quality based on humanism is potentially an important dimension in

which educators beliefs and practices are based on children's individual needs and thus educators will "value children as human beings with their own rights and responsibilities" (Snowman, 2009, p. 401).

Benefits of Quality Early Learning Experience

Quality early childhood education is not a new concept; many countries and nations have been aware of its importance for individuals, socially and globally. Numerous international studies confirm that the quality of the early learning experience impacts all children in later life (Campbell et al., 2008; Huntsman, 2008; Sheridan, 2001; Siraj-Blatchford, 2008; UNESCO, 2004). Therefore, this section not only provided discussion concerning economic, political and personal benefits but also the possibilities for contributions in dealing with some social problems such as bullying or self-harm. Importantly, quality early learning experience may empower children to become global citizens (Ikeda, 2010). This alternative world view could accompany social changes which are ongoing and have shifted the perspective on what aspects construct and understanding of early childhood education.

Economic and political benefits. The impact of global changes on economic structures has led to both parents entering the workforce and consequently many children are cared for in early childhood institutions (Azzi-Lessing, 2009; Chesky, 2011; Farran & Hofer, 2013; Newport, 2000; Shirakawa, 2009; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). The subsequent increase in the number of childcare centres requires quality measures to provide a higher level of education which positively impacts children's learning and development (Yamamoto & Li, 2012). A longitudinal study (Campbell et al., 2008) confirms that high quality child care can have long-term effects on children's cognitive and social development. In fact those children who spend more time in quality preschool programs often graduate from university, become employed and are

less likely to require public welfare assistance. There is evidence of a link between quality education and economic impacts, da Silva and Wise (2006) and parents may have concerns that their children are able to receive quality early childhood education. This is one of the reasons why parents are willing to enter the workforce. The study also highlights that quality education may reduce parental anxiety and concerns at work.

In recent years, a number of governments have prioritised quality education in order to secure social investment by developing human capital (PWC, 2011). For example, in early 1998 the Education Bureau, government of Hong Kong, allocated HK$5 billion (approximately AUD $600 million) of quality education funds to support early childhood, primary, secondary and special education, to boost long-term economic performance (Fung, 2001).

Galinsky's report '*The economic benefits of high-quality early childhood program*' noted that children who participate in quality education programs benefit in terms of "higher scores on tests of reading and mathematics, less grade retention, fewer placements in special education, [and] higher education attainment" (2006, p. 4). In addition, some quality early childhood programs are also associated with reductions in crime and delinquency in childhood and adulthood (Barnett, 2008). Importantly, these programs increase the possibility of achieving successful in life.

Benefits to educators and children. As noted above, quality early childhood education has long-term positive benefits until late adolescence or early adulthood such as obtaining education beyond high school, better employment opportunities, and they are more likely to have an active and healthy lifestyle (Barnett, 2008; Campbell et al., 2008; Clark & Stroud, 2002; Lee, Drake, Pennucci, Bjornstad, & Edovald, 2012). Evidence of social, behavioural and cognitive development that relates to quality preschool education can be found in the Effective Provision of Pre-school

Education (EPPE) project in the United Kingdom. EPPE found that children by age 7 years' old have different scores in literature results between those who attended a quality preschool and those who did not (PWC, 2011). It was noted that the children who experienced quality preschool had a higher score in social, behavioural and cognitive development. In addition, high quality in the 'care-oriented' component of the preschool contributed to significant gains in social and behavioral development (PWC, 2011).

These findings not only showed close inter-relational links between quality early childhood education and how this impacts children, but important elements regarding holistic quality early childhood education.

Indeed, in quality early childhood programs a positive relationship is to be found between teachers, parents and children. A successful relationship means that teachers continue to improve their skills by understanding that children have diverse cultural backgrounds. The benefits for teachers in the implementation of quality early childhood classroom practices could impact their individual development. This may include fostering a sense of respect, developing multi-perspectives, improving observation and communication skills (Alsup, 2006). By constantly practising the discourse of quality in the classroom, early childhood educators can ensure and enhance their identity and professionalism as well as fulfill their self-satisfaction or self-actualisation (Chong & Low, 2009).

Benefits for contemporary society. Currently, the world is facing complex social issues such as inequality, injustice, racial/ethnic conflict and health, so to understand the interrelations between quality education and social issues are significant. In fact, social problems were found to impact children in their daily life. For example, bullying has become an issue of concern in many countries. A survey in

school bullying conducted in 2010 by the Foundation for Preventing Youth Violence, indicated that 20% to 30% of victims have suicidal tendencies due to bullying (Lee, 2012). Another large-scale survey report indicated that 9% to 32% of children had been bullied in school, and the bullying rate was 3% to 27% (Stassen Berger, 2007, cited by James, 2010). In Australia, one in four school children from years 4 to 9 have reported they are regularly bullied (McDougall, 2013). These statistics may only be the tip of the 'iceberg', relative to the real situation. Since some participants did not disclose their experience of being bullied and/or did not participant in this survey, the actual number of victims might be more than we can imagine. Governments and schools firstly provide practical understanding on the part of educators, parents and children as to how to address bullying incidents in school, rather than anti-bullying policy such as 'school-wide awareness' 'adult monitoring', 'anti-bullying strategies' 'reduce less-supervised time', and 'zero tolerance' implemented in many schools (Lee, 2012; McDougall, 2013; Sampson, 2002). However, these responses to bullying in schools only deal with the surface problem without treating the underlying cause. The failure to prevent bullying creates parental frustration and loss of confidence in schooling, because the school should provide a safe and secure environment for all children (McDougall, 2013).

To deal with the complicated issue of bullying, quality education can impact on how children manage relationships with others as well as a focus on children's personal development. For example, Soka philosophy focuses on humanist education which emphasises the importance of children having a sense of respect for the dignity of life, and raising self-reliant human beings who can create value in their own lives and in society (Soka Gakuen Educational Foundation 2009; Soka University, 2009). Ikeda, a Soka philosopher supports humanist education, which is a crucial component for long lasting and far-reaching personal growth (Ikeda Center, 2014). If Makiguchi and Ikeda's

ideas of humanistic education can develop a person with a sense of respect, compassion, appreciation, caring for others, wisdom for dealing with problems and the spirit of never giving up, the bullying problems might finally be resolved. Since there is limited literature regarding quality early childhood education and social issues, this illustrates a gap in which this research has an important role in the exploration of alternative perspectives when viewing different social issues.

> A quality education helps reduce poverty and enables individual and collective empowerment, social cohesion, peace and human development. A quality school respects the rights of the child, does not exclude, provides education that is free, compulsory and accessible, and sees diversity as an opportunity, not a problem. An early childhood education of quality gives children an equal start and allow them succeed in later stages of education. Children have the right to learn from the very beginning. (UNESCO, 2015, para. 6)

The value of quality education should also focus on individual personal development as well as the sense of mission to create happiness, peaceful and inclusive society. The significance of quality early childhood education can be summarised as "better education contributes to national lifetime earnings and more robust national economic growth and helps individuals make more informed choices about fertility and other matters important to their welfare" (UNESCO, 2004, p. 2). In addition, Barnett (2008) draws his research findings and argues that his quality early childhood programs are associated with reduced delinquency and crime during childhood extending into adulthood.

Barriers to Quality Early Childhood Education

This section will provide an overview of the challenges and barriers facing contemporary early childhood education, as highlighted by previous studies.

Genealogical barriers to education and care. Increasing levels of parental employment result in increased demand for various early childhood services such as kindergartens, day care centres and crèches to cater for the needs of individual families. The tension between education and child care are often separated across provisions for young children. Day care, child care and crèche facilities are often associated with care and traditionally required a more paramedical or social care orientation, whereas kindergartens are more educational in orientation (Farren & Hofer, 2013). While education and care are important during early learning collaboration provides holistic development within early childhood education. The term 'educare' is widely used in the United States. Educare is located somewhere between education and care. Smith for example illustrated that "quality care is educational and quality education is caring" (1996, p. 330).

Systemic barriers. Jones (2011) and Pugh (2010) argue that a successful policy framework has to provide long-term vision, a big picture and clear directions to develop quality early childhood education. If the vision is arbitrary it can be problematic for childcare centre management and educators to implement quality into early childhood practice. *Global guidelines for early childhood education and care in the 21st century* suggested that policies regarding quality early childhood education should be clear, legislatively identifiable and allow all stakeholders to become involved (ACEI, 2006). The concept of quality also needs to correlate within "political, cultural and economic contexts" (UNICEF, 2000, p. 4).

Various international studies have shown that one of the key barriers to quality for early childhood education is that current concepts of quality are embedded within modernist perspectives (Buysse et al., 1999; Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fenech, 2011; Huntsman, 2008; Lambert et al., 2006; Rao & Li, 2009).

Logan and Sumsion (2010) elucidate in their study that the majority of stakeholder perspectives on quality have been constructed within a modernist world, which is dominated by standards and regulatory perspectives. This study posits that these modernist views tend to focus on the current policy climate of quality early childhood education applicable at the time. This is where tensions and dilemmas regarding quality are typically found within quantitative indicators based upon universal and standardised measurements (Buysse et al., 1999; Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Fenech, 2011; Huntsman, 2008; Lambert et al., 2006; Rao & Li, 2009).

These deep-rooted modernist perspectives create difficulties for society and various stakeholders in early childhood education and call for a shift from a standardisation mindset to utilising new multi-logical perspectives resulting in uncertainty, cultural diversity, local context and non-linearity (da Silva & Wise, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rao & Li, 2009; Usakli, 2010). To provide alternative perspectives there are new policy directions for quality early childhood education applied in many national educational polices. For example, the Australian government's introduction of a National Quality Agenda which includes an Early Years Learning Framework (Ishimine et al., 2010). The British government published a green paper titled *Every child matters* in 2003 to support the quality of early childhood education (Department for Education and Skills, 2003). Pre-primary education policy highlights in Hong Kong aim to promote the development of quality early childhood education (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2006). The challenge of how early childhood educators and institutional management will shift from a modernist perspective to other alternative and diverse perspectives has become a vital concern.

Conceptual and pedagogical barriers. Another barrier is related to actual classroom practice and how educators conceptualise the discourse of quality,

which subsequently influences their planning, teaching and assessment. Research has shown that educators' lack of correlation between theory and practice also leads to difficulties in promoting quality early childhood education (Agbenyega, 2012a; Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000; Fleer, 1995; Makiguchi, 1989a; Reynolds, 2007). Educators may embed their own values in their classrooms and neglect other teaching theories (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000), or alternatively focus on educational theory and neglect classroom practice or teaching experience.

Several researchers raise the relevance of ecologic (Fenech, 2011) and humanism (Goodfellow, 2001; Ikeda, 2010) approaches in order to transform educators' monological concepts of quality (VanderVen, 2000). It appears there is a lack of research in respect of parental expectations of quality early childhood education (da Silva & Wisa, 2006). Such parental attitudes may also be a substantial barrier to quality early childhood education (da Silva & Wisa, 2006). da Silva and Wisa's (2006) study indicates differences in cultural parental perceptions of quality in child care. The findings indicated that parents have various expectations regarding the characteristics that constitute quality early childhood education. This may be caused by cultural perspectives and parental influences, expectations and demands typically found in most Asian countries. These countries are fiercely competitive societies, leading some parents to be primarily concerned with academic results to equip their child to succeed in this social environment. Such parental expectations will significantly influence both educators and institutions and subsequently impact how quality early childhood education is viewed in such societies. This in turn impacts teaching theory, classroom practice as well as pedagogy.

As stated previously, defining quality early childhood education can be subjective and diverse. For example, Sheridan (2001) conducted research into the difference between external and self-evaluation of quality.

Educators' perspectives. Educator's perspectives of early childhood education can potentially create barriers to achieving quality education. Traditional views regarding children in particular would impact their quality educator-child relationship as well as influence classroom practice. Tang (2006) argued that the Chinese traditional view of children considers them as "private property attached to the family" (p. 342) and therefore certain behaviour is expected. As I mentioned in Chapter One, the Confucian concept of children required them to be obedient and subordinate to educators, teaching and textbook. This means that the interests and potential of children in learning were inhibited. In addition, based on those cultural constructions regarding children's learning, this may influence how educators view children (Tang, 2006). For instance, there are wide differences in cases where educators view children as active or dependent learners. This perspective can be directly implemented by educators in their classroom practice and curriculum. Barriers may be created where there is a gap between early childhood educator's knowledge in respect of how children learn and applying actual knowledge into daily classroom practice (Tang, 2006).

Chapter Conclusion

This literature review has provided an overview of the historical background, context, current provisions and issues of quality early childhood education. There are some conflicting arguments and challenges that confront contemporary quality within early childhood education practice.

Firstly, there has been a large volume of research conducted on single nations. This has resulted in narrow and one-sided perspectives which do not allow us to

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understand how quality can be conceptualised within other nations, cultures and models (Costello, 2000; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Genishi et al., 2005; Giroux, 2010; Goodfellow, 2001; Hicks, 2004; Lobman, 2005; Sumsion, 2005; Tobin, 2005). This demonstrates the tensions of power relations of universal truth and knowledge being constructed within particular groups or nations (Cannella, 1998) through defining what is good or inferior in early childhood education practices within certain cultures (Graham, 2005; Hicks, 2004).

Secondly, the methodology frequently used to explore quality had previously focused on scientific positivism and universal norms or standards. The rationale for these quality norms and standards is situated within particular cultures and ethnicities (Fenech, 2011). Therefore, a postmodern lens was used during this study to create openness to new interpretations and new configurations of quality (Sumsion, 2005). This highlights the benefits of this study, which is of significant value in its contribution to the exploration of quality through providing multiple early childhood educational perspectives from East Asian countries.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Epistemological Basis of My Research

All good research is informed by certain theoretical and methodological decisions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2012). In this chapter, I present and discuss the research methodology, theory (ies), principles and epistemological traditions that have guided my data generation and analysis choices. The methodological considerations play an important role in ensuring that the data collected can accomplish my research goals. By applying theoretical and epistemological lenses, clear justification was provided for the assumptions used in respect of reality and human knowledge, and how my epistemological position shaped the beliefs and assumptions underlying the research methodology.

The objectives of this chapter are: (1) discuss the theoretical and epistemological grounding of the methodology (2) explain how the qualitative multisite case study design and method was implemented during this research and justification for its use, (3) explain the data generation process and analysis, (4) identify my role as a researcher, (5) discuss the validity and reliability issues of this qualitative research, and (6) discuss the ethical issues that have arisen as a result of this research.

Grounding this study in postmodern epistemology. In this study, I have adopted a qualitative interpretive methodology, informed by postmodern theoretical perspectives. The specific selection of postmodern theoretical perspectives was based on the purpose of this study and the nature of the research questions which were aimed at providing alternative and multiple understandings of the concept of quality early childhood education. Postmodern thinkers and writers often argue that science, studies of human nature and behaviours cannot be value free and what counts

as truth is multiple and not universal, as claimed by scientific positivism (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Genishi et al., 2005; Giroux, 2010; Sumsion, 2005). With reference to the construct of 'the quality of early childhood education', at the heart of this study, postmodern scholars may argue that this is a subjective value laden discourse framed by various human ontologies and epistemologies within various cultures and nations through historical periods (Hicks, 2004; Tobin, 2005). In view of this stance the quality of early childhood education should not be universally quantified.

Foucault (1980a), a prominent postmodern thinker, theorised that human thinking and actions are framed by discourse, power and particular knowledge systems across time and place. His ideas are powerful for theorising and investigating various constructs of quality in-depth, by exploring human thinking and actions that have constituted the framing of such an educational construct. As personal values, individual thoughts and diverse views are implicated in the ways we view quality, the employment of an interpretive research approach will strengthen the application of postmodern theory and its contribution to this research.

In the next section, I have discussed how an interpretive research strategy has helped me to investigate and analyze human discourse and beliefs in real-life situations.

Situating this study from an interpretive approach. As previously mentioned, an interpretive approach crystallises a rich intellectual space for interrogating, understanding and explaining what we know within multiple and diverse perspectives. It is argued that an interpretive research approach is a generic term referring to qualitative research that is significant in the study of human experiences and social life (Ary et al., 2010; Cohn & Lyons, 2003; Gay et al., 2009). This approach allows me to explore the concept of quality as practiced in Soka contemporary ideologies in-depth and within a real-life context (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2009). In order

to understand how the quality of early childhood education is conceptualised and practised, an interpretive researcher must explore the beliefs and values informing how research participants ascribe meaning to their actions (Creswell, 2012; Myers, 1997).

Every concept as a human construction is unique in the way it is understood and applied. Radnor (2001) argued that the uniqueness of human inquiry refers to individual people's views and actions based upon their own interpretation of their personal experiences. People create and associate their own subjective and inter-subjective meanings when they interact and interpret the world around them. From my own understanding, subjective constructs originate from a person's knowledge as socialised through various ways which have influenced that person's view of the world. These constructs subsequently form the foundation of their thoughts and actions (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). At another level, the inter-subjective yields attributes of a person's agreement with ideas which are created through shared common concepts with others (Radnor, 2001). At the same time, people's views and actions contribute to the construction of a societal discourse, values and culture (Mac Naughton, Rolfe, & Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). By interpreting the different beliefs of people and groups, one can contribute to the collection, analysis and interpretation of human thoughts to gain insight and appropriate meaning to their behaviours or words (Creswell, 2012; Gay et al., 2009; Yin, 2009). In this way, an interpretive approach is a possible way to engage critically with teachers' beliefs, values and thoughts to understand how they appropriate meanings to quality early childhood education that are built on Soka principles.

Qualitative approach utilised for this research. This study adopted a qualitative approach informed by interpretive epistemology as discussed in the previous section. The adoption of a qualitative approach allowed me to explore the research problems and gain an understanding of human actions informed by ideological thinking

(Soka ideologies). I found that this approach assisted me in exploring and investigating the research problems which relied on the view that participants and the researcher's role is to co-develop a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). With this in mind, I stated the research questions and the purpose with a view to answering these questions by collecting and analysing various data.

As a qualitative researcher I was involved in the simultaneous generation of a range of data over a period of time in a naturalistic setting, instead of a controlled environment (Gay et al., 2009). In this way, data analysis involved reflection and obtaining an understanding of language and actions of participants to provide meaning and an explanation for the study (Ary et al., 2010). The process I adopted was informative, by considering the findings based on connections and common aspects leading to the creation of patterns whilst I analysed the data. I found interpretation of qualities within the data to be difficult, because there are no set rules or analysis models as guidance for qualitative research. However, I was guided by Ary et al. (2010) who argued that the quality of interpretation depends largely upon the "background, perspective, knowledge and theoretical orientation of the researcher and the intellectual skills he or she brings to the task" (p. 490).

There are several justifications as to why I used qualitative interpretive methodology to investigate quality early childhood education within diverse cultures and nations. Firstly, qualitative research methodology provides researchers with an opportunity to state the research question(s) in a general and broad way to incorporate participants' experience. Secondly, the selected methods of data generation led to insider perspectives. Thirdly, this methodology is appropriate for analyzing data for subsequent description and discovery of themes and interpreting complex meanings from findings.

Postmodern theories provide a comprehensive conceptual understanding of complex phenomena (Reeves, Albert, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). In this study, I drew on postmodern theoretical concepts of discourse, power and knowledge to better understand how educators constructed their dispositional and occurrent beliefs in relation to the quality of early childhood education, and how these impacted their practices. Dispositional beliefs are those stored in memory and require recall to be activated (Rose & Schaffer, 2013). In contrast, occurrent beliefs are those that are currently being considered. Postmodern theory also provides a lens for me to explore how power relations produce particular knowledge within classroom practice (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

Research Design

Multisite case study design and method. Various case studies have been widely used to explore education settings (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). To some extent, there has always been discussion and debate regarding the case study approach and its reliability and application for research in education. The research literature pointed to some traditional prejudices levelled at the case study method. Firstly, some critics noted that this method does not follow any systematic procedure which may lead to possible bias during data generation and interpretation (Creswell, 2012). Secondly, it is also argued that the research findings may be influenced by equivocal evidence and tend to draw definite cause–effect conclusions (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2003). In spite of these criticisms, I have chosen to use a case study approach based on Stenhouse (1978) and Yin's (2003, 2009) argument, that case studies allow researchers to import various verification data to capture complex or rare phenomena through in-depth investigation within real-life contexts. This view is reiterated by other researchers in that case study method provides a good understanding about behaviour in

complex education settings and education issues (Creswell, 2012; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Merriam, 1988).

I am convinced that the flexibility of the case study approach allows for its application in single or multiple settings, to contribute to knowledge of a single subject or multiple subjects of an individual, group, organisation or events (Gay et al., 2009; Yin, 2003, 2009). A unique strength of the case study method is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence (Yin, 2003). In this particular work, a case study approach provided the space for detailed descriptions of the research context of teaching and learning. In addition, it offered ample opportunities to investigate the concept of quality early childhood education through a variety of lenses, which allowed for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Yin (2009) has identified three approaches to case study: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. An exploratory case study can allow a researcher to look for general patterns within a range of various research data collected. For example, for this research, I collected the data first, followed by making sense of the data in relation to associated empirical and theoretical literature. Second, descriptive case studies focus on the link between phenomena and theory to investigate and discover key constructs embedded in the phenomenon. Thirdly, explanatory case studies are situated within exploratory and descriptive elements and can be extended in order to determine a specific problem associated with the study (Yin, 2003, 2009) such as why or how something happens.

Merriam (1988), on the other hand, classified a case study as particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. A particularistic study focuses on a particular individual, group, event or specific phenomenon such as practical problems or everyday practice (Merriam, 1988). Descriptive provides a thick description and aids the investigation of

complex situations to consider various factors to understand the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988). Heuristic refers to a greater understanding of a case study through individual discovery and investigation as well as explaining the reasons for a problem in the study. After obtaining an understanding of the different characteristics of case study approaches, I became aware of the need to not only apply a particular single approach, but that approaches need to be interconnected with the research theory and research questions. The main purpose of this study is to explore Soka philosophy as well as to provide different sources of data to investigate the complex relationship between educators' discourse and practice.

Justification for using the multisite case study. In educational research it is common to find case study research undertaken about the same phenomenon but within multiple sites (Gay et al., 2009). Therefore, the use of multiple case studies in educational research is a common strategy for improving external validity or generalisability of the research. The use of multisite case studies allowed me to provide an analytic induction approach to collecting and analysing data, and in the development of a descriptive model that encompasses all cases of the phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

I used multisite case studies in this research due to the fact there is only one Soka kindergarten in each of the selected countries. These three Soka kindergartens were selected as the Soka model is not well known within the western education field. A single site account would not provide satisfactory evidence to support the purpose of this study. In addition, a benefit of using a multisite case study is that it provides an opportunity to examine how the phenomenon is manifested in different environments (Stake, 2006) and within a diversity of contexts.

Research questions. The following research questions are synthesised for the purpose of this research and guided my investigation.

Main research question

What conceptions of *quality early childhood education* are held by kindergarten educators working in the Soka education model and how do these conceptions influence practice?

Sub-questions:

- What is the nature of the practice of educators working in the early childhood Soka education model?

- What are the professional needs of early childhood educators working in the Soka education model?

- What lessons from the data on the Soka model are pivotal to children's quality learning and development that can be used to enhance quality early childhood practices in other contexts?

Research participants. Three Soka kindergartens located in Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore were invited to participate in this multisite case study. The participating kindergartens were all privately owned and financially subsidised by their local governments. Surprisingly, these Soka kindergartens were all independent with no religious teachings in the syllabus including Buddhism in which Soka was grounded. The philosophies of the three kindergartens are all based on the Soka philosophy but their educational practices catered to local cultures and local government regulations.

Initially, I invited participants through contact with Soka Gakkai International (SGI) Tokyo Headquarters by email and telephone to express interest in conducting the study in these three kindergartens. I also explained the purpose and process of the

research during an initial email and follow-up telephone contact with SGI. However, I was also requested to provide further information directly to Soka kindergartens in Sapporo, Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore respectively. Based on this request; I sent explanatory statements and consent forms to SGI Tokyo Headquarters and to the three Soka kindergartens outlining relevant information in respect of the study, as well as my research proposal for their consideration. Within two weeks I received an approval document for this study granted by SGI Tokyo Headquarters and the principals of all three Soka kindergartens. Upon receiving approval to recruit interested participants, the three kindergarten principals displayed flyers containing details of the study and brief personal information about myself on noticeboards at each kindergarten in order to seek potential participants. Interested participants then contacted me with their signed consent forms through the address provided in the flyers.

Participants at the first site, in Sapporo, Japan, included two principals and four educators all currently working at the Sapporo Soka kindergarten. There was also one parent participant who worked at the kindergarten as support staff. The second site in Hong Kong included one principal and two educators currently working at the Hong Kong Soka kindergarten and six parents' whose children were studying or had graduated from the kindergarten. The third site in Singapore included one principal and two educators currently working at the kindergarten and six parents with children who were all current students at the Singapore Soka kindergarten. Table 3.1 provides information regarding participants at all three Soka kindergartens.

Table 3.1

Information regarding participants at research sites

Soka kindergarten	Participants
Japan	2 principals, 4 educators, 1 parent
Hong Kong	1 principal, 2 educators, 6 parents
Singapore	1 principal, 2 educators, 6 parents

Entering the research sites and conducting field work. The ethical application with support documentation was submitted to the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) on research involving human participants for approval before the commencement of study. Approval confirmation was received before proceeding with the field work phase.

Three months prior to departure to conduct the field work, formal approval from SGI headquarters was obtained, and participants were recruited. The recruitment process for participants at each kindergarten has been explained in the previous section. After recruiting participants at the three kindergartens I contacted principals at two kindergartens (the Sapporo kindergarten was contacted through SGI headquarters) to arrange a date and time to conduct interviews and classroom observation. I was mindful of the importance of flexibility in respect of the timing of appointments, which were centred on the convenience of each kindergarten and I adjusted my travel arrangements accordingly. I collected the data intensively over a four-week period covering three sites.

Japan Soka institutions and the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten. Japan was chosen as the first study site to initially investigate the Soka philosophy to gain a better

understanding of Soka education. In order to make sense of Soka philosophy, I visited Soka University, Soka High School and Soka Elementary School, which are all located in Tokyo. The time agreed to visit the school was suggested by the Sapporo Soka kindergarten at their convenience. I engaged with key informants who were located within the Soka preschool environment, as they were considered the custodians of Soka values. These key informants included Soka scholars and professors at Soka University, and former and present principals of Soka high and elementary schools, who have studied Soka philosophy in detail, rather than educators in the kindergartens (who may not have studied Soka philosophy deeply but have implemented the Soka education model at preschool level). I believe the authentic voices of those with a deep understanding of Soka philosophical beliefs and values added in-depth knowledge to the data generated in the field at preschool level, which is the focus of this study.

After a three-day visit at the above Soka institutions in Tokyo, I then travelled to Sapporo, located on the northern island of Hokkaido, to conduct the first site visit. However, I was only granted approval to conduct a single one-day site visit, which included interviews with former and present principals and educators and approximately 1.5 hours of classroom observation. (This limited observation conducted at the Sapporo Soka kindergarten was further discussed in the limitations section of this thesis.)

Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten. The second site visit field workwas conducted in Hong Kong due to the fact that the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten was the second Soka kindergarten to be established after Sapporo. In addition, the period of time for the visit was convenient and caused negligible disruption to the kindergarten. I visited the site over a full five-day period. The kindergarten allowed me to have free access to view the whole kindergarten and its outdoor environment.

Singapore Soka Kindergarten. The third site visit field workwas conducted in Singapore. The period granted for the site visit was convenient and caused negligible disruption to the kindergarten. I visited the site over a full five-day period and I was allowed free access to the whole kindergarten.

Data Generation Process

Figure 3.1 below provides a graphical representation of the data generation process. There were two stages and three steps undertaken when generating my data. In the first stage, all prerequisite documentation was prepared prior to data generation including obtaining ethics approval, Soka Gakkai International permission letter, Soka kindergarten and individual participant consent forms as well as details regarding visit dates, times and contact persons before entering field sites.

During the second stage, three steps were used for the data generation process. Step one: informal conversations were conducted with educators which was important for me to become familiar with the sites and participants. Step two: a total of 41 hours and 20 mins of classroom observation took place during this research. Observation occurred before interviews as this provided me with opportunities to refine and review my interview questions. Although I prepared interview questions in advance and these guided me to set the final questions to be used after my observations. Step three: a total of 10 hours and 30 mins of recorded interviews took place with twelve educators working in Soka kindergartens and twelve parents, whose children attended Soka kindergartens.
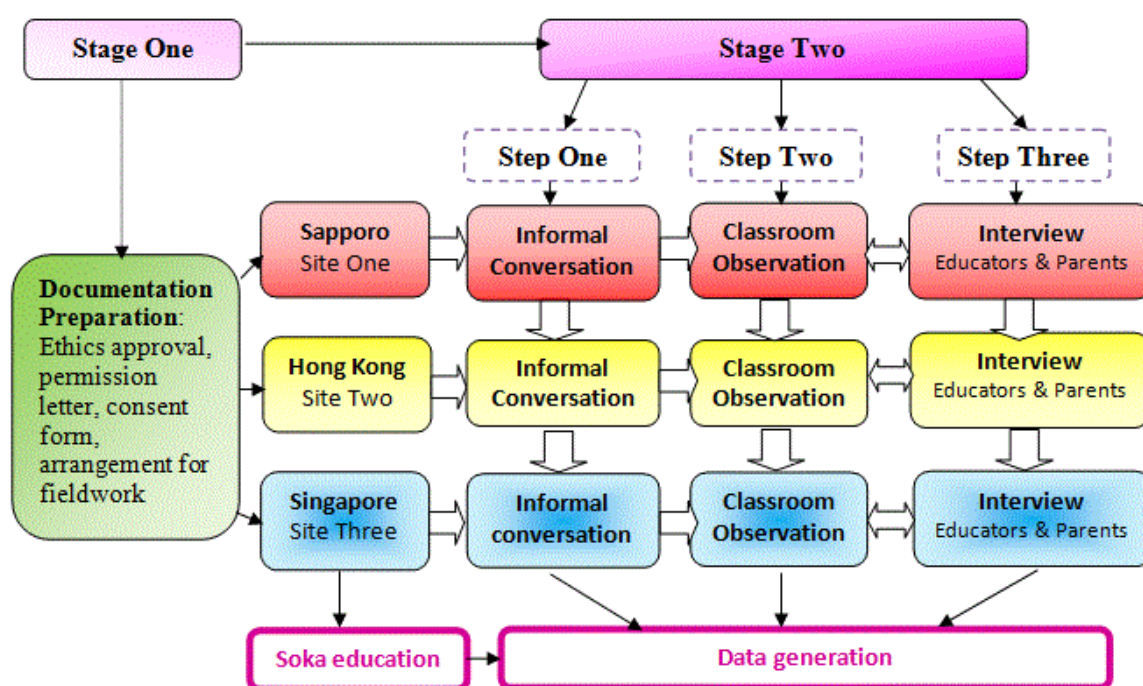
Figure 3.1: Data generation process for Soka kindergartens

During the data generation process I took field notes in all the settings including what I observed inside and outside the classroom. This documentation included important data and contextual information. Gay et al. (2009) suggested that researchers should describe, as accurately and as comprehensively as possible, observations in field notes. In view of this I recorded as much detail as possible regarding teaching practice, including teacher's attitudes, behaviours, facial expressions and the language used, and how children responded during class activities. While I took field notes I focused on descriptive information based on what I had witnessed or heard during kindergarten visits and reflective information captured from personal experience and my thoughts.

In addition, in order to allow me to synthesise my data at each site, I captured some photos of each kindergarten environment and/or setting as appendages. Creswell (2012) asserted that photography is a tool which provides a rich source to understand the central phenomenon of the research. During this study I found it useful to use photography to capture the environment and setting of the three kindergartens in order

to explore how the educators' beliefs had impacted the classroom environment and set up. There is also an advantage when I initiate memories of the screen (Creswell, 2012) to jog memories of the observations. Before and during the data analysis process I reviewed the photographs which were used to support the analysis and provide pictorial evidence of interviews. For example, educators addressed the importance of children becoming global citizens in the future and I found photographs including room displays full of toys and a document regarding educators introducing different cultures around the round. Photographs can be helpful to a researcher in supporting educators' discourse and practice.

Other appendages supporting this data generation included related documentation such as Soka kindergarten publications, introduction brochures, curriculum and activity plans. Documentation can be a valuable source of information which can assist researchers to understand central phenomena within qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). In this study the purpose of documentation was to assist me to better understand the Soka philosophy and educator's practice in particular, as Soka education philosophy is not well known in many countries and nations. These resources are often valued because they are usually given thoughtful attention by the participants (Creswell, 2012). These documents are also ready for analysis without the necessary transcription required with observation or interview data. In this study I was granted permission to read the teachers' personal journals, handbooks, activity plans and kindergarten reports at the Hong Kong Soka kindergarten. The principal of the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten provided an explanation of the curriculum program during the interview. Although I was not able to access documents due to time limitations and language translation requirements, I could grasp the essence of kindergarten culture and experience a sense of the teaching atmosphere through my general and classroom

obersations. At the Singapore Soka kindergarten, the principal showed me the kindergarten curriculum program during interview. Again, I was unable to gain access to documents such as policy materials and teachers' handbooks due to privacy issues at the kindergarten. At the three Soka kindergartens I was able to explore other relevant documentation such as Soka philosophy books, Soka magazines and Soka brochures. I found these sources of documentation helpful in understanding the core beliefs and values of participants in the exploration of the Soka education model.

Data generation approach In the previous section I provided information and a diagram (see Figure 3.1) to briefly explain the data generation process. This section includes further discussion regarding the data generation approach conducted in this study, which involves three steps: (1) informal conversations, (2) mixed mode of non-participant and participant observations and (3) semi-structured interviews. The selection of a strategy for this case study method considered the purpose of the research and the use of interpretive methodology. A more detailed discussion regarding the three steps follows.

Step one – Informal conversations. Informal conversation allowed me to become familiar with the environment as well as establish relationships with the staff prior to my observations. During all site visits I arrived about an hour before the children arrived, as recommended by kindergarten principals. These informal conversations occurred during the kindergarten tour with principals. This enabled me to modify and extend my final interview questions as well as gain a good understanding of educators' beliefs and practices within their education setting. For example, at the Hong Kong site there were two poems written by the school founder, Ikeda, displayed on the wall at the main entrance. The principal explained how these poems were very important and had influenced and impacted staff's perspectives as early childhood

educators. Based on informal conversation, during the interview with educators I modified my questions to include how this motto had influenced their practice of the Soka education model. This example made me understand, as a qualitative researcher conducting field work, that I always need to maintain awareness at all times, and constantly reflect and link what I have seen and heard and not simply follow pre-set instructions or plans.

Step two - Mixed mode of non-participant and participant observations. The pre-prepared list of observable variables assisted in organising and categorising data across various sets of observation notes. This included physical settings, how participants interacted and interaction between teachers and children.

Observation is commonly used when researchers use qualitative case study methods. This allows researchers to access phenomena in a natural setting, and to obtain data by observing participants in a real-life context without manipulation (Gay et al., 2009; Yin, 2009). Merriam (1988) found that the use of observation as a research tool is different to other routine observation. She argues that research observation has to be situated within the research purpose and questions. Observations must be deliberately planned and recorded systematically to control validity and reliability (Merriam, 1988).

Observers often assess specific behaviours, issues or phenomena that enable them to answer research questions. Some researchers may choose to conduct interviews before observation for clarity in their thinking and actions. This could be of benefit when researchers evaluate and assess interrelationships and observed practices. However, my decision to conduct observations first was driven by postmodern perspectives that welcome alternative perspectives of practice as well as allowing me to modify my interview questions. For example, at the Sapporo site, I observed a group of children sitting on a mini train and when I subsequently asked the educators during

interview about this train I discovered they called this '*The train of dreams*'. The educators informed me of the importance of this train, as this allowed children to use their imagination to tell everyone what they wanted to do in the future. This gave the children a voice, a sense of respect for others, and gave hope for their future which relates to concepts of Soka education in my interviews.

In this study, I chose an observational role that shifted from 'participant observer' to 'nonparticipant observer' (Creswell, 2012). As a participant observer I was able to participate and become an 'insider' during the activities being observed, so I could experience these activities in the same way as the children. This approach requires permission from participants; in this case I was invited by the class teachers and children to join them in some activities. In contrast, a nonparticipant observer role allowed me to sit at the side or at the back of the classroom to observe and record observations. These interchangeable modes enabled me to observe how teachers practice in their classroom effectively. Both have advantages and disadvantages (Creswell, 2012). The participant observer role provides natural interaction with the class, which is especially advantageous with young children or where activities often move to different locations. For example, at the Sapporo kindergarten a teacher invited me to join in with movements to music. By doing the movements with the children, it was possible to see how they interacted and how educators interacted with them. This was useful to observe interrelations between children and adults as well as experience the activity. However, I also had difficulties taking notes, compared to non-participant observations under these circumstances. Therefore I took notes between different activities, using a small notebook and pen.

During observation the children welcomed me to their classroom, especially at the Sapporo site where children and educators had limited English language abilities.

Regardless, the children all wanted to hold my hand when I joined in during the music movements. It was explained by the educators that the children often experienced visitors from other educational institutions, professional scholars or students from different countries or government agents visiting their classroom.

To conclude, as I am a former early childhood educator, in order to obtain more information and help participants feel comfortable, I chose to step in and out of the participant role. The recording of observations was mainly handwritten with rough diagrams.

The Sapporo site. The Sapporo Soka kindergarten approved four separate observations over a single day with each classroom session being up to 20 minutes with 4 to 5 and 5 to 6 years' old.

The Hong Kong and Singapore sites. At the Hong Kong and Singapore sites 10 observations were conducted, each lasting for two hours a day over a period of 5 days, for 4 to 5 and 5 to 6 years' old respectively. Moreover, the Hong Kong and Singapore kindergartens invited me to freely observe with no restrictions.

Step three - Focused semi-structured interviews. I consider interview as an important method when exploring educator's discourse (Gay et al., 2009). Interactions between the researcher and participants are an opportunity for a researcher to attempt to obtain information regarding the participant's insider perspectives (Merriam, 1988). The interviews allowed me to obtain important data which I could not have acquired through observation alone. Observation cannot provide the complete picture about past experiences or beliefs. In addition, interview questions can be derived from observational data, which allowed me as a researcher to follow up with an in-depth investigation.

To maximise the limited time available, I chose semi-structured interviews for this case study. Semi-structured interviews are positioned between structured and unstructured methods of interviewing. This required me to be an active listener which "encourages the interviewee to talk freely and be clearly understood" (Yin, 2009, p. 60). This strategy focused on a (certain) set of questions derived from the case study protocol (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009) but they were still open-ended questions and modified, as required, during the interview process for clarity (Ary et al., 2010).

Prior to these interviews, I prepared two sets of questions (for educators and parents) as a guide. I was requested by SGI headquarters to email a set of interview questions prepared for the Sapporo Soka kindergarten two weeks prior to interviews for their information. The interview questions were modified after informal conversations and observations at each field site. Although the main Soka philosophy in each kindergarten was similar; there were still differences in practice due to each country's history, culture and values. Therefore the questions were adjusted to fit each site. The interviews began with an explanation of my research motives and intentions, and what was being addressed. The interviews began with questions regarding personal information. During interviews I was constantly aware of my role in facilitating and managing sessions (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003).

As I understood that participants may feel nervous, I demonstrated a sincere interest in their perspectives and encouraged them during interview. Because I had set the interview questions; this helped me to maintain a clear purpose in respect of this study and to facilitate participants in expressing their thoughts, ideas and views during interviews. In order to achieve my interview goals the interview process was managed in order to answer the research questions. I also exercised judgement regarding the length of time allocated for each topic so I could subsequently move on to the next one.

I also utilised a number of follow-up questions until a satisfactory answer had been obtained.

Brief notes were taken on a mini notepad during interviews. This allowed me to write down some key words and to ask further questions for clarity. I also believed that taking brief notes during the interview helped me to memorise key information. For example, I drew the sitting position of interviewees which helped me to later recall interview content and the scene.

The participants demonstrated active involvement during interviews and there were equal opportunities for participants to express their thoughts. I also sent a letter of thanks to the participating parents via email shortly after the interviews at each site. A thank you letter for participating educators was also sent via email on return to Australia. I found this subsequently useful when it was later necessary to ask participants to verify and amend corrections based on their comments.

The following sections discuss how semi- structured interviews at the three Soka sites were implemented.

The Sapporo site. At the Sapporo Soka kindergarten, due to limited time and access, the principal advised that there would be two group interviews. Group one included interviews with both principals, ranging from 30 mins to one hour, and divided over three sessions. The second session included the single parent participant. Group two included four educators who were also interviewed for one hour after teaching. As the first and only language was Japanese an English translator was provided by Tokyo SGI Headquarters to verbally translate interviews.

The Hong Kong and Singapore sites. At the Hong Kong and Singapore Soka kindergartens, interviews were conducted in three groups. Group one participated in a one-hour interview with the principal of the respective kindergartens. Group two

also participated in a one- hour interview with two teachers involved at each kindergarten. Whilst Group three at both kindergartens included a one-hour group interview with six parents participating. A group interview with parents was an opportunity to gain a shared understanding of different individuals' views (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010; Gay et al., 2009). Group interviews are useful when the interview is limited and some individuals are hesitant in providing information in one-on-one interviews (Creswell, 2012). The interviews in Hong Kong were all conducted in Cantonese (the researcher's native language) and those in Singapore were conducted in English. All interviews were audio-recorded with prior written approval of participants.

Data Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data requires the researcher to make sense of the text and images in order to form answers to the research questions (Creswell, 2012). I am cognisant of the various approaches to analysing qualitative data including techniques such as discourse analysis, grounded theory analysis and phenomenology analysis (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell, 2012).

For this study I used the concepts of power, knowledge and discourse derived from postmodern theory and a thematic approach to analyse the interviews and observation data obtained from the field work. I included photography and documentation as appendages to support and assist the research findings. Figure 3.2 involves five steps: organising data, transcribing data, reading data, coding data and theming data.
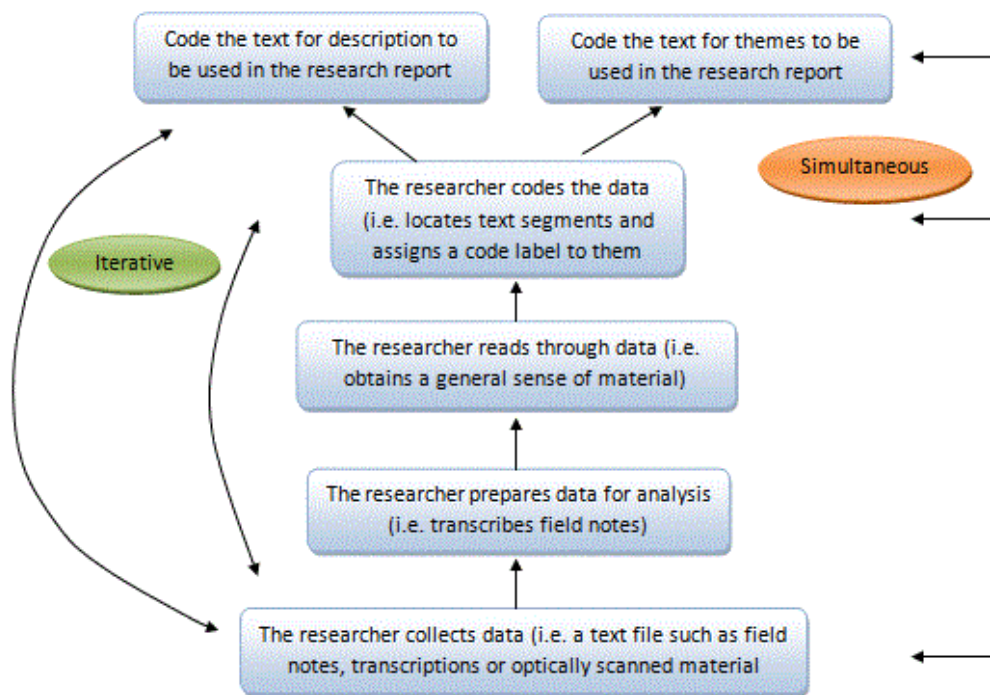
Figure 3.2: Qualitative data analysis (adapted from Creswell, 2012)

I used 'exploration' and 'postmodern theoretical' lenses for analysing interview, observation and field notes data. From a postmodern perspective there is not a single universal way to construct quality because societal values vary from place to place due to culture, history, geographical location, socialisation and norms. Therefore, by using an exploration lens whilst reading and coding data I was able to view the data from a wider perspective and explore new ideas and thoughts from participating educators' beliefs. For example, an exploration lens allowed me to divide text data into segments and code this information. This assisted me in minimising data oversight.

To narrow the data to specific themes I also used a postmodern theoretical lens during the reading and coding of data resulting in data being categorised into different themes. This postmodern theoretical lens provided an understanding of the discourse, power and knowledge which guided the search of in-depth data to answer the research questions. Further explanation is provided in the theme data section.

Organisation of data. I developed a system to effectively organise all the materials and resources obtained in this study. This system included a file folder (hard copy) and computer folders (soft copy). The file folder allowed easy access to material and I was able to keep track of the data files. The file folder was divided into classifications based on the three Soka kindergarten sites. Each site sub-folder included permission letters, explanatory letters and participant consent forms, interview transcripts, field notes, and photography and documentation (i.e. kindergarten introduction booklet, lesson plans and quality assurance reports issued by local government).

The soft copy folder enabled me to back-up data files and maintain a communication record. Three soft copy folders were used during this study. The first file contained communication with the Soka organisation and participants (emails and letters). The second file was divided into classifications based on three Soka sites. Each site sub-folder included permission letters from the participant kindergarten, my explanatory letters and interview transcripts. The third file cotained interview audio recordings.

Transcribing data. The data was transcribed verbatim by me. With respect to the field visits in Japan, the translator provided by SGI headquarters simultaneously translated conversations into English, which were audio recorded. I later personally transcribed this data based upon the English translation version. In Hong Kong the interviews were conducted in Cantonese which I was able to translate and transcribe. All interview transcriptions were returned to individual participants in written form via email for verification and amendments were corrected based on participants' comments.

During the data collection stage there was extensive use of language translation during background reading and interview of participants. It was necessary to translate

data and information from Japanese into English when conducting field work in Sapporo. My Asian heritage, of having a Japanese mother and a Chinese father, provided an added advantage of familiarity with the culture of Japan, although I acknowledge my Japanese language skills still required an interpreter in order for me to fully understand the information and interview data collected. Therefore, in Sapporo, I relied upon the provided translator in order to clarify terms into English during and after the interview.

In Hong Kong it was necessary to translate from Cantonese to English to facilitate the data analysis. Being born and brought up in Hong Kong, I had a deep understanding of the Cantonese language and the particular culture of Hong Kong therefore, I was able to completely rely upon my own native language skills to translate the data directly into English.

In order to prepare for and navigate through these language complexities I did conduct extensive background reading of Soka Gakkai philosophical literature in order to better understand the English language translations of Japanese and Chinese Soka and Nichiren Buddhist concepts and terms. It was frequently necessary to ask clarifying questions of the translator to ensure that concepts and terms were translated into the English language as accurately as possible. In Singapore, English was the only language used during data collection and therefore, no translation was required.

Reading and coding data. The first step of the analysis process commenced with repeatedly reading the interview data and observation field notes from a computer screen. This process included noting down ideas, comments and highlighting some words whilst exploring the data. Reading and re-reading the data allowed me to gain initial impressions of the data and start to identify broad categories.

The second step included data coding which was a process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes (Creswell, 2012). For more effective coding, I used various colours and fonts. I read the data from a computer screen and used an exploration lens which divided the data in text segments, placing brackets around text and inserting a code word that accurately described the meaning of the text segments in the left margin. As the purpose of this study was to explore Soka education, this process has allowed me to maintain all research evidence. Each interview document was inserted with 15 to 20 codes during initial analysis. After coding an entire text, I then printed out the documents on A4 paper in different colours to distinguish different interviews (e.g. red for interviews with principals at the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten).

Theming data. After categories had been defined, the text data was cut and sorted for patterns matching the analysis. In this process the text data was divided into three sites for individual analysis. The use of themes was formed from major ideas through similar codes at each site. I merged categories to establish connections to different conceptual themes.

To identify the themes I approached the data with a postmodern theoretical lens. A postmodern theoretical discourse rejects abstract universalist perpectives of enlightenment rationality. This means, truth is multiple, fluid and shifting according to contexts (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). Discourse is also constructed through power relations and knowledge. These three concepts are closely interrelated. Therefore, it was important, for me as a researcher, to explore the educators' discourse of core Soka philosophy. A theoretical lens generated five themes including beliefs, relationships, curriculum, environment setting and attitudes. Table 3.2 illustrates how a postmodern

theoretical framework was used to analyse and identify these themes to answer the research questions.

Table 3.2

Analytical themes generated from the theoretical framework and research questions (see Appendix 14 for a larger scale diagram)

Theoretical Framework	Data sources	Research questions		Theme
	Informal conversations Interviews Observations Photography Field notes Documentation	*Main research question:* What conceptions of the quality of early childhood education are held by kindergarten educators working in the Soka education model and how do these conceptions influence practice? *Sub research questions:* What is the nature of the practices of educators working in the early childhood Soka education model? What are the professional needs of the early childhood educators working in the Soka education model? What lessons from the data on Soka model are pivotal to children's quality learning and development that can be used to enhance quality early childhood practices in other contexts?		*Beliefs and knowledge* Value creation education Happiness education Humanist education (Influence/Impact) ⇩ ⇧ (Re-shape/Re-confirm) *Practices:* Kindergarten policy Health and hygiene Structure (physical) environment Learning environment Relationships

My Role in the Research Process

My role as a qualitative researcher during each phase of the research is unique. In this particular study I was an interpreter, an instrument and a critical reflector.

Firstly, Creswell (2012) defines the researcher's role as "bring[ing] out the meaning, telling the story, providing an explanation, and developing plausible explanations" (p. 490). This process includes a crucial element in which I have access to

and interpret the insider voices of participants. This allowed me to understand the educator's ontology and epistemology knowledge (Gitlin, Peck, Aposhian, Hadley, & Porter, 2002), which is especially important for this study. A qualitative researcher constantly reflects on the process of data generation, data analysis, and the relationship with participants in addition to factual data, the research process and actual participant voices.

Secondly, the concept of the researcher as an instrument is prevalent in qualitative literature (Barrett, 2007). This concept demonstrates "the distinctive function of the researcher's knowledge, perspectives, and subjectivity in data acquisition" (Barrett, 2007, p. 418). My role as a researcher employed multiple methods of information gathering including being an interviewer, observer and presenter. The discourse, knowledge and skills of the researcher are an important part of how data is collected and analysed. As a researcher, I became an instrument in the research process which always leads to credibility and validity. Complex issues such as advantage and disadvantage are necessarily detached during every qualitative research undertaking. For example, during this study I became a live and active instrument involved in continual decision making to achieve the aims of the study. My background experience assisted me in assessing and establishing respect and comfortable relationships between the children, educators and parents. In contrast, my subjective discourse and knowledge can create a barrier, leading to being over subjective whilst conducting and analysing data collected. Again, I was mindful of these risks and to foster sustainability I drew upon the theoretical framework and research questions.

Finally, as a postmodern researcher, it is important to maintain a critical and active reflective attitude at all times during the study. Active reflection refers to locating different perspectives, views and thoughts gained from theoretical lenses and various

data. The term 'critical' in regard to my role is about becoming "more discerning in recognizing faulty arguments, hasty generalizations, assertions lacking evidence, truth claims based on unreliable authority, ambiguous or obscure concepts" (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 46). A critical researcher is frequently seeking reasons and evidence. For example, when exploring Soka education beliefs I was not only assessing participant's thoughts through interviews but investigating power relations. During the data analysis I frequently reflected on beliefs and practices, such as 'who benefits?' This process of critical thinking is often closely linked to theoretical perspectives and the rationale for the research (Burbules & Berk, 1999).

Validity and Reliability of Data

Credible qualitative research should provide a clear explanation regarding how the research findings and interpretations were grounded (Gay et al., 2009). It was necessary for me to be aware of my own subjectivity, influenced by personal experiences, and to ensure that this bias did not influence the validity of my interpretation of the research findings.

Validity through participant checks and triangulation. Validating findings refers to the data analysis being carefully conducted to determine the accuracy of findings through "member (participant) checks" and "triangulation strategies" (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). During this research all Chinese and English interview transcripts and Cantonese to English translated transcripts were checked by the participants to ensure accuracy of information. In addition, I employed two triangulation strategies to verify the data. Triangulation is "the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, type of data, or methods of data collection in description and theme in qualitative" (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). To apply these strategies I used corroborating evidence from participants and type of data (Springer, 2010). Participant

triangulation strategies included principals, teachers and parents at the Hong Kong and Singapore Soka kindergartens. They examined the interview data to ensure accuracy. For further verification, I compared the interviews and observation data with Soka organisation literature including 'Soka education' by Ikeda and 'value creation' by Makiguchi. This literature review was an opportunity to discover evidence to support interviews and observations in this study. For example, educators working in Soka kindergartens highlighted during interviews that each child has unlimited potential. Within Soka organisational literature, Makiguchi (2004) argues that educators should value and respect each human being as we all have unlimited potential within us. This illustrates the importance of including Soka organisational literature in this triangulation to verify the accuracy of the data.

Reliability of reflexivity on minimising personal bias. Researcher bias is a potential source of invalidity in qualitative studies. Bias may result in selective observation or perception of information based on preferences or judgements of the researcher which may affect the accuracy of findings. A common strategy to minimise bias in qualitative research is the use of reflexivity (Ary et al., 2010; Day, 2012). I believe that reflexivity is crucial to identifying personal bias to ensure accuracy of information (Pillow, 2003; Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). Reflexivity refers to a process in which the researcher consciously reflects on their own assumptions and subjectivity during the research process (Day, 2012; Doyle, 2013; Springer, 2010). Therefore, Day (2012) argues that credible qualitative researchers must reflect on problems and dilemmas, such as subjectivity and power relations, which occur during the entire research process; this is an ongoing process of awareness rather than simply a one-off reflection. For example, during this research I constantly reflected upon the power relations between the researcher and participants by questioning how power is

exercised during data interpretation. Attending to reflexivity also requires that I should view the data with an open mind and freely express participant's value position during the research process (Creswell, 2012). During this study I used personal, positional and theoretical reflexivity to support research accountability.

   Personal reflexivity. Personal reflexivity refers to individuals being mindful of their own bias and prejudices when trying to make sense of participants' views. Such "reflexivity as recognition of self" (Pillow, 2003, p. 181) allow researchers to be self-reflexive. This places the responsibility on me, as a researcher, to be critically aware of my gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, identity, and interests which may influence the research process (Pillow, 2003). During this study I recognised and acknowledged my personal bias, cultural assumptions and individual history that I brought to the research setting. For example, I have lived and taught in Hong Kong for 16 years which may be an obstacle impacting my unbiased views during the field work. As a former kindergarten teacher I may already have a set of expectations in the promotion of quality early childhood education. I am also Japanese by descent (mother) and my familiarity with Japanese culture related to one of the study sites, which may also be influenced by my bias. Therefore a sense of self-awareness is important in order to seek out self-subjectivity, and to remain open to new alternative understandings or ideas (Cologon 2012).

   Whilst undertaking this study, the discovery of postmodern theory has benefited me on a personal level, in particular, whilst receiving and processing new information or perspectives. Postmodern theory seeks new alternatives, new perspectives and new ideas; therefore I often reflected on personal approaches to data analysis and discussed the findings to reflect on personal understandings of participant's thoughts and situated accounts of their experiences.

Positional reflexivity. Positional reflexivity is situated within a blurred area, which is difficult to clearly define (Pillow, 2003). In this section I employed Macbeth's explanation for positional reflexivity as a function that "takes up the analyst's position and positioning in the world he or she studies and is often expressed with a vigilance for unseen, privileged, or worse, exploitative relationships between analysts and the world" (2001, p. 38). This led me to understand the importance of how researchers position themselves to view the world. Day (2012) further explained "how the subjectivity of the researcher enters into the process of knowledge production" (p. 63). As such, the value of understanding positional reflexivity has raised the researcher's consideration of their own subjectivity in making claims in the research. For instance, when I became aware of my own bias (personal reflectivity) consequently I established a stand and produced a set of knowledge based upon my own world views (positional reflectivity) which are corroborated with data findings.

My reflectivity may shift from time to time and from case to case. This forward and backward movement allows me to bring unconscious aspects into conscious awareness (Doyle, 2013). As mentioned in a previous section, I am also aware of my own dual nationality from a Chinese and a Japanese background and therefore I have a depth of understanding of both cultures. I previously lived in Singapore for three years which provided some insight into the cultural environment and living conditions of that country. I positioned myself on the border, as an insider (familiar with the cultures within the study and an ex-kindergarten teacher) and an outsider (exploring Soka education). Day (2012) argued that it is important for researchers to be aware of their positional situation as insiders or outsiders; this assisted me in articulating the possibility of problematising during the research process. Day defined insider and outsider as "one's positioning as a researcher outside of the community/location under

study, versus the insider positioning of those we study" (2012, p. 74). For example, whilst exploring quality and before commencing field work I understood quality as being influenced by various studies that related to early childhood education policy, curriculum, environment settings and leadership. However, the data indicated this to be a narrow view of quality. Soka kindergartens define quality as happiness, value creation and humanism. Educators working in Soka kindergartens were found to hold strong beliefs in respect of these three concepts, which were addressed as key to achieving quality education.

Theoretical reflexivity. To further activate reflexivity, I considered theoretical reflexivity as a crucial component to avoid personal bias. The theory not only contributes to the design of the study, generation of the data and data analysis but also supports the role of the researcher and observer (Henstrand, 2006). The theoretical frameworks of postmodern perspectives assisted me to manage and maintain subjectivity during the research role, including numerous emotional feelings experienced during the field work. For example, there was an incident in which a child was scolded by an external physical education coach, which personally impacted my own feelings. To maintain subjectivity I consciously retreated from the role of researcher by applying the theoretical model to the situation. This assisted in maintaining a deliberate neutral and objective attitude throughout my data generation and analysis stages.

Ethical Considerations

Every researcher must be aware of the importance of ethical considerations during all stages of the research project (Creswell, 2012). This is particularly salient when conducting qualitative research. Some features of qualitative research raise

additional issues as "qualitative research plans typically evolve and change as the research setting grows" (Gay et al., 2009, p. 22).

In this research I paid attention to ethical issues, including (1) permission to conduct the project, (2) my relationships with participants as a researcher, (3) confidentiality, (4) data obtained being influenced by cultural issues and (5) ethical issues related to legal matters.

Firstly, this research received approval from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) involving humans for approval prior to proceeding to the data generation stage. In addition, formal approval confirmation letters for the study were granted and sent to me by SGI Tokyo Headquarters and the principals of the participating Soka kindergartens before the field work commenced. Individual participants also signed and returned consent forms on the first day of the field work (Appendix 7 & 9). The consent forms and explanatory statements explain the rights and responsibilities of the participants, including how to withdraw consent from the study, confidentiality issues and how to request further information, if required. Participants were also free to join the research with a clear understanding of the nature of the study.

Secondly, after I conducted interviews and observations, I gradually grew closer to participants and established a sense of friendship. Therefore it is important, as a researcher, to remain friendly and honest during the research process, but also to be mindful of this relationship and the need for theoretical reflexivity, personal reflexivity and positional reflexivity to maintain my professionalism and to validate the credibility of the study.

Thirdly, to maintain confidentiality during the study I used acronyms to represent different participants and I also made provision for participants to request a

summary of the study findings via email, if they wished. Email was selected rather than postage, because I was only provided with each kindergarten's address and to avoid loss of documents in situations where some participants may have left the kindergarten, or where parents had lost contact with the kindergarten or upon their children graduating.

Fourthly, I also paid particular attention to ethical and cultural issues such as language expression, for example, the term 'happiness' may have slight differences between the Cantonese and English language versions as a critical part of the data generation process in order to contribute to the validity and reliability of the study.

Finally, in the previous section I addressed an incident which occurred when a class of children were practicsng their gymnastic performance for a graduation ceremony. I observed a child being scolded by a sports coach in front of the whole class. The child stood in front of his classmates and looked down, with no expression on his face. The classmates were all quiet and looked at this child. The atmosphere was full of tension and even the coach assistants stood and watched the incident. In a western society, such as Australia, this incident would most likely be defined as a child being emotionally mistreated. Emotional maltreatment refers to "a caregiver's inappropriate verbal or symbolic acts toward a child or a pattern of failure over time to provide a child with adequate non-physical nurture and emotional availability. Such acts of commission or omission have a high probability of damaging a child's self-esteem or social competence" (AIFS, 2012, emotional maltreatment section, para. 2). However, there may be differences between other nations. As this study widely used postmodern perspectives; I used a postmodern lens to assist me in being aware of this incident, not through a universal perspective, but to include other cultural and individual perspectives. Some Asian countries may not consider this incident as a case of abuse but rather as a 'traditional' teaching method (Chan, 2004; Tse, 2001). This approach can

still be found at some schools throughout Asia but less frequently seen in early childhood settings. Again, when using a postmodern lens to look at the specifics of the coach's discourse in this incident the coach may believe that he had to get the children to focus and concentrate, and that injuries may result if children didn't pay attention. It may also be important for the children to do well during the graduation ceremony to demonstrate their abilities. However, when I look at power relations resulting from this incident, it is clear that the sport's coach is a subject of power over the child. This form of power comes into being through discipline of the children's behaviour (Foucault, 2000), not only the victim child but all the children who witnessed the incident. In addition, the actions of the coach go against the philosophy of Soka which strongly focuses on humanist education, respect and compassion towards each child. Although this incident was only observed on one occasion in which the coach was employed by the kindergarten to prepare children for a graduation ceremony; however, an important rule that researchers must always follow is such instances need to be reported (Ary et al., 2010). On this occasion, I decided to report this incident to the principal of the site.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided understanding into the methodology and methods used in this research. A postmodern perspective underpins the research process and human ontologies and epistemologies as human constructions from culture and history. For an in-depth understanding of educator's discourse a qualitative and interpretative methodology was selected for this study. Both exploration and theoretical lenses were used to analyse interviews, observations and field notes in order to make sense of educators working in Soka kindergartens' conceptualisations of quality early childhood education within culturally diverse sites. The following chapters present the results and findings of this study.

Chapter 4 Data Presentation and Analysis

Introduction

The objectives of this chapter are: (1) to illustrate the significance of the findings in the single case study, (2) to use reference codes as pseudonyms for the identification of all participants, (3) to provide brief background on the three kindergartens, and (4) to present data regarding educators' beliefs and practices in detail.

This exploration of the Soka education model, seen through postmodern theoretical lenses, has been a valuable and important opportunity to present an exciting alternative approach in creating quality early childhood education. In this chapter, a postmodern theoretical lens was used to analyse the complex relationship between the concepts of discourse, power and knowledge. Importantly, this allowed me to question educators' discourse and practice, for example, how is the discourse of educators working in Soka kindergartens drawn from their education ideology? What is educators' discourse and how does this represent knowledge? How is this knowledge related to power, and how is power and knowledge exercised within educators' discourse? These questions allow me to address my main research questions of quality and alternative perspectives of quality early childhood education.

In particular, this study is a challenge to the universal acceptance of western dominated perspectives of quality. I argue that the concept of quality should be situated within a diversity of different nations, cultures and historical contexts. The purpose of this study was to gain access into the insights of educators working in Soka kindergartens and their conceptualisations of what constitutes quality early childhood education. I explored their discourse and knowledge of the Soka education model (philosophy) in order to discover if Soka offers an alternative understanding of quality

classroom practice. To answer the study questions I used various tools, as explained in my methodology chapter, to generate the data. In this chapter, I have presented this multisite case study as a single case study and analysed the data with a thematic approach. The use of a thematic approach has helped me to analyse all the interviews and observations obtained during the field work. Importantly, a thematic approach would provide the greatest flexibility and be essential to allow me to examine the meanings and experiences of the data in order to understand the discourses operating among the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This also assisted me in the development of themes to summarise key features of the data. During the analysis process, the interview and observation data was also supported by informal conversations, photography and documentation as appendages to reinforce the research findings. The justification for making use of photography and documentation was discussed earlier in the methodology chapter.

The data presentation is divided into parts A and B. Part A presents the educators' beliefs through three themes: 'value creation', 'happiness' and 'humanism'. The findings in Part A were mainly drawn from informal conversations and semi-structured interviews with educators, supported by site images. Part B relates to Soka practices which include five themes: 'kindergarten policy', 'health & hygiene', 'structure (physical) environment', 'learning environment' and 'relationships'. The findings in Part B were also drawn from parent group interviews, classroom observations and support images. Parent's voices were beneficial for me to better understand their views regarding Soka education, the correlation between educators working in Soka kindergartens and their practice, and children's experiences at Soka kindergartens.

Single Case Study Findings

While presentation of case study findings does not follow any stereotypic format (Yin, 2009), it is important to define and provide sufficient evidence to enable the reader to reach their own understanding. In this chapter the data obtained from the Soka kindergartens in Sapporo, Hong Kong and Singapore are presented as a single case study. The significance of presenting multisite locations in a single case study is that this provides the reader with a general, comprehensive and coherent description of the Soka education philosophy and sufficient information to understand the main findings. The findings indicated strong links and similarities throughout the three Soka kindergartens being studied. Therefore, single case study presentations avoid any repetition and provide the reader with an in-depth understanding of the findings. These findings generated from data analysis included eight conceptual themes: 'value creation', 'happiness', 'humanism', 'kindergarten policy', 'health and wellbeing', 'structure (physical) environment', 'learning environment' and 'relationships'. Each conceptual theme can be further broken down into sub-conceptual themes for in-depth discussion.

In this case study I have used a postmodern conceptualisation lens to explore and analyse the above eight conceptual themes. By doing this, I remind myself of my role as a researcher, interpreter and to act as a critical thinker. I focused on exploring and interpreting the data in-depth and interpreting what participants said, what the environment indicated and my observations. At the same time I used my personal, positional and theoretical reflexivity to maintain validity and accountability in this case study. As a postmodern researcher, I am not only seeking to gain new knowledge from this case study, but I have also deconstructed the epistemology of my own beliefs about quality early childhood education practice.

Confidentiality of Participants

In order to maintain confidentiality I have used acronyms to represent the different participants through the use of coded references. Although, this is presented as a single case study, I believe it would be beneficial to state the specific country location of the participants in order to assist the reader in understanding the diverse impacts of history and cultural contexts in Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore. There is a possibility that readers may able to identify individual participants through the stating of specific country locations. Maintaining full anonymity has been a challenge in this study; however, great care has been taken in how data has been presented in the thesis. For instance, I constantly considered the words used when presenting participant's thoughts and acknowledge my own subjectivity. This contributed to a level of assurance regarding anonymity whilst maintaining the reliability of this research. The coded references follow:

- ED1J – Former principal of the Japan Sapporo Kindergarten
- ED2J – Current principal of the Japan Sapporo Kindergarten
- ED3J – Teacher 1 of the Japan Sapporo Soka Kindergarten
- ED4J – Teacher 2 of the Japan Sapporo Soka Kindergarten
- ED5J – Teacher 3 of the Japan Sapporo Soka Kindergarten
- ED6J – Teacher 4 of the Japan Sapporo Soka Kindergarten
- P1J – Parent of the Japan Sapporo Soka Kindergarten
- ED1HK – Principal of the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten
- ED2HK – Teacher 1 of the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten
- ED3HK – Teacher 2 of the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten
- P1HK – Parent 1 of the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten
- P2HK – Parent 2 of the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten
- P3HK – Parent 3 of the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten
- P4HK – Parent 4 of the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten
- P5HK – Parent 5 of the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten
- P6HK – Parent 6 of the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten

- ED1S – Principal of the Singapore Soka Kindergarten
- ED2S – Teacher 1 of the Singapore Soka Kindergarten
- ED3S – Teacher 2 of the Singapore Soka Kindergarten
- P1S – Parent 1 of the Singapore Soka Kindergarten
- P2S – Parent 2 of the Singapore Soka Kindergarten
- P3S – Parent 3 of the Singapore Soka Kindergarten
- P4S – Parent 4 of the Singapore Soka Kindergarten
- P5S – Parent 5 of the Singapore Soka Kindergarten
- P6S – Parent 6 of the Singapore Soka Kindergarten

Brief Background of the Three Soka Kindergartens

Chapter One discussed the sociocultural backgrounds of Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore. In this section my goal is to provide readers with an understanding of the overall background context of the three Soka kindergartens. Therefore I have provided a summary table (see Table 4.1) to illustrate each kindergarten's location, year of establishment, number of educators and children, enrolment and term commencement. This information will contextualise the findings. For example, an awareness of each kindergarten's term commencement date assisted me in understanding any potential impact on the generated data when I visited each of the Soka kindergartens.

Table 4.1

Brief information regarding the three Soka kindergartens

	Sapporo Soka Kindergarten	Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten	Singapore Soka Kindergarten
Location	Sapporo, Japan	Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong	Tampines, Singapore
Year established	1976	1992	1993
Children age range	4-5 years old	3-5 years old	3-5 years old
Class/Group	Total 8 classes Full day session	Total 19 classes Morning session and afternoon session	Total 18 classes Morning session and afternoon session
No. of children	Approx 240	Approx 540	Approx 330
No of Educators	Approx 12	Approx 42	Approx 20
Languages Used	100% Japanese	80% Cantonese 10% Mandarin 10% English	50% Mandarin 50% English
Term start	April	September	January

The above table not only provides brief information regarding the three Soka kindergartens but also raises several important points linked to current practice in each kindergarten. Firstly, the opening of these Soka kindergartens was over twenty years ago, and the schools are now established with a school culture and well-formed structure based upon Soka education philosophy and practice. According to the three principals, after many years of becoming established, the three Soka kindergartens were well known and well accepted within their communities. This was also further corroborated by the educators who confirmed that these kindergartens were frequently involved in collaborative projects with their respective communities, other education institutions (other kindergartens, primary schools and universities), and local government. This led to the sharing of Soka practice and transference of educator pedagogy knowledge. For instance, the Singapore Soka kindergarten was invited by the

Singapore Ministry of Education to hold a peer review session regarding Soka education practice for other early childhood educators.

Since their establishment, Soka kindergartens have received a range of different awards from both government and community bodies. For example, in 2012 the Hong Kong Soka kindergarten received 'The Chief Executive's Award for Teaching Excellence', described as an "honour award" by one of the Soka staff. Additionally, the Soka kindergarten principals explained that they had received many positive comments from parents as well as from scholars and external visitors. This form of positive community exposure has resulted in Soka kindergartens being in demand for parents seeking a place for their children to attend. All Soka principals stated that enrolment of their respective schools was oversubscribed and a waiting list had been established. For instance, the Hong Kong Kindergarten reported that entry into the nursery class in 2013 attracted 4,000 applications; however, the kindergarten could only accommodate an intake of 180 children. The Soka principals explained that Soka kindergartens are non-profit and therefore fees were low in comparison to other kindergartens in the private sector. These kindergartens have government support which provides an opportunity for anyone in the local community to afford quality early childhood education. This is important because it demonstrates how Soka education philosophy, 'humanism', has been applied to their practice; providing quality early childhood education inclusively to all socioeconomic status families.

This situation raises an obvious question; as the demand for access into Soka kindergartens was so strong, why was there only one kindergarten in each of the three locations? The answer provided by the principals was that the land required to build Soka kindergartens in each of these locations is both expensive and difficult to procure

in the market. A second reason was that quality may become diluted through an increase in the number of Soka kindergartens at each location.

The languages taught (see Table 4.1) in Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore were influenced by educator's beliefs, culture, and social expectations. For instance, after 1997, when Hong Kong sovereignty reverted to the People's Republic of China, the Hong Kong SAR Government encouraged schools to teach Mandarin Chinese. However, the Hong Kong Soka kindergarten had already foreseen the need to teach Mandarin Chinese, and in 1992 the Soka kindergarten introduced Mandarin Chinese into the curriculum, well in advance of this requirement. The Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten employed a full-time Mandarin Chinese teacher who used play-based pedagogy to encourage children to learn Mandarin. This illustrated the kindergarten not only followed government policy but also considered children's future needs. Another example illustrating how Soka practices prioritised children's needs can be found in the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten, where a few Japanese children attended. The principal arranged for a Japanese speaking educator to become the class teacher and this arrangement supported both new children and parents in settling in well at the Soka kindergarten and assisted future communications. Interestingly, when asked why Japanese families chose a Soka kindergarten, they stated they liked the school very much and, more importantly, the majority were Soka Gakkai members who wanted their children to gain exposure to the Soka philosophy of humanism.

Another example at the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten was that although a native English teacher attended the school only once a month, this was not typical practice at Japanese kindergartens due to the high cost of engaging a native English teacher. The principal explained that to learn other languages was not only good for their second language development but provided an opportunity for the children to meet people from

different nationalities and learn their culture. The principal further confirmed the children really enjoyed the English lessons. English language service is provided free of charge for parents although this could only be provided once a month. During this informal conservation with the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten Principal, it was explained to me that their policy and practice was based on the children's needs and interests as a priority. Whilst this was a low fee kindergarten, Soka sought to provide various learning opportunities for children to connect to the World.

At the Singapore Soka kindergarten there was an obvious understanding of the importance of English and Mandarin Chinese within a local Singapore context. The policy was to engage two teachers (English and Mandarin speakers) in each class in order to benefit the children's needs in a multilingual society. This provided daily opportunities for children to learn both languages.

During my visits I found that although there was not any regular contact between the three Soka kindergartens, they have nevertheless developed collaborative projects in the past such as children's art exhibitions and informal / formal teacher exchange visits. For instance, when the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten was established in 1992, the principal and head teacher visited the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten to learn the practice and philosophy of Soka education. This exchange also occurred when the Singapore Soka Kindergarten was established and their senior staff visited both the Hong Kong and Sapporo Kindergartens. This confirmed there were many areas of similarity and influence within the three Soka kindergartens including a structured learning environment; this will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Part A: Educators' Beliefs and Knowledge

Part A of this chapter presents participant interviews supported by information gathered during informal conversations, and photography and documentation. In

particular, the integration of documentation such as Soka philosophy books and Soka literature with interview data can help the reader gain a greater understanding of the Soka discourse and knowledge as well as educator's practice.

Many scholars have highlighted that an important factor in quality early childhood education is the link between educators' beliefs and knowledge (Fleer, 2010; Logan & Sumsion, 2010; Rivalland, 2007); this is particularly relevant to educators working in Soka kindergartens. The findings indicated that educator's beliefs and knowledge were deeply rooted in the philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism and Soka philosophers including Makiguchi, Toda and Ikeda. At the same time it was noted that educators' beliefs influenced their classroom environment setting and classroom practice. In this study, I wanted to explore how educators working in Soka kindergartens conceptualised quality early childhood education. One participant explained quality in relation to Soka beliefs:

> *Quality education can refer to Soka beliefs, which really focuses on the concept of 'education is about daily life' which means the knowledge we learn can be used in our daily living, each person can create positive value to achieve a better life. The quality of Soka education is to add value or create value. For example, when there are any improvements, in even one small thing within our teaching, this is still called Soka education, whether this is knowledge or behaviour. If we can bring out a child's positive side this creates value for the child as well as the teacher too, I think this is Soka education and also a quality of education (ED1HK).*

For this participant, the discourse of quality early childhood education is closely linked to how daily practice can create or add value in the classroom. An educator *(ED1HK)* stated they are not only trying to add value in their own life but create value as well. Soka philosophy illustrates that value does not exist from the outside but [it is] for us to discover (SGI, 2014c). In response to creating value in our daily life I argued

that it is necessary to be constantly aware of thoughts, actions and attitudes within oneself and the environment. This argument is in line with the concept of "cause and effect" (SGI, 2014d, para. 1) which is found in Nichiren Buddhist philosophy. Nichiren Buddhism describes cause and effect as the outcome of each person's thoughts and actions and how these subsequently impact their future (SGI, 2014d). Buddhists would say that cause and effect are like the two faces of the same coin, which occur simultaneously within a single body. Notably, how we create our own present and future through the choices we make at each moment during our life (SGI, 2014d). Nichiren Buddhists would argue that we, as individuals, are fully responsible for our thoughts and actions. This means at some level we have the power to exercise our own thoughts and actions to create value (a better world) for ourselves and others.

Within classroom practice, I describe this as 'awareness and reflectivity', to reflect on our thoughts and actions in the classroom which is important for creating quality education. Thus creating value would call for teacher and children to turn any difficulty into a positive outcome. For instance, if there was a child with challenging behaviour in the classroom, instead of the educator thinking this was unlucky, he/she would think about how they could help to bring out this child's potential. The educator might consider maintaining a daily teaching journal and he/she could reflect on their practice and look for improvements in their daily classroom teaching. In Makiguchi's (1989c) literature regarding value creation, he argues that it is necessary for educators to reflect on their daily teaching in order to create quality classroom practice. Using this technique, we could say that creating a positive attitude towards life and educators' reflection on their teaching could potentially have a direct impact on quality education. Three educators working in Soka kindergartens further explained:

> *Quality early childhood education, I think children need to enjoy the learning*
> *process, like our Soka kindergarten which promotes 'humanist education'.*

'Humanist education' is not only talking about when teachers see differences between children or what are their individual needs, but we also talk about focusing on how to live with happiness together with others (ED2HK).

For me, quality early childhood education is a focus on children's happiness; for example, not only for the children enjoying going to school but to be able to overcome difficulties and problems. The happiness of education is an important aim of our kindergarten (ED2S).

Quality education is to foster children to develop a strong personality and have a spirit of never giving up and be willing to accept challenges: the spirit to really take care of each person. I believe this is how children can achieve real happiness. As a teacher it is important to identify the good points in each child and that I really want to pray for that child (ED5J).

If, as educators working in Soka kindergartens explained, the discourse of quality refers to contributing to children's positive attitudes and the development of a strong personality, one could argue that the goals of quality education in these instances went far beyond the simple focus on academic or short-term achievements. This was further emphasised by educators working in Soka kindergartens during informal conversations. The educators addressed that their Soka kindergarten not only focused on building knowledge but there was also a concern about children's moral education and holistic human development including having a strong spirit when facing problems, overcoming difficulties and love for others. For instance, Soka kindergartens hold children's group performances such as music festivals, kindergarten anniversary celebrations and annual graduations. Educators mentioned some children find it difficult to perform in front of others. One educator emphasised that if a child was genuinely worried about public performance they would put them at the back, or perform off-stage or even just watch the performance. Ideally, educators would prefer all children join class performance. Educators working in Soka kindergartens further explained they

encouraged children to overcome their fears by standing next to and supporting them during the performance. Some educators mentioned that the children were generally very happy after they had completed their performance. Interestingly, the children frequently told their teacher they wanted to repeat the performance.

Through this example we can see that although there is power exercised by educators to encourage children to overcome their difficulties, children develop a sense of confidence and achievement. Foucault argues that power can also be positive and produce new knowledge. During my site visit I read a Soka newsletter regarding how three former Soka kindergarten students are now studying at university. The article included comments about happy memories of their Soka kindergarten graduation performance and the positive impact this had on their life. Although this is only one example, no doubt moral education and holistic human inner development plays a major part within Soka education. This explains why the themes generated from my data during this study were closely related to human inner development. For instance, the themes of 'value creation', 'happiness' and 'humanity' are frequently highlighted in the data findings and capture the core of quality early childhood education within the Soka education model. The data showed these three concepts are interrelated, and overlap and expand from within an individual's life to the surrounding environment. Ikeda and others posit that happiness, which lies in creating value in daily life, is a fundamental purpose of humanist education (Ikeda, 2010; Makiguchi, 2004; Soka Gakkai International, 2013b).

Theme One - value creation education. As previously explained, 'Soka' is a Japanese term meaning value creation drawn from Makiguchi's ideas, which are a vital component of Soka education philosophy. An exploration of Makiguchi's 'value' constitutes of 'beauty', 'gain' and 'good' and also the concept of creating value in our

daily life experience. In Soka, 'beauty' indicates aesthetic values, the positive sensory response evoked by that which we recognise as 'beautiful' (Ikeda, 2010). My understanding and interpretation of what educators working in Soka kindergartens mean, when they refer to the term 'beauty', is the positive side of each child as a form of beauty in itself. The aesthetic values of beauty can be found anywhere, within anyone and not limited to objects but also people. To be able to see 'beauty' in our daily lives depends on individual perspective. For instance, we all face various forms of 'stress' at times, either studying, parenting or at work. When one views stress as a negative force, they may feel anxious, distressed or nervous. In contrast, if that person views stress as a form of beauty they may regard this as a good thing, to remain motivated and productive. To transfer this example into an education situation; if educators see the beauty within each child, the positive value of their perspectives of children as individual and unique with diverse cultures and background, impacts or shapes their classroom practice.

This positive sensory response allows educators to view the good side and extend their understanding of each child and this gain is what educators working in Soka kindergartens find rewarding. Viewed through a postmodern theoretical lens, the discourse of the value of 'beauty' would allow us to gain new knowledge and meaning towards creating quality early childhood education classroom practice. The chief factor of the discourse of the value of 'beauty' is how this influences the movement of power relations between the educator and the child in a classroom setting. This power can be exercised as respect, as positive and constructive, rather than a negative force such as educators exercising unquestioned authority. This helps us understand how the concepts of creating the value of 'beauty' and 'gain' in daily life experiences can ultimately lead to creating and enhancing the wellbeing of an entire community and this makes it a

better and more 'just' place for people to live. This is what educators working in Soka kindergartens mean when they talk about 'good' in value creation (Ikeda, 2010), creating a peaceful, happy, harmonious and sustainable society. The understanding of 'beauty', 'gain' and 'good' can be found in the following educator's comment:

I keep asking myself what kind of value are we creating and what values do you think are beneficial to people. So I think the values come in recognizing the goodness in each person and this includes me as an educator. How to continue to highlight this goodness and contribute to the fellow people around you? We work towards a bigger goal such as a harmonious environment and society. Of course the biggest goal will be global world peace. So this is a Soka value (ED2S).

Makiguchi (2006) also argued that value is not external but refers to internal aspects and can be created in how we respond to a society. The concept of value creation refers to gaining value through daily life experiences which refers to the human character. Humanist values are the objectives of Soka education. An educator further explained that value points to the positive aspects of reality that are brought forth or generated when we creatively engage with the challenges of daily life. Soka 'value creation' was discussed in detail in Chapter One regarding the background of Soka education. This section focuses on how the concept of value creation has constructed educators' discourse and beliefs. As discussed, educators' beliefs in value are not only related to the inner self needs and satisfaction, but they are also an important contribution to society. This means how individual actions create value in our society. Since the concept of value creation is profound, educators working in Soka kindergartens often relate to the Soka education institution founder, Ikeda, and the Soka philosophy of humanist practice. During interview, one educator expressed some key words, which helps me understand her constructions of the concept of value creation:

They had some kind of discussion among teachers about what is Soka education. But actually, as you know, Soka education is very profound because Soka education talks about… the heart of the student and also about how you take care of each child sitting in front of you. And it seems that the quality of Soka education is that really this is not only for your own happiness but also the happiness of others… And from this value creation you can find the founder's spirit and I really try to encourage the children to convey the spirit of the founder so that they can overcome any difficulties they may face in the future (ED6J).

This educator underlined that Soka education is profound because it relates to human to human interactions; educators to children, educators to parents, child to child and educator to educator relationships. Human thoughts and actions are complex and they are situated within social constructions of meaning. An educator *(ED6J)* relates to the discourse of the educator regarding how children shape and influence what educators provide in their classroom practice. This educator expressed that happiness is one of the most important elements which constructs the concept of value creation and that happiness is not only for oneself but for others. Soka education philosophy argues that happiness is a fundamental inclusion in the creation of quality early childhood education. Happiness fosters a sense of determination, hope and appreciation in Soka children. Further explanations of this concept of happiness will be discussed in 'theme two' later in this chapter. Since Soka education is profound, this educator often refers to the founder's spirit as a model in her classroom practice. Another educator related her understanding of how she conceptualised value creation in the context of a child's knowledge and behaviour:

How I interpret value creation is that it means we should be adding value to our daily practice. When there are improvements in even one thing this is value creation. Many parents said that their children learnt so much knowledge as

well as fostering their child's happiness and positive behaviour. In my view, whether knowledge or behaviour, if we (educators) can bring out the child's positive side and this has its own value, I think this is value creation, Soka education (ED1HK).

The above educator explained the importance of bringing out children's positive aspects, in other words, developing the child's potential. This explanation is in line with the concept of 'beauty' and how educators see the beauty in each child. The concept of beauty in this context refers to each child's potential. Educator's appreciation of each child's potential creates a positive value and a positive impact on children's learning through the classroom learning environment, relationships, curriculum as well as the educators' pedagogy. In addition, how educators create value was found in each of the educational principles and goals of the three Soka kindergartens.

Sapporo Soka Kindergarten:

> To encourage children to acquire basic life skills, to develop creativity and the ability to take action and to strengthen children's desire to contribute to society in the future.
>
> (Soka Gakuen Educational Foundation, 2009, p. 36).

Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten:

> To foster children's pure hearts and a healthy body.
> To foster children's independent personalities and strong willpower.
> To foster children's gregariousness and care for others.
> To focus on children's individuality and to develop lofty sentiments.
> To foster children's *hopes for the future, to expand their vision to the world*.
>
> (Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten, 2003)

Singapore Soka Kindergarten:

> To cultivate good habits to develop a healthy body and mind.
> To foster a considerate child who can interact with everyone.
> To foster the child's ability to continue courageously to the end for righteousness.

To nurture fine characters to contribute to the future society.

To develop and foster rich creativity and humanity by cherishing each child's distinct personality.

<div style="text-align: right">(Singapore Soka Kindergarten, 2003)</div>

The above Soka kindergarten principles and goals illustrate the relationship between the educators' discourse of value creation and practice. Whilst the term 'value' is abstract, Soka principals highlighted the elements that promote value creation. For instance, the principal of the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten stated an aspiration "to encourage children to acquire basic life skills, to develop creativity and the ability to take action and to strengthen children's desires to contribute to society in the future". It is clear that although the term 'value' did not appear in the above quote; to acquire basic life skills and develop creativity relate to creating positive values for children. This indicates that value can be viewed in many ways. The Hong Kong and Singapore Soka Kindergarten principals focused on how children could gain good value from quality education. Importantly, these principals discussed a sense of inner-self, personality and good habits. Educators working in Soka kindergartens explained that Makiguchi promoted the importance of education in the context of the needs and daily lives of people. These educational principles cultivate recognition and the ability to create value in the human character, which lies in fostering the values of gain, good and beauty. The theory of value and education are closely linked to happiness in individuals and societies. While the education goals of Soka focus on human happiness, this is contrary to traditional Asian education practices which typically focus on academic achievement. For instance, writing and reading skills are critical tools for when children transition to primary school. Therefore kindergartens need to focus on the development of the whole child instead of focusing narrowly on prepration for primary school. With respect to this view I raise a critical question regarding how Soka education philosophy can

accommodate and compromise the social constructions of such highly competitive education systems in East Asia. One educator explained during an informal conversation:

The children are still learning to write sentences and memorise Chinese characters (dictation). However, it is most important that what children learn is related to daily life. For example, we set up a corner to recreate a supermarket where children carry out role play; some children need to write out a shopping list and the children pretend to be shopkeepers and need to write down the names of their products and the prices, etc. The cashier needs to count how much each customer has to pay. All that learning is through meaningful play. Also we provide some books to let children find and copy some words to write (ED3HK).

This narrative shows how this educator planned activities with rich sources of learning, respecting children's interests as well as teaching useful life skills. This highlights the interrelation between educator's beliefs and their practice; this learning creates a positive value for children. In this example learning can be anytime and anywhere, and educators working in Soka kindergartens believe every moment can be an opportunity to create value for themselves as educators or for the children. Another educator said:

For me I think Soka value creation education is about trying our best to help each child to learn and to develop in the correct direction, every moment is a teaching moment. Sometimes it's not necessarily planned but I think about how I can use every moment to teach them something of good value and not just like focusing on the weak academic side. I think children who have a good learning attitude are important, [have an] interest in learning and want to try something, even though you [the child] may not think you can be successful (ED3S).

These good learning attitudes can be found in the general theme of this study; the concept of happiness in Soka education philosophy and fostering children to have hope and a determination not to give up. A further explanation of these two concepts is

presented in the next section. The narratives provided in this section show an understanding of the values of educators as individuals, and this is an important issue in quality early childhood education.

Educators working in Soka kindergartens expressed the power of the value creation concept within Soka kindergartens, which has determined their direction and created a set of knowledge which has subsequently influenced the practice of educators in the classroom. It was Makiguchi's view that the concept of happiness and humanity were educational goals which should be fully deployed to create value when facing life's obstacles and difficulties.

Theme two - happiness education. Educators working in Soka kindergartens held deep beliefs in respect of 'happiness' being an essential factor in the development of quality early childhood education, and as part of the overall development of children and subsequently society (Ikeda, 2010; Makiguchi, 2004). They emphasised that happiness can contribute to children's learning capacity in different contexts. They draw on Nichiren Buddhist philosophy which associates happy experiences as a key determinant of quality early childhood education (Ikeda, 2010). Educators working in Soka kindergartens argued that young children's experiences would nurture the child to face future challenges with boldness throughout life. In the following two quotes, educators adapted Makiguchi and Ikeda's beliefs in that they considered happiness as an essential part of the overall development of children and society (Ikeda, 2010; Makiguchi, 2004).

> *You know, the most important thing for us is happiness. It does not mean when children are running around or laughing then they are happy. Some children can fake their happiness just to please educators (ED5J).*

A Soka educator should know this…we are talking about the happiness that comes from the inside of the children. You see this in their work habits within the centre; their posture and their determination show this (ED2J).

The educators' conceptions of happiness as a foundation for quality early childhood education have historical roots in Makiguchi's, Toda's and Ikeda's philosophical traditions. Ikeda (2010), Makiguchi (2004), and Toda (cited in Soka Gakkai International, 2013b) posit that happiness is a fundamental purpose of quality education. They emphasise that happiness can contribute to children's learning capacity in different contexts because happiness liberates the individual from within. The following narratives illustrate how these educators perceive happiness:

The children need an inner drive and it is happiness that is the root of all the marvels of children's quality learning (ED1HK).

When the happiness comes from within, the children are able to accomplish complex goals. They have an exploratory drive and they want to understand how things work in nature. They also link this happiness to their peers (ED1J).

We think you cannot have a quality program if the children are not feeling happy, and this includes wellbeing, confidence, etc. (ED3J).

These concepts of happiness are drawn from Nichiren Buddhist philosophy, which associates happy experiences as those that are not imposed by external forces (Ikeda, 2010). One educator *(ED2J)* further explained that the internal forces of happiness are a key determinant of quality early childhood education because young children's experiences are nurtured from inside rather than outside. These children have deep reflective dispositions that enable them to see every problem as an opportunity for improvement or innovation.

During interviews with educators and parents regarding fostering children with determination, hope and appreciation (gratitude), comments were often made which

highlighted that the nurture of children's happiness, their personalities and attitudes were found within Soka philosophy.

Happiness via fostering children with determination. Interestingly, the findings demonstrated that fostering determination is an important component in the construction of happiness. Educators working in Soka kindergartens interpreted determination as a sense of strength which leads people to strive to overcome any problem or difficulty. An educator explained:

> *Children who are happy are determined at every opportunity, they want to succeed at whatever they do, even if they fail many times they do not stop trying because of their happiness in which the drive of determination comes from within them (ED6J).*

I am questioning how Soka values can construct a positive attitude towards oneself. An educator provided some Soka literature which explained perspectives regarding how children who are nurtured into possessing a strong determination, develop perseverance and do not easily give up when faced with difficulty within their learning programs to achieve success, which they subsequently model in adult life (Soka Gakkai International, 2013c). This is also addressed in the following narratives:

> *As a teacher, we really want ourselves and the children to develop a 'never giving up spirit' and the heart to overcome any challenges (ED4J).*
>
> *It is important to overcome your own negativity but this does not come easily or spontaneously; it is the teachers' role to nurture children to acquire these characteristics. I think to do this we must let the children know that overcoming current challenges is the way to achieve the goal of happiness. I believe this is the spirit of Soka education (ED6J).*

These narratives show that the spirit of never giving up is a main driving discourse among educators working in Soka kindergartens in terms of their program for

planning and classroom practice. In addition, Ikeda and Nichiren Buddhist philosophy have immensely shaped the beliefs of educators. The following narratives illustrate a strong bond between Soka educators and the founder, Ikeda.

> *The principles of the Soka kindergarten are to nurture a person from the early years of life, a person who will never be defeated ... this is our goal to teach children. That is what Ikeda Sensei [meaning teacher in Japanese] always encourages us to do (ED1J).*

> *I have been here 15 years, actually, every year we are meeting different children and their families. Sometimes I might face some struggles and hard times but inner happiness gives me the strength to overcome these struggles. I feel really happy and appreciative of what I have had to go through, and with [Ikeda] Sensei's encouragement, I do not fear anything. I really appreciate [in a] sense so much (ED6J).*

It is apparent from these educators' comments that through the philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism some people are able to transform hardships and difficulties into absolute, indestructible happiness (Ikeda, 2010; Makiguchi, 2004). Ikeda's (1987) statement illustrates this further:

> Indestructible happiness is found "in the indestructible 'self' established with the life of an individual which enables him to calmly overcome whatever difficulties he may face ... unwavering 'self' require that we actively pursue and establish in our lives, the foundation of genuine happiness" (pp. 56-57).

Ikeda's views regarding an indestructible 'self' include the need to value individual self-esteem, self-confidence and self-belief. Similarly, associating these perspectives with early childhood education brings into focus how an individual child values themselves and how educators' perceptions of children impact their teaching practice. Soka philosophy, for instance, emphasises the unlimited potential of each child, and the same beliefs shape Soka kindergarten practice.

I really think the spirit of early childhood education at this kindergarten is the unlimited potential of each child...this consideration is important if the educator is working with each child focusing on the child's potential brings happiness to the learning for this child because the child can relate to what we are teaching them (ED2J).

The Soka kindergarten believes each person has unlimited potential regardless of whether you are educator or a child. As the one in charge, we need to believe this in ourselves and never doubt something we can do or achieve...this perspective allows us, the educators here, to keep challenging the children even beyond their capabilities (ED1J).

I was keen to understand how the value of determination and never giving up would be found within educators' practice and kindergarten activities. For example, during the 'Week of Victory' Soka kindergartens provide positive reinforcement for children to overcome obstacles as well as encourage others to do the same. In this way, educators explained that the Soka education philosophy of happiness for children is grounded in practice that empowers children to have a sense of courage to overcome difficulties and challenges. To do this, children need to be encouraged to overcome their difficulties and challenges.

Happiness via fostering children with hope. The findings from educators' views showed that fostering hope contributes significantly to children's happiness and they believe children should always have hopes and dreams. The concept of hope at Soka kindergartens was interpreted by one educator as:

Individual actions toward their goals as well as giving hope to others to create greater happiness and a harmonious society (ED5J).

Educators working in Soka kindergartens further explained that this process is expected to result in an individual's courage, determination, ability to take risks, greater wisdom, compassion and inclusion of others. Ikeda (2010) explained "people must be

empowered with courage and hope if they are to take those first concrete steps" (p. 43) in life. Thus hope has become a strong motivating factor and offers direction when an individual moves toward their goals. One view shared by an educator was:

I have always supported and encouraged children's sense of hope as this was a desire of the founder of the kindergarten…the founder Ikeda named the Sapporo Soka kindergarten a 'fairy tale land'. The idea behind this term was that children are expected to draw on their ability or capability to freely explore their own dreams without limitations (ED1J).

In addition, a Soka principal explained that the kindergarten had a children's mini train called *the Train of Dreams* which was a space for children to create a sense of hope and to express their dreams. Educators further stated that the children were always excited to ride this train during which time they shared their wishes and hopes.

We really tried our best efforts to encourage those children to have their own dreams and develop their own dreams more and more at this kindergarten (ED2J).

There are some messages when Sensei came to this kindergarten and one of them was, please come back to this fairy tale land any time, I know [Ikeda] Sensei always wanted to encourage children to create their dreams. Nothing is impossible; we need to create the impossible to become possible in my life time. This is my belief too (ED1J).

Interestingly, data found that 'hope' is not only for the children at the Soka kindergarten but also strongly influenced educators' beliefs, which they expressed. They argue that the promotion of hope for children at the Soka kindergarten is the genesis of happiness. This belief was observed during classroom practice which comprised positive and supportive educator-child relationships in motivating children to learn beyond their capabilities. The educators working in Soka kindergartens further explained how important it was for educator-child relationships to show respect to each individual child, and to accept children's views and perspectives. These positive and

supportive relationships were highly regarded within Soka kindergarten practice as contributing factors to the overall happiness of the children they taught. Three Soka educators commented:

> *I always listen to children and care about their feelings. I know that they will become a person like [Ikeda] Sensei to really go all over the world to create friendships with others. They have this kind of warm heart to take care of others. That is one thing that we really want to teach the children by showing this ourselves (ED3J).*

> *I really love children and it was my dream to become a kindergarten educator when I was young. Therefore in the classroom I always encourage my children and give them support when they face any struggles (ED6J).*

> *I really treasure my lunch time with the children where we eat together and share our thoughts and ideas. We have harmony and supportive classroom practice (ED4J).*

These educators addressed the importance of providing positive support and continuous encouragement to each individual child at their kindergarten. This is supported by postmodern perspectives which argue the importance of diversity and culture. Here the educators' discourse with respect to 'valuing children's voices' produces a set of knowledge, as well as power relations in the classroom which creates a shared learning practice instead of simply educators telling children what to do. Foucault's concept of power was that power is not a thing but a relationship that is found within our daily interactions with others (Foucault, 2003a).

Happiness via fostering children with a sense of appreciation. Findings in this study indicated that fostering a sense of appreciation and gratitude emerged as another strong factor in contributing to happiness. Appreciation and gratitude are deeply rooted in the Soka philosophy (Makiguchi, 2004; Ikeda, 2010).

Makiguchi (2004) posited that it is important for children to learn values such as the sanctity of human life, a sense of gratitude and how to contribute to society through education. Educators mentioned that the concept of gratitude is situated in the 'Mentor and Disciple' relationship as a part of Nichiren Buddhism. A Soka principal explained that the mentor and disciple concept does not mean the mentor exacts obedience from the disciple. Instead, the mentor seeks to foster the disciple to achieve an even greater state of development than the mentor (Soka Gakkai International, 2013d).

Undoubtedly, the fundamental spirit of the mentor and disciple relationship was demonstrated by Makiguchi, Ikeda, and Toda (Soka Gakkai International, 2013e) in my data. As a demonstration of their gratitude to his mentor Makiguchi, Toda worked to compile Makiguchi's numerous notes on educational theory into a publication (Soka Gakkai International, 2013e) which led to the consolidation of Makiguchi's life works on Soka education. This sense of gratitude was inherited by Ikeda to fulfil Toda's desire to achieve a dream of putting Soka theory into practice. Consequently, Ikeda established Soka schools and propagated Nichiren Buddhism outside Japan (Soka Gakkai International, 2013a). It is this chain of mentor-disciple relationships that is strongly rooted among educators who work in Soka institutions. Included in the curriculum was a topic introducing the founder in each classroom; for instance, a poster of Ikeda (see Figure 4.1), the children's birthday display (see Figure 4.2). In addition, children's artwork (see Figure 4.3) from the Sapporo Soka kindergarten, depicting an excursion to Atsuta (a village on the west coast of Hokkaido). Ikeda and his mentor, Toda celebrated dialogue regarding their pursuit of world peace. The principal explained this excursion was very meaningful for Soka children and assisted in their understanding of the founder's aspirations for world peace.
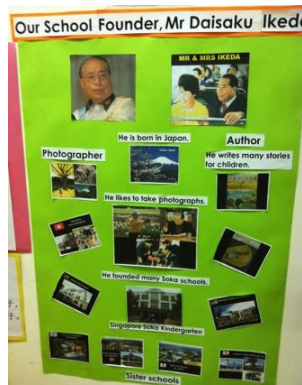
Figure 4.1: Poster of founder's profile in a classroom

Figure 4.2: Founder's birthday display together with children's birthday board in a classroom

Figure 4.3: Children's drawing display following an excursion

The images above illustrate how educators working in Soka kindergartens have developed a personal sense of mission in the promotion of Soka education to support and mentor each other, particularly novice educators. They also see themselves as mentors for the children they teach. This sense of mission has influenced their daily practices and views toward children.

> *I really appreciate that I was able to actually get involved in the movement of the kindergarten and fulfill my mission to become an early childhood educator...the greatest goal is to teach children a sense of appreciation because being appreciative of what you have brings a sense of happiness (ED1J).*

> *I have learnt many things from [Ikeda] Sensei about education and how much [Ikeda] Sensei has contributed to education. So I need to look after children well, just as Sensei would (ED5J).*

Another educator considers how her appreciation contributed to her work as an educator:

> *I can see how [Ikeda] Sensei has contributed to the education for all children...this really makes me consider and think how can I repay back Sensei with appreciation. I will try my best to foster the children to become capable people in the future (ED6J).*

In fact the findings showed that the process of appreciation would also demonstrate a sense of inner reflection. This reflection can contribute to reflective practice:

I have been thinking that all educators here are the disciples of [Ikeda] Sensei and we have a strong feeling of how to respond to Sensei within us (ED5J).

Ikeda has been to this kindergarten nine times; so I always try to go back to how Sensei was… and so that's why I always see him as an example and to consider whether I am constantly reflecting on my contribution for children's happiness in the future (ED2J).

For me I reflect on Sensei as my model in terms of how he interacts with children and this has become my example of practice (ED3J).

These findings indicate educators' perspectives on gratitude that can strengthen one's life. This was further explained by educators working in Soka kindergartens in that a sense of appreciation allows people to enhance their inner life state which can lead to broadening one's perspectives. Thus children can appreciate their capabilities even when they are faced with difficult challenges (SGI, 2014e). According to the educators working in Soka kindergartens, because they are appreciative of their capabilities, they can enhance their children's capabilities to overcome everyday learning challenges. This is clearly a form of self-awareness, as educators have expressed.

To show my gratitude to [Ikeda] Sensei, I will always look for an improvement in myself as a teacher and take good care of my children (ED4J).

I always encourage my children to overcome difficulties, whatever they may face in the future and have an appreciation for the people and environment around us (ED6J).

This sense of appreciation and gratitude illustrates the importance of educators in promoting quality classroom practice. A sense of appreciation and gratitude provides

children with positive thinking and consideration for others. This will assist in creating people who are self-reliant and place happiness at the centre of learning and development.

Theme three - humanist education. Ikeda (2010) and Makiguchi (2010) noted that humanist ideologies respect equality and humanism as individual rights, diversity, culture, personality, needs and thoughts in quality education. Ikeda (2010) argued that education should not become a product of political or economic demands, but instead it should endeavour to support each person to reach lifelong happiness. The following narrative illustrates this perspective:

> *I think, in Humanist education, it is very important to look into each child, not only when teachers see a difference between children but to look how to bring out the potential of each unique child's. Each child is important and we also should foster children to respect other's differences. For me, it is most important to teach children how to live in harmony together with others. A kindergarten is like a small society, children learning to respect and care for others. Our goal is to provide humanist education as well as create an education of peace (ED2HK).*

All of the participating educators explained that Humanist education considers each child as unique and equal. They referred to how Ikeda (2010) made use of a Buddhist metaphor to describe each individual as "the flowering of the personality that emanated from the depths of life with the statement that each person's individuality is as unique as cherry, plum, peach or damson blossoms" (p. 168), in which the character of each person is able to contribute and construct a positive functional role in society. One educator addressed the concept of diversity in her relations with other educators. She highlights that despite her many years of teaching experience and regardless of qualifications, it is important, as a humanist educator, to learn from and respect each other. This discourse demonstrates the quality of interactions between educators.

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In humanist education, we are all different, both teachers and children. Importantly, we need to value ourselves as well as others, for example. I know myself as somewhat very rough and I speak loudly so I try to learn from my classroom partner, she is very gentle so I try to learn from her. Actually she has not much teaching experience compared to me but I can still learn from her because I am a human, I have to learn other's good points (ED3HK).

This finding showed that the discourse to humanist education conceptualisation within Soka philosophy can be found within Soka education (Soka Gakkai International, 2013c), which lies in helping each child to bring forth his or her potential from deep within and focuses on developing a life that makes a contribution and the ability to empathise with the feelings of others (Ikeda 2010). Educators working in Soka kindergartens point to the example of Ikeda who, through his many visits, small gifts, and encouraging messages to children, has modelled humanistic educational interactions for all educators.

Data analysis highlighted that the notion of humanist education was strongly embedded in educators' discourse in the Sapporo, Hong Kong and Singapore Soka Kindergartens, which was foregrounded in the motto 'strong, righteous and free (liveliness)'. Educators explained that the motto indicates a focus on inner human qualities such as spiritual strength, character and humanity. These beliefs have been constructed within a body of knowledge that includes the principles of happiness and humanistic education. To provide a deep understanding of humanist Soka education, a sense of respect, compassion and unlimited potential will be discussed in the following sections.

Humanity via fostering children with respect. Educators working in Soka kindergartens addressed that respect for self and others are important elements in constructing happiness and creating value in everyday life. An educator explained that

in Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore, like many other Asian countries, educators and parents often focus on children fostering a sense of good manners and respect for elders and senior people. This is mainly due to cultural and social expectations as demonstrated by powers of authority, while elders and seniors manifest power interrelated with their knowledge and life experience. In contrast, Nichiren Buddhism views that a sense of respect should be for all human life and the environment and argues that each person has potential Buddhahood, which should be respected by all people. Buddhahood means "the supreme state of life in Buddhism, characterized by boundless wisdom and compassion" (Soka Gakkai, 1999, p.1207). All people are unique, equal, precious and full of unlimited potential, which is necessary in order to value diversity and difference.

The concept of self-respect and respect for others is an essential teaching in Buddhist practice. According to the participating educators they value the fostering of children to develop respect, and to create positive and inclusive relationships within their classroom practice. For example, one educator expressed the following:

The Soka education model is about belief. The belief is situated within Buddhism philosophy: respect for each person and belief in their unlimited possibilities. In Nichiren Buddhism there is mention about firstly respect for life, those views of life are very important. So as a teacher we have to be respectful, accepting of diversity and be inclusive of all children. Whatever the children's background, ability or personalities, we have to foster each of them to become capable people who will become global citizens and contribute to society (ED1HK).

Soka educators' see their roles as fostering children to become global citizens and ultimately contribute to World peace; respect for diversity and different cultures are an important element in creating an inclusive environment. It is interesting to note that whilst the Soka kindergartens are grounded within Buddhist philosophies the three institutions do not include prayers or other religious activities in their respective

curriculum. The focus is rather on the development of respect for different religions. For example, this respect for diversity was also found in some practices at the Singapore Soka Kindergarten, as one educator explained:

Our teachers and children at this kindergarten are from various religious backgrounds. We don't want anyone to feel left out. For example, some children and teachers have a Muslim background. We had a policy change a few years ago in which the food provided for teachers and children is now officially Halal. I feel that this is a way to show our respect for diversity. I feel good relationships are based on respect, understanding and caring for each other (ED1S).

Another example highlighting respect for cultural diversity was found at the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten during a field visit.

The Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten has a small group of Japanese children who cannot speak Cantonese, including their parents. Based on the Soka kindergarten goal of humanist education, we have to consider the needs of each child. Our kindergarten has arranged [for] teachers who speak Japanese to be placed in those classes to support Japanese speaking children and also all the communication notes to these parents are translated into Japanese. Although there was only a small group of Japanese speaking children we respect them and appreciate that they chose our kindergarten although they understand the language used is Cantonese. The children and parents were very happy and that is what I call humanity education (ED1HK).

This narrative illustrates respect for different views and diverse backgrounds of the children and their families; this approach has led educators to reflect on their classrooms practice and curriculum planning. Educators working in Soka kindergartens highlighted that one way to achieve quality early childhood education is through an understanding of the importance of observing children's ideas. Educators further explained that when children were respected and accepted, this would lead to improvement in children's confidence and their holistic development.

Humanism via fostering children with compassion. In my data, the Buddhist perspectives of compassion can be found in creating a supportive and encouraging educator-child relationship. In Chinese and Japanese Buddhist texts, including Nichiren Buddhism, there are two Chinese characters comprising the word 'compassion'. The word is pronounced 'ci bei' in Chinese and 'jihi' in Japanese. The first character means "to give happiness" and the second character means "to remove suffering" (SGI-USA, 2014, para. 5).

Compassion constituted in humanity is a sense of equality and interconnectedness with life which is about empowering others, helping others to unlock strength and courage within their lives to overcome their problems. Compassion allows people to understand other's feelings and look at the positive side of that person (SGI, 2014f).

An interesting concept found in my data was from a Soka perspective: that compassion refers to rooting out the causes of misery in people's lives and directing them towards happiness. Such compassion is the very nature of acting with courage and strength. For example, the findings showed that educators working in Soka kindergartens often seek to imagine other people's suffering and joy. Those thoughts allow educators to better understand the importance of seeing things from the child's perspective.

The following narrative highlights how compassion can influence an educator's determination to manage an unhappy child at the Singapore Soka kindergarten:

> *I had an experience with a child who always didn't seem to smile, we found that very hard for her. She seemed to have a lot things going on in her mind. Although the child didn't disrupt the class, but as a teacher, I really wanted to help her and I had her in my mind all the time. So I tried many ways but it didn't work, until I noticed she liked role play. I decided to bring her out from the class, not even during snack time; we went to the play room. The environment*

was in confidence and I felt when I talked to her and asked her why she was so upset? And she suddenly said that her mummy doesn't like her. And she started to go on and on and just went on about how her mum hit her. I think that those kind of feelings, very negative feelings regarding the relationship between her mother and her younger sister and I can feel her sense of sadness. I think a lot of children won't be able to express sad feelings so I think dialogue has a very important role as a teacher (ED1S).

This narrative illustrates the importance of a sense of compassion within educator's beliefs which motivate their behaviour to support children's emotional development. Although the educator did not explain how she helped the child, the sense of compassion for the child's happiness was clearly demonstrated. The findings also showed a belief in compassion within educators working in Soka kindergartens. This frequently has a positive impact on classroom practice and educators tend to do more work for the general happiness of children, instead of simply routine teaching work.

I believe when teachers want a child to have happiness they will know what they have to do and that leads them naturally to think about the children all the time. When you really love a child you will naturally think what can I do to help them to grow? What are those children's needs that we can give to them? (ED1HK).

This highlights compassion and desire for the child's happiness such as focusing on the empowerment of a child's learning, and unlocking an individual child's potential is reflected in educators' thoughts in planning activities and curriculum.

Based on Soka beliefs and in seeking happiness for all children, the curriculum will need to be based on those elements. For example, when I plan my activities I will think how we can help children to develop their various abilities by providing support for children, and the plan becomes involved with more chances and opportunities for children to express their thoughts and feelings (ED2HK).

We had a 'harmony day' based on the ideas of children at this kindergarten. When we started it wasn't in the plan, so sometimes, with the amount of

discussion with the children, there is now a common trend or current theme that they want to do something different or immediately, how about we do this event and so on. As a teacher we welcome a child's thoughts and ideas (ED1S).

As mentioned above, these narratives demonstrate how educators position themselves to appreciate children's perspectives and this constitutes a form of compassion. Understanding this process may assist early childhood educators elsewhere in the world to move on from ingrained perspectives and habitual thinking, thus creating alternative epistemological and ontological positioning of childhood, and children who may impact their classroom practice and the construction of quality early childhood education.

Through clearly demonstrating compassion through their actions, words and attitudes educators can foster a sense of compassion within children. The fostering of children to develop a sense of compassion may include educators going beyond the classroom environment. For example at the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten there is a preference to conduct home visits to the children's homes. However, due to the large number of students, educators often find it difficult to make such home visits and the kindergarten organises telephone conservations at the start of the term which are mostly conducted outside of school hours. Educators working in Soka kindergartens might call parents in the evening when working parents are back home. In addition, conducting home visits depends on individual educators or family needs. The educators at the Sapporo and Singapore Soka kindergartens also conduct annual home visits to children and their families. Educators working in Soka kindergartens explained that home visits assisted in building a good relationship with families and children. It was also explained this was a good opportunity to better understand the background and domestic circumstances of the children. Home visits are conducted outside of normal

kindergarten working hours in the evening or during weekends. One educator expressed her thoughts regarding home visits as follows:

> *I really like the idea of home visits because this allows teachers to better understand the children in their classroom. The children were so happy when they saw me and they play host at their home. But ultimately it's another way for parents to observe their children in a gracious, well-mannered role as host; it's a chance for them to do that and it's a great chance for the parents to prepare together with the child for something and all that. So parents are very welcoming, they also understand that the teacher has to do this in their own time and that means the time is not claimable with time off. We have to do this in the evening, after work, all out of our own time (ED1S).*

From a Soka philosophical point of view, when educators position themselves to appreciate other's perspectives this constitutes a form of compassion; this may cause educators to consider implementing alternative options and ideas which they can subsequently use in the classroom.

Humanity via fostering children with unlimited potential. A belief in the unlimited potential of each child can be found within Soka philosophy. An understanding of this unlimited potential is mentioned in a previous section, discussing how each individual can attain Buddhahood. Nichiren (the founder of Nichiren Daishonin Buddhism) states Buddhahood is not a static condition but rather it is a dynamic experience through which an individual continues development and discovery (SGI, 2014h). Makiguchi (2004) argues that each individual contains Buddhahood and has unlimited potential, therefore the goal of lifelong education is for children to pursue happiness, self-awareness and wisdom. The educators at Soka kindergartens view children as very treasured people.

> *For kindergarten teachers it is important to believe children have their own potential and unique personalities. Like twins [that] still have their own personalities. So, as a teacher, we need to know their personalities and their*

strong and weak points that exert their potential. Afterwards we need to mentor and bring up these children to become capable people who will contribute to society (ED3HK).

I really think that the spirit of early childhood education at this kindergarten brings out this unlimited potential, and that this will really make a contribution to world peace in many ways which we cannot image. So we really try our best efforts to encourage those children to develop their own dreams at this kindergarten. So actually, not only are we teaching the children, actually we have been learning so much from the children too. (ED1J).

This belief in individuals is also related to discussion in respect of how children value their own unlimited potential. The findings showed that the educators believe that this can impact children's self-esteem, self-confidence and self-belief. The following narrative illustrates the Soka concept of human revolution and how this impacts educators working in Soka kindergartens. The term 'human revolution' is widely used within Soka and means the work of transforming our lives at the very core. It involves identifying and challenging those things that inhibit the full expression of our positive potential and humanity (SGI, 2014b), people who transform to become a better self:

Soka education means to take care of each person. Taking care of each person seems to be quite easy to do but actually in reality is very hard to articulate. For example, in the class there were some students who don't really follow and there are some problems occurring occasionally. So it's always a challenge to believe in each child's potential and to really believe in that person. But I think that it's good to take care of each person as this has a deep meaning more than we actually think. And, er, Sensei always says that there is nothing that we can't overcome if we have human revolution. If we can maintain our human revolution there is nothing we can't overcome and I like this quote a lot (ED4J).

Similarly, associating these perspectives with early childhood education brings into focus how individual children value themselves and how educators' perceive the

unlimited potential of each child. The value of self-belief is important as this creates a

sense of courage to overcome difficulties and challenges in life.

Part B: Data Presentation of Soka Practices

The Soka educators' beliefs were presented in Part A. In Part B I explore how educators' beliefs were implemented into actual classroom practice. This gives the reader a more informed understanding of educator's beliefs and practice. The educators see value in the expansion of children's interests in reading; evidence of this learning environment can be seen in the creation of book corners in each classroom and a library room. Additionally, the library room depositary had a wide array of books with bright and comfortable furniture which encouraged children's reading. This illustrates that, despite the limited space available at the Sapporo, Hong Kong and Singapore Soka Kindergartens, educators that work in Soka kindergarten classroom settings and reading areas prioritise available space for children. In addition, the location of the book corner and the design of the furniture selected encouraged children to read. This shows how Soka kindergartens provide meaningful and valuable information.

To understand Soka practice, the interview data collected from educators and parents and observation findings from my field work will be presented. This data was supported by informal conversations, photography and documentation collection as appendages to reinforce the research. As demonstrated in the previous section, the educators' beliefs were strongly embedded within Soka educational philosophy. It is important to explore the practices of Soka educators working in Soka kindergartens in relation to how they construct quality early childhood education. This analysis helped me to lay the foundations for discussing the findings in my discussion chapter.

During interviews many educators working in Soka kindergartens highlighted the importance of putting their beliefs into practice. Thus it became essential to understand how this was actually done. The educators posit that continuous self-

reflection and analysis of their daily teaching practices is important in ensuring transferability and consistency of their beliefs, curriculum implementation and pedagogical practices. One educator explained her classroom practice:

> *I would like to say some of my teaching and curriculum planning strategies are influenced by my beliefs [Soka philosophy]. For example, every year I know which class I will teach, so I will prepare an individual plan for each child during the summer holiday to help me better know their personalities. Although nobody requests me to do individual plans I do it anyway, because I am trying to understand each child's personality and character. Each child is so different and unique. Afterwards I will create a list including what they like to do or any special behaviour[al] needs. I continuously reflect on my teaching and the children's progress. I record in my 'teaching journal' each day my reflections of my daily practice and any new teaching ideas. Each teacher here has a teaching journal and these practices are based on our Soka beliefs of 'respect and value for children' (ED3HK).*

These deeply in-grained beliefs are due to their underlying Nichiren Buddhist philosophy which leads them to use these concepts in their daily practice and everyday lives and this is reflected in their routine classroom activities.

To provide a further explanation of my findings, the following five themes are generated from the data in respect of Soka practice: 'kindergarten policy', 'health and hygiene', 'structural (physical) environment', 'learning environment', and 'relationships' are presented and discussed in the following sections.

Theme one – kindergarten policy. The findings showed that the three Soka kindergartens practices were in line with respective local government early childhood education policies with respect to funding and regulations. In this section, due to the purpose of this study, I will not focus on presenting data related to government policy, but rather focus on how Soka discourse has influenced individual kindergarten policies. The overall policy at each of the Soka kindergartens was to provide quality

early childhood education practices for the children. Since Soka kindergarten beliefs are founded on concepts of value creation, happiness and humanism to create quality early childhood education, educators are involved in aspects of institutional management and decision making. This highlights that despite kindergarten policies, such as educational principles and goals, were already established upon inception of the schools, there was involvement and decision input in respect of curriculum, environment learning which provided educators a sense of belonging and empowerment:

> *Basic policies such as school resource policies, policies such as school rules and regulations and all that, teachers probably won't have much say. But for curriculum, activities planned, etc. where teachers are involved we have input. Although there are some rules when they make decisions, the guide is that teachers need to think about the children's benefit. Children's happiness is our first priority. When we planned to buy some teaching resources and if the school can afford it and the teaching resources are good for the children, why not? I saw this book and the other teachers thought it was good, so it's ok for you to buy that book ... but you still have to go back to the principal (ED1S).*
>
> *As part of my management style I will allow teachers to join in decision making, because after they become involved they will become very happy. They can also see results from their contributions (ED1HK).*

The educators working in Soka kindergartens explained that it was important to have the freedom to discuss and provide input into the creation of kindergarten policies and the curriculum whilst still following local government regulations. The findings showed that, although under the umbrella of local government policies, the participating Soka kindergartens developed policies according to school needs and demands. The level of educator involvement in the creation of kindergarten policies varied from time to time. For instance, since participating Soka kindergartens were established; educators have had various opportunities to become involved in influencing policy. In addition to

the educators, the parents were also found to be involved in the creation of kindergarten policy making. For instance, the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten created a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) in which members are elected by the current kindergarten parents. The PTA is involved and supports the making of kindergarten policies as well as organising school events.

At the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten, the majority of Japanese mothers stay at home and the kindergarten often invites parents to assist, which provides opportunities for them to observe kindergarten practice and in turn this creates closer relationships between parents and educators.

Interestingly, educators working in Soka kindergartens in Singapore welcome parents who visit the classroom; however it was explained that the majority of parents need to work, and therefore regular daily involvement with parents does not exist. Looking at addressing and reinforcing the importance of parent/kindergarten involvement, educators working in the other Soka kindergartens stated they were planning to form a PTA. They were hopeful that in doing so they could allow the parents' voices to be embedded in the actual kindergarten program.

Theme two - health and hygiene. The findings showed health and hygiene are important factors in the promotion of quality early childhood practice at Soka kindergartens. The first and obvious evidence of health and hygiene practice at the kindergartens was the requirement to change shoes to slippers for all educators and children entering the premises. This arrangement was common in the Sapporo, Hong Kong and Singapore Soka Kindergartens. Educators and children would exchange footwear (see Figures 4.4 to 4.6) when they entered and left the kindergarten each day. Soka principals explained that the exchange was about hygiene issues in order to protect the children. They also highlighted that indoor shoes are more appropriate for activities

such as running around and movement within the kindergarten. This is linked and associated with the type of activities and the curriculum conducted at Soka kindergartens.

Soka principals also explained that shoe exhanging provided children with an opportunity to take care of themselves and their belongings, which they found was beneficial in fostering independence habits at a young age. This indicated that Soka kindergartens have a strong Japanese cultural affiliation and demonstrate concern for student health and safety issues.

Figure 4.4: Shoe cabinet at Sapporo Soka Kindergarten

Figure 4.5: Shoe cabinet at Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten

Figure 4.6: Shoe cabinet at Singapore Soka Kindergarten

To better understand the practice of hygiene at any kindergarten; toilets are an important place to look for levels of and attention to cleanliness. A Soka principal explained that toilet hygiene is very important at each kindergarten as this provides a pleasant atmosphere (see Figure 4.7) to foster children to have a heightened awareness and appreciation for hygiene. In addition, educators mentioned that the facilities in the toilets are also purposely designed for the children's needs. For example, in Figure 4.8, due to the cold weather in Sapporo during the winter, a hand dryer was installed to allow children to dry their hands with warm air. In another example the children's toilets at the three Soka kindergartens are separated into boys and girls as expected; however, these facilities incorporated aesthetic features such as soft pastel colours,

plants and large mirrors in front of the washbasins. The principal of the Hong Kong kindergarten explained that they changed all the wash basin taps to auto type (see Figure 4.9) following the 2002 and 2003 SARS outbreak to reduce potential cross contamination risks. The World Health Organization [WHO] (2003) provides practical guidelines for infection control associated with the outbreak of SARS. There is a substantive section regarding the importance of keeping hands clean and details explaining how to wash hands correctly, but no requirements or comments regarding specific changes to hand washing facilities. This illustrates how Soka kindergartens have paid attention to changes in the environment and respond to a crisis situation. Concern for children's health was clearly identified as important during the site visits and during conversations with educators.

Figure 4.7: Children's drawing displayed at the entrance to the toilets

Figure 4.8: Children's hand dryer

Figure 4.9: Hygiene and cleanliness of wash basins

Another example of an active hygiene measure observed at the Hong Kong kindergarten was that the toilet facilities on each floor were the responsibility of cleaning staff that assisted some of the younger children having difficulties using the toilet. This was in addition to regular inspection and cleaning of facilities. The findings also showed the incorporation of carefully designed features and planning appropriate for young children, which included hand washing basins with filtrated water located at the optimum height. Such designs and features demonstrated consideration for

children's wellbeing, hygiene and they are positive steps in fostering good habits of independent care. The Singapore Soka kindergarten joined a local scheme to support and encourage good toileting habits for young students. Subsequently this kindergarten received an award from the Singapore government in respect of this scheme. The purpose of this scheme was to create good hygienic habits and encourage children to look after themselves.

In addition it was observed there was a focus on children's health at the Singapore Soka Kindergarten where educators and administration staff were noted as checking the incoming student's temperature and inspecting their hands before they proceeded to their classroom. The principal explained that body temperature and hand inspection reduces the risk of passing on illnesses around the school. An educator in Hong Kong explained that their daily one-on-one meeting with children was crucial for educators to observe children's emotional health:

> *When children arrive at the kindergarten they have to put a stamp in their hand book. So in the morning I will help to stamp the handbooks. During that time I will try to not only see if the children look sick or not but also welcome and greet the children each time. I also pay attention to their emotional health. I believe that this is important and also a good start to the day. If the children seem unhappy I will talk to them and understand what is wrong. Although this is only for a short time, I really think it is important and I really enjoy a bit of private time with each child (ED3HK).*

The above comments highlight how one educator focused on emotional as well as physical health. However, there was an incident related to emotional health which was observed during field visits. This incident, which I noted in my methodology chapter, regarded a child being scolded by a sports coach (who is not a full-time employee of the kindergarten) in front of the whole class. I found it difficult to analyse this incident, although I acknowledge that I did not use a universal perspective, but

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included other cultural and historical perspectives to view this incident. However, this incident still contradicts the Soka philosophy of respect and compassion in addition to viewing children as unlimited potential. If seen through a postmodern theoretical lens; the discourse of the sports coach in training the children was different from that of the Soka educational practice. The knowledge of this sports coach may be technical skills and maintaining class discipline. This discourse produces a set of knowledge in the way the sports coach exercised power with the children. This is to say that power was exercised through a dominant position (as an oppressor) by the sports coach, as the children acted as being oppressed. Arguably this creates a potential risk if a non-education expert is teaching within an education setting. The dilemma between the expert's knowledge in their field and children's development may not match or be appropriate.

Theme three – structured environment. The term 'structured environment' in this section focuses on the use of the internal physical structure of Soka kindergartens. Since the Sapporo and Hong Kong Soka Kindergartens were purposely built as kindergarten settings, the interior layout and design focused on an environment appropriate for young children to learn in and use. For instance, the setup of the tables and chairs could be configured depending on the activities and different purposes required for use. The classroom layout also provided another opportunity to understand how educators' beliefs, practices and pedagogy direct teaching or free learning. The classroom layout and setup provided opportunities for educators to interact with all children in the classroom.

The findings showed large windows, open spaces and an attractive interior design, combined with colourful furniture and children's art work on display. This combination created a well-structured and pleasant environment throughout the three

kindergartens. A good example of this was found at the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten where a castle has been installed within a large play area when the premises were first built. Educators working in Soka kindergartens explained the children really liked the castle as this represented a fantasy dream land and created a sense of hope for them. This is discussed later in this section. Another physical structure embedded in educators' beliefs was also found at the Sapporo Soka kindergarten. This was a colourful tunnel (Figure 4.10) which connected the learning area to classrooms. Small round windows (Figure 4.11) were designed at children's height so they could look outside. Educators working in Soka kindergartens explained the children really liked this tunnel and they often played in this area. It was emphasised by educators that the tunnel was very important for the children to discover a sense of happiness and harmony at the Soka kindergarten.

Figure 4.10: A colourful tunnel called the 'Tunnel of Rainbow'

Figure 4.11: Small, round windows at children's height

The Singapore Soka Kindergarten was originally built as a religious meeting place and one of the largest rooms has a high ceiling whilst other rooms are of varying size. Interestingly, the educators were not deterred by these physical restrictions and instead created an environment suitable for learning and various activities. An example was found on the ground floor where there was a large 'nursery' classroom

accommodating three groups of children. Educators working in Soka kindergartens divided the groups into three areas for different activities; the children had free choice of activity according to their interests.

Consideration for the design of dedicated educators' working spaces was also noted. Each Soka kindergarten had a teacher's room with individual desks for teachers to prepare their curriculum and also served as a space where they could rest and relax.

Soka kindergartens also sought to gain maximum use from available space; at the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten the roof was converted in 2012 as an outdoor play area (see Figure 4.12). Educators working in Soka kindergartens explained that the materials for this space were specially imported from Japan and were designed and safe for young children. The materials were also designed to provide a sense of nature (see Figure 4.13). The principal highlighted that the kindergarten management aspired to achieve improvement for their school and were concerned about the learning environment and enhancing the use of space, which is always a challenge in crowded Hong Kong.

Figure 4.12: Roof outdoor play area gaining the maximum use of space

Figure 4.13: Materials and design focused on safety and nature

At the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten, there was a large video screen used for video conferences with other Soka schools around Japan. This room was also used for staff meetings. This communication with other Soka educational institutions demonstrated

regular contact which enhanced opportunities for staff to share beliefs and ideas. As I noted in a previous section, children attending Soka kindergartens do not participate in any praying or religious instruction. However, it was observed that a 'chanting' area had been set up with a traditional Japanese tatami floor (a type of traditional Japanese interior floor made from straw), various coverings and a large Buddhist altar at the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten. This room is provided exclusively for staff to chant (a Buddhist practice) together each morning before work. In front of the 'altar' was a list of all the children's names entering the kindergarten that year. The principal explained that the educators wish for each child's happiness and good health during their morning prayers. These thoughts were confirmed during the interview phase. At the Hong Kong and Singapore Soka Kindergartens, due to space limitations, educators conducted chanting and discussed Soka philosophy at the end of the teaching day in a classroom, when all the children had left the premises.

In addition, the findings showed that each room was named according to how the kindergarten viewed the children. For example, the hall at all three kindergartens was called '*The hall of the little prince and little princesses*'. The principals explained that it was the founder who decided to name these rooms in this way, so the children understood how precious they were to the educators. It was also explained that the hall name was a goal for educators to foster each child to become noble. This detailed consideration was frequently found throughout the three kindergartens.

Theme four – learning environment. The learning environment refers to diverse physical locations, contexts and cultures in which children learn, since children experience a wide variety of environments including inside the kindergarten and other outdoor environments. The term is often used as a more accurate or preferred alternative to 'classroom', which has more limited and traditional connotations: a room with rows

of desks and a chalkboard. During field work it was found that Soka kindergartens provided both structured and unstructured learning environments. Structured learning environments were easily observed at all three Soka kindergartens, as educators had planned settings for activities children could do, but with a focus on a range of abilities and developmental levels.

Structured learning environment. A structured learning environment refers to where educators set out clear and direct instructions for children's learning. The findings showed each classroom was purposely designed with some considerable pre-planning, although for different learning themes. Firstly, in each classroom at the Hong Kong and Singapore Kindergartens there was a strong literary focus influencing children's learning. There were a lot of words related to indication and activities within the classroom; educators working in Soka kindergartens explained their beliefs were influenced by the founder, to cultivate children who enjoy reading. The 'whole language' approach was used in which they had previously received professional training during the early years following the establishment of kindergartens. Educators placed great value in reading and book corners were set up in many locations throughout Soka kindergartens.

At the Singapore Soka Kindergarten there was a room set up as a post office. The principal explained that this was for children to create a situational scenario in which students participated in writing and sending letters, understanding letter classifications and creating stamp designs. The principal also additionally explained that while children really enjoyed this activity, importantly the purpose of this activity was to encourage children to communicate with other places around the world, not just Singapore. During my field visit, I noted an area called 'Happy Land' at the Hong Kong Kindergarten where many awards and prizes were being displayed showing

participation in various activities within the community. The principal explained that the kindergarten always looked to promote strong links and supportive relationships between the children at the kindergarten and their local community.

Structured learning was found in the data, and illustrated in my observation journal notes regarding an activity at one of the Soka kindergartens, as follows:

The children had requested an activity involving drawing their faces. Educators provided a mirror for each child and encouraged them to observe and draw themselves on paper. There was a child who drew his hand whilst wearing a pair of gloves. The educator smiled and said to the boy with [a] soft voice "Look at the mirror, are you wearing gloves"? The child replied "No" and then the educator said "No, but you can draw if you said you imagine yourself to be wearing gloves, it is ok, no problem. So you have to draw winter clothes". The educator pointed to the picture and said "so do you think you would be wearing gloves whilst wearing a short sleeve shirt"? So maybe you can draw some winter clothes and the gloves can be changed into fingers. So do you know how to change this into fingers? Try it". The educator moved her fingers and said". "Look at my fingers [which] can move, so can you draw fingers which move?" (Researcher observation journal, 2012.10.9).

My observation notes indicate that the process implemented during this activity was highly structured with instructions regarding how the children drew their faces and what they drew. The children were not given any choice in creativity or opportunity to use their imagination to draw what they wanted. When the child drew gloves the educator stepped in to explain that if the child was wearing gloves then they should also draw a long shirt and long trousers. My postmodern theoretical lens questioned where were the children's voices in these findings? Where did children's creativity appear during this activity? These questions have provided me with an opportunity to consider and discuss in-depth issues regarding educators' discourse and effective pedagogy. I

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wonder what was this discourse when conducting visual arts? Following this observation, I questioned this educator about her teaching methods and in particular about children's self-portrait sessions. The educator didn't provide any specific answers, so I believe she may think this approach was effective practice. This has allowed me to better understand how I may address further discussion on the needs for professional teacher development and the importance of developing quality classroom practice.

Another observation journal also highlighted that whilst activities may have provided creative opportunities for children, however, educators often became too involved in the learning process.

> *There was a tray for each child and there were three colours and a container of glue in the middle of the table for children to share. Educators told the children what to do, for example, educators told the children to firstly put the glue and then choose two colours in the tray and use fingers to mix it. When the child put a colour in the tray the educator cleared the table whenever the children dropped some paint on the table. When the children wanted to put more [paint] the educator said "it's enough, enough." Educators remained with the children during the whole process. Educators told the children to use fingers to do the mixing. When a child touched the spoon with the colours they had to put the spoons back in the original colour tray. Then the educator went to clean the spoon. After a child mixed blue and red the child was asked what colour was it now? Finally the children were given a piece of paper to place in a colour tray and make a copy of those colours (Researcher observation journal, 2012.10.11).*

These observation notes illustrated a direct structured approach which is commonly found within East Asian societies where educators tend to focus on the end result and outcomes, although educators may think it is appropriate to provide guidelines and closely guide children's learning. However, several questions arise in

respect of where the power relationship is situated in this incident. What were the cultural impacts on this educator's practice? How was the Soka educational philosophy in line with those activities? These questions allowed me to think critically and holistically.

Unstructured learning environment. As noted previously, although structured learning environments were observed at the three Soka kindergartens, it is worth keeping in mind that the educators remained fully aware they were using a structured learning approach. The classroom environments had been specifically planned for various abilities and needs. My data found that the educators addressed that it was crucial that an environment setting would positively impact children's learning and friendship building. An unstructured learning environment refers to a situation where children take control of their own learning. For instance, one Soka kindergarten had created an unstructured learning environment where children had free choice of activities based on their interests. This was a large room set up with various activities and a mix of age groups where more independent children could help others. The role of the educators was to stimulate children's interests and scaffold their learning. In addition, this was an opportunity for educators to observe children in the form of photo taking and observation notes.

During my observations there were children skipping and laughing in the "Rainbow Tunnel", mentioned in a previous section, and some had stopped and looked outside through the little windows and told me what their friends were doing outside in the playground. Those beliefs from the educators can be observed through the environment which appeared to have been indirectly passed on to the children through various daily experiences.

Theme five – relationships. I found that my theoretical lens provided me with a microscope to analyse the relationships between educators, children and parents. Postmodern researchers often look for power relations within social practice. I considered how power was circulated between complex relationships, for instance, educator-child, child-child, educator-parent and educator-educator relationships at the three Soka kindergartens. My findings showed that relationships were a major focus of the Soka education philosophy based on concepts of respect, compassion, appreciation and giving hope to others. The creation of a harmonious atmosphere was often highlighted during interviews with educators and observations. One educator explained how they believed quality educator-child relationships had influenced their practice:

> *The founder, like my model, was always focused on how he interacted with children and this became an example for us. When our founder visited this kindergarten for the first time, he wrote on a paper 'smile'. I think this is one of the greatest principles of early childhood education is to 'smile'. So if you say it now among the adults there are many types of smile and adults that kind of make it up could be kind of fake smile but the children, because they are so pure, their smiles are real. I believe our teachers have to have this kind of strong life so we can really bring those children to really smile and we are the ones who should have a real smile too (ED1J).*

This showed the educator's association with the founder as well as his personal reflections on his practice. As Soka educational philosophy addresses a sense of caring for children and appreciation of their individual potential, this is characterised by the humanistic educator. Makiguchi (2006) made it clear that people are shaped by other people and there is no genuine education without earnest life-to-life interactions and inspirations. This was further explained by a Soka principal: that positive educator interaction in the classroom creates a sense of trust, respect, compassion and wisdom, reinforced in the study data. The following narrative is an educator's experience in

which he believed the relationship between educator and child had made a significant contribution the child's life:

> *Last year, two graduated students who were in their last year of high school came to the kindergarten to see the teacher who used to teach them. They want[ed] to tell the teacher they had been accepted into college and after we heard this news we were so happy for them. We spent an hour in conversation together and we were enjoying this so much. At the end of the conversation this girl asked the teacher "I have something that I want to ask you", and she [the teacher] asked so "what do you want to ask me?" The student said "can you give me a hug like I was young." So of course, actually, this girl is bigger than the teacher now but I think the students did remember that kind of feeling: how those teachers hugged them every day. So although many students kind of forgot what they learnt there but I think that they really remember how they interacted with their teachers [and] the comfort they felt. I believe [that] being caring and [being] loved are the most part [sic] of their memories (ED2J).*

This narrative illustrates how educator-child relationships are not only limited to the classroom but memories can be carried through into later life. Educators working in Soka kindergartens addressed that when working with humanist perspectives; educators have to reflect on their teaching with diversity and possibilities in mind and this process of reflection is influenced by Nichiren Buddhist beliefs and practices. To support the concept of a humanist view of education, educators need to encourage children to develop various approaches toward acquiring skills, knowledge and values, as well as a sense of responsibility and strive to become an active and productive citizen (Makiguchi 2004, 2010).

Educator-child relationships. The findings showed that at one particular Soka kindergarten, educators demonstrated a supportive attitude in their interaction with children during a music activity conducted in a large hall. I observed one educator's

nonverbal communication was also important in understanding educator-child interactions and relationships:

> *During this activity, the teacher required the children to listen to music and freely walk around until the teacher shook a tambourine; the children had to freeze. This is a game often found in early childhood settings but the teacher implemented a supportive attitude by constantly smiling and using a soft gentle voice to communicate with the children. The teacher checked each child's actions by looked at each child's face with a smile. Although the activity was conducted in a large hall the children were given freedom to run around, but the teacher only used a soft and gentle voice to communicate with the children. During this activity the children behaved well and there was no pushing of others, running too fast. Instead children concentrated and were involved in this activity. The children laughing and smiling was captured by me at that moment (Researcher observation journal, 2012.10.1).*

Educators working in Soka kindergartens addressed that quality educator-child relationships require development and are constructed during daily classroom practice over a period of time. This is explained through my conceptual framework: that human thinking and actions are constantly influenced by different interactions with other people, subjects, objects and the environment. This will be discussed in more detail in the following discussion chapter. Children often learn a sense of respect through adult modelling, especially during the early years. Regarding the above observations, the educators were of the view that a supportive and caring interaction with young children will lead to greater interest and involvement in learning as well as better classroom compliance.

I was aware that quality interactions could occur at any time of the day. The following are other observations indicating a close and welcoming relationship between the educator and children, when the children left at the end of the school day.

Children, one by one, said goodbye to the teacher. When teachers said goodbye to each child they knelt down and smiled to each individual child at eye level and offered either a 'high five' or 'big hug'. It was observed that both the children and educators enjoyed that moment because their faces were full of smiles and children kept holding on to the teachers and didn't want to let go (Researcher observation journal, 2012.10.1).

This highlights that Soka kindergarten educators' daily practice demonstrates how the relationship between children and educators can be supportive and happy. Educators working in Soka kindergartens addressed their discourse in respect of happiness as a humanist experience which is an important part of the Soka education philosophy. Two educators expressed the following:

As a teacher we need to respect children's views in developing themselves, meaning as young as they are, treating them as another human being. This belief is always in my mind. I will respect my children and have heart to heart dialogue instead of only telling them what to do. My belief is no child is unteachable and as a teacher we have to bring out each child's potential (ED2S).

My hope for teachers at this Soka kindergarten is that they can create appropriate dialogue with children. I think that is very important. Listening to them is one thing, talking to them is al- together another thing, a lot of times they talk to children but I more prefer to use words to speak with them and not speak at them or talk to them because I think that two-way communication is very important. At the Soka kindergarten one of our main interests is teacher-child interaction. So the quality of the relationship between teachers and children should always be there (ED1S).

A Soka principal addressed that respect for children's views provides educators with an alternative perspective in viewing children and reflecting on their classroom practice, which is important in curriculum planning and classroom practice. Children's

ideas were observed as being respected and accepted which improved their confidence and their involvement in their development.

Educator-parent relationships. The topic of educator-parent relationships is often neglected as a component of quality early childhood education. During my interviews with educators and parents I was very interested to explore these relationships in addition to the perspectives of parents toward Soka education philosophy. What do educators think about the role of parents in early childhood education? Educators working in Soka kindergartens addressed that to create quality early childhood education an important element is to develop a close and trusting relationship with parents:

> *At our Soka kindergarten we have a very close relationship, not only with children but with all the parents too. I believe this is very important in promoting quality early childhood education. Parent's voices need to valued and respected in accordance with our Soka beliefs and respect for other cultures and views (ED2HK).*

This concept of respect provided by the educators can also be found in the parents' narratives. There were discussions during parent interviews regarding their initial impression and experience of their Soka kindergarten, which had influenced their selection of kindergarten for their child.

> *I really like humanist education! I am also a primary teacher; in fact I really have fate [sic] with this kindergarten. The Soka kindergarten was the first place I went to during my practicum. I never knew what the 'Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten' was. That day, I went for a classroom visit and I could really see the teachers used love and sincerity to teach the children. Actually, I am a parent who is concerned about a child's academic aspects; I wish my child can gain good English standards and other academic skills when they are young. But after I went to Soka I felt, in fact, the child's conduct and behaviour is far more important. The Soka kindergarten provided those things for the children. I can see all the teachers have a good heart and care about the children.*

Moreover I saw on the website that the Soka kindergarten had received an 'Excellent teaching' award from the government. Actually those teachers with a sincere and passionate approach are very important. As I know Soka education promotes humanist education in developing a child's creativity. So I don't feel it is enough for my child to only attend a kindergarten which just focuses on academic [achievement]. I think the development of the child's conduct and behaviour is needed too. Soka is focused on developing individual personalities and the creative side which I think is really important (P6HK).

This narrative highlighted a common issue of parental academic expectations in East Asian countries. Parents who explained their previous experience with other kindergartens included a strong academic performance focus on young children instead of a holistic development approach. However, findings showed educator's attitudes and behaviours impact the relationship with parents. The following narratives describe parental impressions of one particular Soka kindergarten:

When my husband and I first visited the Soka kindergarten I was very impressed because when I first walked in there were teachers checking our body temperature and then directing us where to go for our interview. I felt things were very well organised and most importantly a sense of respect for families and parents (P1HK).

I find that the Soka teachers here are very … very compassion[ate] and most of the teachers behave wholeheartedly (P3S).

I noted how parents whose children attend Soka kindergartens placed considerable value in educator's attitudes and behaviours toward their families. This reminds me of one particular educator, quoting from Ikeda; the importance of humanity is creating human to human respect. The following narrative demonstrates how a different experience with another kindergarten impacted a parent's perspectives and values toward a Soka kindergarten:

My child joined the kindergarten at the Lower KG grade (kindergarten). My daughter attended a Soka kindergarten interview when we applied for Nursery.

Actually on that day I already had a good feeling about this kindergarten. In contrast, other kindergartens were full and some people named these as 'famous' kindergartens. We were told my daughter answered some interview questions wrongly, although she was correct. For example, they asked what [is] your name (in Cantonese) and my daughter said 'my name is Carol'. The teacher said [that] because I used Cantonese to ask her, she should use Cantonese to answer. Those comments really affected my daughter. Also the interviewers didn't have any facial expressions and you can see that they didn't really like children. It seemed they only wanted to finish their task. But when we came to the Soka kindergarten for interview we all were very happy. The teachers treated the parents and children with care and love and the staff showed a strong team spirit (P2HK).

One educator explained the importance of relationships as actual proof that parents could see the growth of their child and how this is important in building trusting relationships:

Whenever there was a parent who did not really understanding Soka education, we still really tried our best to communicate with these children and we really thought about their happiness. With this progress, those parents can see the difference in the growth of their children (ED2J).

The findings showed that supportive relationships were two way; not only for educators to support families but parents supporting the kindergarten. The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) at the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten is a good example of collaboration, allowing parental involvement in kindergarten practices. The role of the PTA is to support kindergarten events with participants being parents and educators. As an example, the Hong Kong PTA had organised and discussed the planning for an event; the comments below were from a parent using an insider perspective regarding how they felt about the Soka kindergarten:

After working so closely with the Soka educators, I will use the following words to describe the Soka 'spirit' and 'everything is for the people'. For example,

when we have meetings there was consideration for even very simple details, as simple as when setting up one activity – having chairs. No chairs, how are set things up, having tables, no tables etc. If you have a chance to have a meeting with the principal you will really admire her. In my own experience to organise many activities outside of my work, those issues wouldn't even be brought up for discussion. But within the Soka these little questions will be considered, even such things as are there any pregnant mothers or any senior grandparents attending who have special requirements, so they don't need to sit on low chairs so that any questions can go back and forth. That experience impressed me. (P6HK).

During interviews, another parent highlighted how the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten not only supported families and children's learning but also supported the health and wellbeing of families:

Soka not only supports children's learning, they also assist parents [with] how to help our own children too. For example, this Soka kindergarten has a psychologist who always emphasises the use of psychology to teach children how to learn. The Soka kindergarten always provides many activities and I always join these activities, such as excursions or performances, with my son. I really don't know why but I always feel really happy when attending. My feelings regarding the Soka kindergarten are similar to being within a family and having a sense of comfort. This care and support from the bottom of the educator's heart is difficult to find at other kindergartens (P3HK).

Due to the majority of parents having to work; parents often found that educator-parent communication was important in the progress of their children's learning and development. The Soka kindergartens provided different channels for parents to communicate with the kindergarten/educators. The following narratives illustrate how the educators took into account the situation of full-time working parents and how they provided opportunities for parents to understand their children's progress:

Parents have some expectations. So actually we open five days per year for parents to come to the school, so they can observe the classes and then, at that time, we conduct a parent survey at which time they can write whatever they feel and include any written requests too (ED2J).

They call this educational research, but maybe once or three times a year we open the school for parents to also observe classes. But after this, we have a discussion with all the parents with the principal, so that they can kind of share their thoughts (ED1J).

Regular contact and communication was strongly promoted in kindergartens. Educators working in Soka kindergartens explained that to promote quality early childhood the relationship between parents and educators is important. In the narrative below a parent expressed their feelings regarding how communication is important for them:

The communication book is very helpful for us as working parents. We can write to the teacher and highlight any special things that happened and the teachers will let us know what's happened with our child at the kindergarten. I feel I am well informed and this supports my child's learning as well (P3S).

Thus Soka provides alternative options for educator/parent communication which are necessary in the contemporary world, as communication technology advances over time. For instance, as many parents need to work long hours they may find it difficult to have face-to-face communication with educators. Or some children may live with their grandparents because of parental work commitments, which is quite common in Hong Kong and Singapore. Therefore, written communication has become an effective way for parents to have an understanding of their child's experience and learning progress.

Child-child relationships. During my field visit I found that Soka emphasised humanist education. Therefore, I was very interested to observe relationships not only

between educators and children, but also how child-child relationships developed. Was there any impact due to the structured or learning environment which became a media for children developing friendships? One educator explained how the learning environment created opportunities for children to learn from each other in a natural way:

> *One day I went to my classroom where there was a boy who has some defined learning difficulties. He went to the Chinese Language corner where he wanted to write some words [虫]. However, he had to learn some vocabulary in order to create the words [虫]. There were themes of spring so the teacher introduced some new vocabulary so the children could pick up a grey card with words [虫] on it and then try to write these characters by themselves. So that boy, who was holding his pen, wanted to write but he didn't know where to start. At the same time there was girl standing next to him and that girl went over [to him] holding her pen, to show him how to write. She held his hand and told him to draw down straight and then horizontally straight and he finally managed to write by himself. So you can see during this whole process the girl observed what the boy needed and helped him. After the boy wrote the characters the girl said "you did so well, you are very smart!" During this process I can see the boy didn't feel sad that he couldn't write but he kept trying and with some help he eventually could do it so well. So you can see [the weaker students can find success and the stronger children can use their abilities to help other students]. In this whole process the girl didn't think the other [boy] was weak but rather wanted to help and encourage others. This is 'humanist education'. 'Humanist education' is not only when teachers see differences between children and understand what their individual needs to provide what they need, knowledge or opportunities. On the contrary I feel a 'humanist' teacher should not only teach children individually but children also should know how to live together with others (ED2HK).*

This narrative illustrated how a relationship between children was developed based upon a humanist foundation. Interestingly, the girl demonstrated some beliefs of Soka educational philosophy, including compassion for other, being supportive and

encouraging peers, which contributed to a harmonious and happy learning environment. Harmonious relationships between children were often observed during my field visits. For instance, the older children (five years' old) become 'buddies' of the nursery children (three years' old) as noted, when a father said:

> *We only have one child and he seemed to lack opportunities to care for others. He is the one where people always take care of him all the time. So this year he went to the Upper KG and the headmistress explained to me that my son will change his role to become a 'big brother' in the kindergarten. He will help teachers to look after the new students such as helping to bring them from the school bus to the classroom and take them to different corners to play. If some children get upset he would have to comfort them as well. I think my son really feels that he is a big boy now and this will make him grow. This growth will develop in its own way rather than through parents pushing him. He will know what he should do and how he should do this. These experiences of caring for others are obviously changing his behaviour (P3HK).*

Supportive and caring peer relationships were welcomed by parents. Social and economic issues have impacted family structures in many East Asian nations. For example, parents tend to have only one or two children in the family. Therefore, to provide opportunities for children to look after others would positively impact their social and emotional development. One parent discussed building friendships and how to develop a positive social life.

> *My son always comes home and shares what he has learnt at the kindergarten with his schoolmates. I feel although they are so young but they are starting to establish a social life. Soka kindergarten provides a lot of social activities for them to do and this also establishes how they live together and in fact the teachers provide many chances for them to create peer relationships. For example, each month the teacher will help the children to prepare a dance for a birthday party which not only develops their confidence but the children feel a sense of belonging and learn a team spirit and cooperation, which is most important. As a parent, I found that it is important for our child to go to school*

happily, fostering their conduct and relationships with friends. They can then be
prepared for primary school. When my son came home and told me how happy
he was I wasn't worried when he was in kindergarten (P6HK).

The kindergarten attempts to create an environment in which children are close to each other. One parent explained how her two daughters knew the name of the children in other classes at this Soka kindergarten.

Because my two daughters are very close in age, so they often come home to
share what had happened at the kindergarten. One thing [that] surprised [me]
was ... how come my youngest daughter can tell me her sister's entire friend's
names from the Upper KG. And my eldest daughter also knows all the names of
her sister's friends too. It seems they all know each other very well. At my
school this was very different and there wasn't much chance for children to meet
friends from other levels ... I never thought they had so many crossovers during
school time and that they do things together ... I was really impressed and this is
important for me because they allowed the elder child [to] look after the
younger one. Honestly, I feel there are many opportunities at this kindergarten
for children to learn how to care for others. There are many interactions and I
think that this is one of the best things the school does. I think if you told my
children not to go to kindergarten this would be very difficult because every day
they just love going to school (P1HK).

The above parent expressed her perspectives regarding harmony and the close relationship of her children with the kindergarten experience. This narrative showed that her children were happy and loved to attend the kindergarten. This would be an alternate source for a better understanding of children's life at Soka kindergartens. In this study, I believe parents provided an important source of information for me to understand their children's experience and wellbeing regarding everyday experiences at kindergarten. Disappointingly, as the purpose of this study was to focus on the educators' insider perspective of quality, the findings were limited in that I could not record any of the children's voices regarding their experience at the kindergartens. Or

their relationships with other children and educators; however, I paid close attention when conducting observations during my field work, in which I tried to provide detailed observation notes regarding the children's experience in the classroom. The findings showed how educators promote a supportive and harmonious environment which encouraged child-child interactions.

Educator-educator relationships.   Since the findings showed that the Soka educational philosophy placed value on human to human relationships; therefore I was interesting in exploring more in respect of the relationships between educators. Perhaps educators working in Soka kindergartens supported each other, which in some ways enhanced quality classroom practice. The following statements by two educators expressed how they supported each other and how this impacted their practice.

> *I really like reading and this is one of my hobbies. I often recommend a new book or share new teaching techniques with other teachers such as teaching children to create their own stories, etc. The other teachers seem to be appreciative and in the end the benefits will go to the children. I think this is one of the ways we can help each other with our classroom practice (ED3J).*

> *Our founder, Ikeda used to visit our kindergarten once or twice a year until in recent years, since he became older and found it difficult to travel. So I was one of the last ones able to meet him at this kindergarten. So the teachers who work at this kindergarten after me actually didn't have this experience. So I really feel that I want to pass down this spirit to other teachers so they can understand our Soka beliefs (ED5J).*

The attitude of learning from others was a commonly found value at the Soka kindergartens. Soka principals explained that obviously all educators had different personalities, strengths and weaknesses. However, they acknowledged their individual skills and abilities, which they all benefit from with their collective work. Importantly, the findings showed that a culture of learning and collaboration was effectively

implemented at the Soka kindergartens. The educators also addressed the importance of creating happiness, harmony and a supportive working atmosphere:

> *The teachers are getting along so well. Actually it is really important to develop an environment where people can get on very well together and also enjoy themselves. Like our Soka philosophy, it's not only for the children's happiness, but we also care about our colleagues' happiness as well (ED2J).*

The following narratives from two participating educators addressed their discourse regarding creating a harmonious environment:

> *All the teachers here are the disciples of 'Sensei'[Ikeda] so that's why I think all the teachers have a strong sense of mission and feeling to do well in our daily practice. We try to carry out the mentor-disciples spirit within each of us (ED2J).*

> *Everybody is working with 'Sensei' [Ikeda] and we all have the same goal for the children's happiness. I feel that each time we support each other this is an improvement. I really try to make improvements together with my colleagues (ED1J).*

These narratives illustrate the significance of educators having the same goals; this clearly influenced their beliefs and practices. On the contrary, I would imagine if the goals of the educators were different, for example, if they were focused on financial issues and considered their careers as just a job, then the outcome of their practices may well be different.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have used an exploratory and postmodern theoretical lens to analyse my data. These lenses not only assisted me to explore the Soka concepts of quality early childhood education, but constantly helping me understand Soka education by questioning the data. In order to create generalised, comprehensive and coherent result findings, I have presented my findings as a single case study using a thematic

approach. The findings included data obtained through interviews and observations supported by informal conversations, photography and documentation as appendages to reinforce the research findings.

My findings were divided in two parts. Part A (Educators' beliefs and knowledge) included three general themes: 'value creation education', 'happiness education' and 'humanist education'. Part B (Data presentation of Soka practices) covered five themes: 'kindergarten policy', 'health and hygiene', 'structured (physical) environment', 'learning environment' and 'relationships'.

The findings clearly showed that the concept of quality early childhood education at Soka kindergartens was embedded in Nichiren Buddhist philosophy and the ideas of the founder, Ikeda. Since Nichiren Buddhist philosophy promotes happiness as a goal for each person, this means how we foster children to achieve happiness, which is a priority in Soka education practice. This is further explained through Soka beliefs which emphasise the qualities of happiness from an individual, inner self rather than short-term happiness influenced by external factors. At the same time, Soka provides a perspective into quality education explained as an individual's self-revolution (self-transformation) and striving for the happiness of others as key elements in the promotion of quality education.

In the discussion chapter, I will draw together the findings from this chapter to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of this study. Importantly, this will assist me in answering the research questions.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings in terms of the research questions. Foucault's ideas of *discourse*, *power* and *knowledge* have been used to deconstruct Soka educator's perspectives, understandings of quality early childhood education and practice. According to Dahlberg et al. (2007) understanding the ways in which quality is conceptualised in early childhood education provides a deeper understanding of how practice can be improved in different cultural contexts. Figure 5.1 shows the key findings pertaining to the research questions.
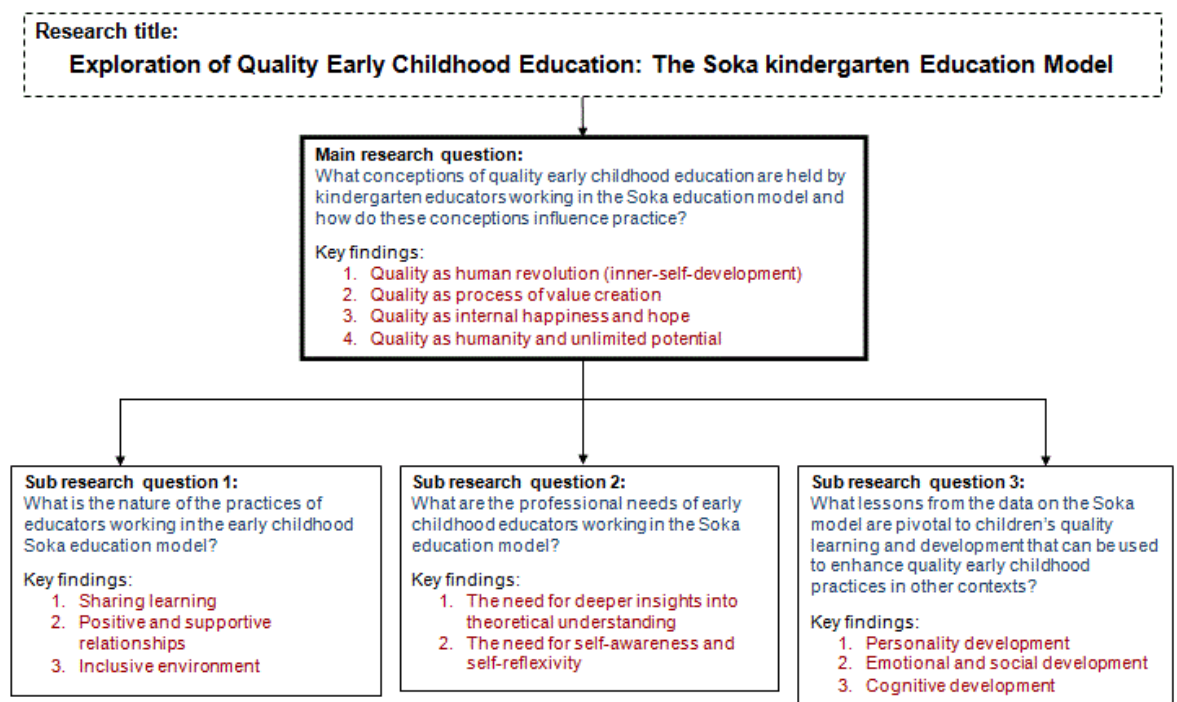
Figure 5.1: Key findings in relation to the research questions

Soka Educators' Conceptualisations of Quality

What conceptions of quality early childhood education are held by kindergarten educators working in the Soka education model and how do these conceptions influence practice?

This main research question is intended to gain an in-depth understanding of the discourses framing the educators' conceptions of quality and the influence of their understandings on classroom practice in Soka kindergartens. In response to this question the following findings identified four important concepts: *human revolution (inner self-development)*, *value creation*, *internal happiness and hope*, and *humanity and unlimited potential.*

Quality as human revolution (inner self-development). The study revealed that the teachers who work in Soka kindergartens conceptualised quality early childhood as human revolution. This concept serves as the basis upon which they strive towards their own self-improvement and self-perfection as teachers. Guided by this understanding, they work hard to foster children to develop an attitude of taking on challenges and having a strong sense of self. According to one educator the discourse of human revolution is one of the most important concepts for achieving quality classroom practice: "*I need to keep doing my human revolution so I will be able to reflect on my own actions and improve my classroom teaching*" *(ED3HK)*. Human revolution in Nichiren Buddhism foregrounds the necessity for individuals to engage in self-reflection, considering their personal actions in order to achieve self-improvement (SGI, 2014b).

This discourse of human revolution acted as a catalyst, leading teachers to engage in self-reflection to consider how their actions and pedagogical practice would address the needs and self-development of children. The educator gave some thought as to what they could do to help others find happiness in life, for example, changing the attitude of the educators to become active in classroom practices devoted to that purpose. This illustrates a positive result for the educator's human revolution, which is also called inner self-development, and how the discourse of human revolution may

lead to one's self-improvement and contribute to the happiness of others. Human revolution helps educators to reflect on their actions and their teaching attitudes in the classroom. This ultimately leads to the children benefiting through these changes. Ikeda (2010) argues that human revolution changes not only the individual but also other people, the community as well as the world. This links to the educator's conceptualisation that quality is understood as an improvement to oneself, happiness for others and ultimately towards a harmonious community (SGI, 2014b).

Human revolution refers to the continuous development of a sense of self-awareness, self-reflection and mindfulness. The epistemology of self-awareness and self-reflection are commonly discussed in the educational field. Capel (2012) argued that the mindfulness of educators is also an important discussion in relation to quality classroom practice because mindfulness is a process of "bringing one's complete attention to the present experience on a moment to moment basis" (p. 68). With reference to Capel's argument, when educators become mindful of each present moment, it is an acceptance of their self-awareness and self-reflection which affects each decision and subsequent actions. This is especially important when educators are promoting quality through classroom practice. As some participating educators explained; the process of human revolution has helped educators to self-reflect and improve their practice by becoming aware of their subjectivity. For example, when an educator has the ability to reflect and has an awareness of their subjectivity this would also provide greater opportunities for children to have a voice in the classroom. This may increase educators' willingness to be open to the suggestions of others including the children they teach. Postmodern theorists (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Mac Naughton, 2005) refer to this as reflective or a deconstruction of our own subjectivity, which

provides various perspectives. This has also become an important area of discussion in this study.

The discourse of human revolution brings new knowledge to the understanding of quality early childhood education and practice. Educators undertaking a personal human revolution, seeking to improve their professional skills, will translate this human revolution into a desire to enhance quality classroom practice. A postmodern perspective argues that the discourse of educators provides an opportunity to exercise a power relation representing a particular kind of knowledge; in this case I would say this is the Buddhist knowledge of human revolution. Foucault (1984) analyses power as a very complex interplay between an individual's discourses and knowledge. Since knowledge constructed through individual ontology and epistemology has accumulated throughout history (Kincheloe, 2004), knowledge not only detaches itself from its empirical roots but that initial need for power arose from the demands of reason (Foucault, 1977). The power of Buddhist philosophy, which is internalised by the educators, becomes the driving force for them to consider and do quality teaching. For example, some educators explained that "*through the process of human revolution such as self-reflection, we pay greater attention to our teaching. At the same time we develop a sense of compassion and appreciation towards the children" (ED4J)*. This is to say knowledge of human revolution, which includes compassion and appreciation, are internalised as part of the educators' discourses regarding how they view children. The educator's perspective of children is particularly important, especially when theorising how power plays out with children. This sense of compassion and appreciation becomes a positive product of power and allows educators to broaden their views and, at the same time, become aware of their subjectivity.

The discourse of subjectivity draws upon various elements such as personal values, beliefs and culture (Foucault, 1972). I argue that awareness of one's subjectivity enables educators to deconstruct their dominant discourse in order to develop an openness and acceptance of the views and differences of others. I note that the Soka educators did not deconstruct their idealist views or their discourse of the Nichiren Buddhist philosophy which informed their values. However, whilst the educators aimed to achieve quality based upon their ideological views of this philosophy, within their pedagogical practices they were self-reflective regarding the betterment of children and to ensure this was ethical. The educators argued that helping others leads to a sense of self-value which is important in the development of internal happiness. Ultimately, discourse and knowledge of human revolution would be beneficial for both educators and children in order to create quality classroom practice.

Quality as process of value creation. Another conception of the quality of early childhood education put forward by participating educators in this study was value creation. The educators view the discourse of value creation as gaining value through daily life experiences which leads to a constant contribution to human character. According to these educators the discourse of value creation is another important concept in the construction of quality. One participating educator commented, "*We consider that each child has their own beauty (meaning the good and positive side of each child) which, as a teacher, we try to create value each day and contribute to the happiness of each child*" (ED2HK). For Soka educators, the concept of quality would be seen as not only being able to recognise the goodness in children but also to help them to construct happiness. Being able to foster something good in a child would have a positive value. Examples of good and positive things would include a child being

willing to help others, care for others, expressing thoughts confidently, enjoying music, being creative, etc.

There is no doubt that the subject of quality from Soka educators' views consider the discourse of human revolution discussed above as intricately linked to the discourse of value creation, which in turn leads to pedagogical practices with compassion and respect with an aim to foster and value positive aspects of children. For example, quality early childhood education would benefit from how an educator's discourse creates positive values, such as seeking out children's capabilities and strengths, which directly impacts on how educators pay greater attention to children's voices, feelings and individual needs. Here the concept of power is exercised as constructive and as a producer of knowledge (O' Farrell, 2005). The educators argue that a top-down voice leads to a lack of variety in how educators understand the feelings and needs of each individual child. Therefore to value children's capabilities and to create a positive connection with children is becoming increasingly important as educators promote quality classroom practice. The discourse of creating value creates opportunities to look for and closely observe children's capabilities.

The educator's discourse may explain a quality practice component of fostering positive educator-child interactions such as children developing a sense of happiness. The findings of this study show that the Soka discourse of happiness included elements, such as a sense of hope, determination and appreciation, as discussed in the previous chapter. Importantly, the Soka discourse of happiness refers to the construction of individual actions to create values through daily practice, and to live with humanist values such as respect, love and care for others. Srinivasan (2014) argued that the subject's attachment to a particular discourse is derived from power (or lack of) between discourses and subjects. Whilst there is a grand narrative in the form of Soka

philosophy, in which participants strongly frame their discourse, this is contentious as participants do not question or deconstruct these ideological concepts, but rather work towards better achieving these concepts within Soka kindergartens. The lack of any critical deconstruction of the grand narrative limits the educator's ability to see other world views. This can also be viewed as positive in that their discourse frames their pedagogical practices of value creation, happiness and humanity; this means the discourse of the educators is influenced by power relations between children and the educators' beliefs. In view of the concept of value creation, one participating educator noted: "*I always try to find something in which the student is very good, all the children are different*" *(ED2J)*. If the educators' discourse of quality leads to an attitude that each child has something good in them, then this attitude will subsequently impact on their classroom practice, such as an awareness of subjectivity, and allow a new pedagogy and alternative theory to be applied in their classroom settings. Ikeda (2010) argued that quality early childhood education should consider "learning as a preparation for living but enabling people to learn about the process of living" (p. 20). The research results demonstrated that all of the participating educators emphasised the importance of understanding the concept of value creation. This forms part of the discourse of how educators working in Soka kindergartens think and act, which in turn impacts their classroom practice. The educators called this construction of quality education.

The educators' epistemological knowledge can clearly be seen through their voices in this research. An example can be found in the remarks made by another participating educator, who expressed that "*for my beliefs, each child is so different, unique, beautiful and important; we are not only respecting the children's differences but we are celebrating the diversity in our classroom*" *(ED1S)*. This educator's remark illustrates how the Soka discourse of value creation has led to a sense of respect for the

diversity and unique personalities of the children in this particular classroom. To provide theoretical discussion of these concepts, Foucault (2003a) argued that power only exists when one acts on others and power manifests as a force from which people's behaviour has been shaped or moulded. Foucault refers to the "microphysics of power" in which "power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts into their actions and attitudes, their discourse, learning process and everyday life" (1980a, p. 203). In the Soka context, power relations are tied to educators' discourse, such as compassion, benevolence and care for others, which constantly impacts educator's classroom practice. As previously discussed, there are limitations due to the grand narrative of the Soka philosophy not being questioned by participating Soka educators. However, since elements of Soka philosophy promote value creation, happiness and humanity; this may also be viewed as a benefit allowing the educators to work within ethical pedagogical practices that subsequently achieve quality early childhood education.

In this section, there was an important discussion regarding how the discourse of value creation allowed diversity of thought. Since postmodern perspectives argue that there are no absolute truths (Rabinow, 1991), we have to explore from time to time and nation to nation, and deconstruct educators' subjectivity in terms of labelling children (e.g. 'good child', 'naughty child', 'active child' or 'passive child'). Educators may use their perspectives to view individual children and focus on them as unique and with no limitation to growth, which one educator's termed, "*making the impossible to possible*" *(ED1J).* This statement contains positive connotations such as hope, determination, success and happiness. This understanding of transforming the impossible into the possible forms part of the Soka concept of 'value creation'. Soka literature argues that value creation is "a call to action, as we are, where we are, in cause of human

happiness" (SGI, 2014c, para. 9). The concept of value creation as put forward by these educators is reassuring in that people are able to make changes within themselves which they can utilise to create positive values in their daily lives to achieve internal happiness. This could be a crucial point when educators seek to implement quality practice in the classroom.

Quality as internal happiness and hope. Another important finding in relation to the main research question was about how educators conceptualise quality of early childhood education and practice is internal happiness and hope. Firstly, the concept of internal happiness was frequently expressed by educators during interview sessions. For example, a participating educator remarked, *"children need inner drive and it is happiness that is the root of all the marvels of children's quality learning" (ED1HK)*. The concept of happiness by Soka educators clearly addressed that personal happiness is not referred to from a pure joy aspect, created through external causes, but rather true happiness is gained from the internal self (SGI, 2014i). It is noted in Fishman and McCarthy (2013) that evoking positive internal feelings or emotions, such as a "happy mood" (p. 510), is a primary factor in achieving happiness. This is not to say that external happiness is not necessary; however, based on Soka discourse, I interpret the educator's external happiness as a 'booster' reaction. This booster assists us to face minor difficulties and provides us with a sense of confidence or joy over a short period of time. The educators refer to this 'booster' effect as a positive attitude to face difficulties or challenges. However, external happiness is affected by changing external environmental and other human factors. Postmodernism views the complexity of power relations with discourse and knowledge as potentially positive, oppressive, productive or negative (Foucault, 2003b). Interestingly, in this section, I posit that the concept of power could be positive or negative at the same time. For example, external forces may

manifest through a sense of happiness which leads to a development of self. In this relationship one becomes a receiver of external forces which manifest through emotions and actions. Educators working in Soka kindergartens apply a positive and respectful attitude towards children (external forces), for example, through verbal praise from educators to children. This attitude of interaction is based upon care and love for the pursuit of children's happiness (the child's emotions). This example illustrates how external happiness can contribute to the wellbeing of children as an important factor in achieving quality early childhood education. However, when the source of external happiness is removed, or for example, educators become authoritarian or strict, children may become unhappy in the classroom. In contrast, overcoming difficulties generates a sense of happiness in children which they extend to others. In this way, capable children take on a role as vibrant agents of happiness, who positively affect others (Matsuoka, 2010).

There is no doubt that internal happiness should not be neglected or ignored when we talk about the quality of early childhood education. Internal happiness may contribute to various child development areas such as cognitive, emotional and social enhancement. For example, when a child has internal happiness they may possibly feel happier about their education and learning. A sense of happiness may help children to develop a sense of self-motivation and confidence. This in turn would positively impact their cognitive and social development in classroom settings. Educators working in Soka kindergartens argue that creating internal happiness is a goal for the promotion of quality early childhood education and learning. The importance of personal internal happiness is also noted by Noddings (2003) in *Happiness and education*, which has reverberated among many scholars. The succinct argument by Noddings is that "happiness should be an aim of education, and a good education should contribute

significantly to personal and collective happiness" (2003, p. 1). Noddings argues that internal happiness is not a luxury but is essential and necessary for children's growth.

A focus on internal happiness during this research found that educators seek to foster children with a sense of determination, hope and appreciation. As explained in the previous paragraph, participating educators explained that happiness is not only 'received' from other people or sourced from the outside environment, but rather is 'constructed' from within oneself. This is further explained through Soka literature in respect of the discourse of giving hope to others or having hope in oneself to achieve internal happiness (SGI, 2014i).

The concept of fostering hope has not been widely discussed or explored within the early childhood education arena. The term 'hope' has been subject to various interpretations across different time periods. In ancient times hope was associated with a dark side or negative views through mythical stories (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010). In recent times, various religious organisations, philosophers and psychologists have reconceptualised hope as having faith in a good future, biological evolution and the development of a positive personality (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010). Also, many people associate hope as a likely view on the pursuit of good wishes (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010) that brings a sense of happiness. Folkman (2010) elucidated that hope can create a "positive goal-related motivational state" (p. 902) through goals to achieve a higher state of life. This is to say that the discourse of hope provides drive or motivation to achieve a desired outcome, or a sense of achievement and self-satisfaction (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010). The Soka discourse of hope, from a postmodern perspective, can be viewed as being created through positive thoughts. Foucault argued "a form of power comes into being that begins to exercise itself through social production and social service" (2003b, p. 311). Since discourse is situated in a strong

position, it would render oneself able to choose one's own views and actions. In the meantime, Soka literature provides a set of knowledge for understanding the importance of how a person can create self-happiness through hope which is not dependant on others. These discourses and knowledge constitute power over oneself in making decisions and in taking actions to creating internal happiness. One particular educator noted that "*Individual actions can create greater happiness and a harmonious society as well as world peace*" *(ED1S).* This is to say that to be able to achieve hope we have to have the capacity to see the positive side of each phenomenon.

The findings of this research draw attention to Nichiren Buddhist perspectives, including the discourses of hope, which is an important contributor to the concept of happiness, in particular, when facing difficulties or challenges. One participating educator commented that "*fostering children with the sense of hope will help them create strength to overcome any difficulties or challenge in their life time*" *(ED6J).* In Nichiren Buddhist terms this is frequently referred to as 'changing poison into medicine':

> The process of changing poison into medicine begins when we approach difficult experiences as an opportunity to reflect on ourselves and to strengthen and develop our courage and compassion. Suffering can thus serve as a springboard for a deeper experience of happiness. From the perspective of Buddhism, inherent in all negative experiences is this profound positive potential (SGI, 2014j, para. 1).

This highlights the importance of the context for when an individual overcomes difficulties or suffering in order to create internal happiness. This is to say that external forces such as an individual's experiences and environment impact oneself. This can clearly be seen through postmodernist thought, how "power circulates multilaterally and unpredictably" (Taylor, 2005 p. 126) within individual discourses. This relationship of

discourse and power impacts how individuals think, learn, act and live. Foucault (2003a) argued that this form of power makes "individuals subjects" (p. 130). As discussed in Chapter Four, to foster children to develop determination, hope and appreciation forms part of the construction of internal happiness. A psychologist would say that happiness is when a child develops a positive determination to achieve their goal easily (Fishman & McCarthy, 2013) as opposed to children lacking in determination. One educator commented that "*determination is a drive for children to achieve their goals" (ED6J)*. The sense of satisfaction and successful experiences lead children to feel happy about themselves (Fishman & McCarthy, 2013); this is an important factor when educators talk about quality.

Educators working in Soka kindergartens mentioned that an optimistic attitude with elements such as possessing a sense of hope is important to obtain internal happiness. Fishman and McCarthy argued that "happy people are hopeful about the future" (2013, p. 510). The abstract association of determination and hope provide a complex understanding of how this concept is implemented in a classroom setting. The Soka curriculum included examples of fostering hope and determination which were noted during classroom observations. Interestingly, these concepts were not implemented in a lesson plan but rather integrated into daily activities and also observed during educator-child interactions. For example, I recorded an observation in which an educator spoke to a child during a group activity in which the child had difficulties with a picture matching game. The educator stated "I believe you can do this, can you do it one more time?" (Researcher observation journal, 2012.10.16). With the educator's encouragement and support this particular child became determined to finish the task and achieved the targeted goal. From a postmodern perspective words are used as making meaning of the world (Mac Naughton, 2005). For example, when an educator

states 'I believe in you' to a child this implies trust and hope, instead of just simply saying 'just try to do it'. From a Soka perspective, when a child overcomes difficulty this leads to a sense of satisfaction, which contributes to the child's sense of internal happiness. However, Soka kindergarten educators provided various activities at different levels and abilities to allow children to meet their own expectations and scaffold their path of learning, which constitutes flexibility within the curriculum. In the long term, this may impact on the child's resilience and capacity to face future challenges. Soka educators believe that the construction of inner strength, courage and determination are important aspects to develop, for children to function effectively in our contemporary world.

The findings of this study demonstrated that educators' discourse of internal happiness not only focuses on individual appreciation but also a desire to appreciate others, which leads to a strong relationship between oneself and others (human or environmental). In the results presentation chapter (see Chapter Four) I introduced the rationale for the term 'appreciation' through the lens of Soka philosophy in which educators working in Soka kindergartens argued that life is interwoven with many efforts and consideration of people around us. Making use of Eaude's (2009) idea that four elements, drawn from Hay and Nye (2006), are constructs of happiness, I have selected three of these elements which are useful to Soka philosophy in this section, namely: "awareness of self", "awareness of others" and "awareness of the environment" (p. 190). Awareness of self involves a level of consciousness such as a deep understanding and consciousness of one's relationship with the self, others and the environment. I interpret this to mean that when a sense of awareness is developed between an individual, other people and the environment, this reduces self-centredness

and subjectivity. This may also be a crucial point when educators seek to implement quality practice in the classroom.

Quality as humanity and unlimited potential. The final and important concept indicating the educators' understanding of quality of early childhood education and their practice is the concept of humanity and unlimited potential. The research results indicated that all participating educators had similar humanist ideologies when viewing each child with respect, compassion and with a belief in the unlimited potential of oneself. With reference to the educators and their concept of humanity this makes an important contribution to inclusive classroom practice. It has been argued that a respectful and supportive learning environment provides children with a good level of social support, which contributes to a happy learning environment (Appleby & Andrews, 2012). And further, a sense of respect for others creates an inclusive classroom environment (Cologon, 2010), which is a strong component in the construction of both educators' and children's wellbeing in an early childhood setting. This suggests that the discourse of respect and compassion can manifest as power through interaction with others. Foucault (2003a) argued that when we use the "exercise of power as a way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions" (p. 140). The grand narrative of Soka philosophy includes value creation, happiness and humanity and this frames the field of possibilities for Soka educators. This scenario indicated that power was exercised within Soka discourse, educators and subsequent teaching practices. For example, the discourse of the educators looking for goodness and potential in others would positively impact on their pedagogy practice. The children may feel their voices and thoughts have value leading to a sense of wellbeing and happiness. This may also include relationships between educators and children, educators and parents, and through curriculum planning, the classroom setting,

and children's work displays. This can even be found in detailed children's seating plans.

A core Soka discourse is the appreciation of unlimited potential. One participating educator commented: *"For kindergarten teachers it is important to believe each child has unlimited potential and unique personalities" (ED3HK)*. Educators working in Soka kindergartens believe that all people are unique, equal, precious and full of unlimited potential, which is essential in order to value diversity and difference. This creates a contrast to some literature which refers to 'potential' as a level of intelligence or ability. Unfortunately, unlimited potential is not often found in regular classroom settings but is closely linked to ideas associated with 'gifted' or 'able' children (Young & Tyre, 1995). Young and Tyre (1995) argue that this exclusive association and interpretation of human potential considers that "all children enjoy exposure to all that is worthwhile and life enhancing" (p. 31). This leads to potential not only being associated with a particular group or ability, but rather suggesting that all people can create positive values and experiences to enhance each other's lives. This is supported by UNESCO which states that "everyone is unique and that all people are equal" (2004, Chapter 1, p. 32). The components of respect, compassion and unlimited potential were used to conceptualise understanding within a Soka educational philosophy context. Foucault (2003a) often argued that power relations are rooted within social discourse, therefore the strategy of deconstructing Soka discourse provided an understanding of how this discourse was linked with educator's pedagogical practices.

Drawing on Soka education philosophy, an important factor contributing to the conception of quality education is that everyone possesses individual unlimited potential. Yet, literature drawn from western and Asian philosophers, such as Dewey

and Makiguchi, provide a synthesised understanding of unlimited potential. This is to say that from a prominent western philosopher's perspective, Dewey in 'Democracy and Education' (1961) rejected the rigid term 'human potential'. Dewey argued that 'potential' should be the "possibility for growing" (1961, p. 42), which contains positive enforcement at any stage of life. In which case, the characteristics of potential are not limited by the child's transition from "immature to mature" (Dewey, 1961, p. 42). Dewey's perspective on continuous human growth is equally applicable to adults as well as children. This perspective is in line with the Soka philosophy of unlimited potential.

In this present research, the educators often refer to Makiguchi's ideas (1997) in his 1930 publication *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* (The theory of value-creating pedagogy) in which he focused on the unlimited potential of every person. The research findings indicate that educators' discourse was strongly influenced by Makiguchi, in particular, how he asserted the value of each individual regardless of differences in culture, gender, age or education. The philosophy of Soka regards education as a humanistic tool for the lifelong pursuit of self-awareness, wisdom and development (Bethel, 1989; Goulah & Ito, 2012). This is to say, the basis of 'Soka humanistic education' lies in helping each child to bring forth his or her potential from deep within, and focuses on developing the wish to lead a life of contribution and the ability to empathise with others' feelings (Goulah & Ito, 2012; Ikeda, 2010; Lyotard, 1984).

The educators in this study expressed their desire to seek and draw out the unlimited potential of each child and their hope that they will ultimately contribute to society and make a positive impact in the creation of World peace. From a Soka perspective, to be able to see goodness in others (value creation) rather than focusing on negative elements, fosters a sense of compassion, respect and tolerance (humanist

aspect). These key components can lead to the construction of a harmonious and supportive society. Ikeda, the founder of current Soka education institutions, stated that, "a great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation, and further, can even enable a change in the destiny of all humankind" (cited in SGI, 2014b, para. 1). Ikeda (2010) further explained the possibility of inner transformation as a process of bringing forth our full human potential, which can lead to individual empowerment and constructive action. The educators expressed that ultimately the goal of Soka education is to direct humans toward creating a peaceful, happy and sustainable world. Ultimately, it could be argued that this is the major purpose of quality early childhood education within Soka philosophy. In this section I identify a discourse to achieve a better self and better society discussed among educators working in Soka kindergartens. However, viewing this through a postmodern lens I would argue that the goal for a better self or better society contains a set of expectations regarding how this might be achieved through how educators behave within the norms of social expectations. The power of this Soka knowledge is exercised as a guide for educators to view and become a good person or citizen. Through this argument, educators addressed that Buddhist practice has helped them reflect on their daily actions and delivery in the classroom. Buddhist chanting is seen as an opportunity for educators to undertake self-realisation and self-reflection, which is important in the promotion of quality early childhood education. For example, in Chapter Four, I mentioned how educators working in Soka kindergartens displayed a current list of children attending the kindergarten, and how educators chanted for the happiness of these children every morning before they arrived at the kindergarten.

In relation to unlimited potential, literature sourced from Nichiren Buddhism was used to better understand the knowledge of unlimited potential. Nichiren Buddhism

advocates that an individual's 'Buddha nature' can be developed through human practice. Soka discourses such as courage, wisdom and compassion allow people to overcome challenges, transforming their lives and contributing to the happiness of others. The ultimate goal of Soka philosophy is to achieve world peace (Ikeda, 2005). It is argued that the Buddha nature exists in every person and/or each person has potential Buddhahood. Buddhahood means "the supreme state of life in Buddhism, characterized by boundless wisdom and compassion" (Soka Gakkai, 1999, p. 1207). Nichiren stated that Buddhahood is not a static condition but rather a dynamic experience through which an individual continues to develop and discover (SGI, 2013g). Therefore, our daily actions as a person are a form of practice to achieve Buddhahood and create our own unlimited potential.

Ikeda (2010) made use of a Buddhist metaphor to describe each individual as "the flowering of the personality that emanates from the depths of life with the statement that each person's individuality is as unique as cherry, plum, peach or damson blossoms" (p. 168). This narrative means all people are unique, equal, precious and full of unlimited potential and subsequently able to contribute and construct a positive functional role in society. Reflecting on such arguments, the Nichiren Buddhist global view of unlimited potential is that each person can be in line with concepts such as respect, compassion, tolerance and the appreciation of others. This in turn has shaped Soka educators' discourse and knowledge, and has influenced their attitudes toward pedagogical practice and their aspirations to achieve quality early childhood education.

The results of the research show that the belief in individuals is also related to discussion in respect of how children value their own unlimited potential, as this can impact their self-esteem (individual feelings and attitudes toward self), self-efficacy (belief in one's capabilities), self-confidence (linked to initiative, self-motivation,

resilience and empathy) and self-belief (Rhodes, 2012). Similarly, associating these perspectives with early childhood education brings into focus how individual children can value themselves and how educators should perceive the unlimited potential of each child. Rhodes (2012) argued that "self-belief may be an important bridge between the potential to lead and subsequent high performance" (pp. 439-440). The value of self-belief is an important part of a quality inner life highlighted within the Soka education model, as this creates a sense of courage to overcome difficulties and challenges in life.

Building on the Soka discourse regarding humanist perspectives in which each child is considered as having unlimited potential; educators working in Soka kindergartens seek to encourage children to develop their own voice in order to acquire skills, knowledge and values, as well as a sense of responsibility and to strive to become active and productive citizens (Makiguchi, 2004, 2010; UNESCO, 2004). Postmodernism views this discourse and knowledge as a source of inspiration that leads to a greater value of people's (children's) individualism and uniqueness (Foucault, 2003a). Viewing power circulated within educators' discourse of the unlimited potential in children can be defined as an appreciation which transforms and moves educators toward harmonious classroom practice, compassion, respect and kindness for others. Thus the concept of unlimited potential in children is a key component of the Soka educational philosophy, which inspires educators to achieve quality early childhood education through pedagogical practice.

Soka Kindergarten Practice

What is the nature of the practices of educators working in the early childhood Soka education model?

This research question is intended to gain an understanding of educators' classroom practice. In response to the second research question, the findings identified three aspects which highlighted the application of educators' classroom practice: *shared learning*, *relationships*, and an *inclusive environment*.

Shared learning. The first important finding in relation to Soka classroom practice was shared learning. This is an important component when discussing quality early childhood education. Shared learning refers to a process of collective understanding and actions to bring about negotiated agreements in respect of children's roles, rights and responsibilities related to their learning. Shared learning often occurs when children have opportunities to voice their thoughts during a learning process. This learning style does not refer to a top-down approach but rather a collaborative learning approach. As previously discussed, the educators' discourse is that every child has an unlimited potential, a sense of respect and there is goodness in each child. This has positively impacted the educator-child relationship and has led to shared learning through classroom practice. Shared learning allows children to contribute their views into their learning which is associated with effective learning throughout global education settings (Humphreys, 2012). Listening to children expressing their ideas was frequently noted during my interviews with participating educators. For example, a participating educator remarked "*we changed our theme based on children's interest or something children felt was important*", and further "*we discuss different ideas and from there I can see what they want to learn and then we try to move on from there to allow them to see and later to investigate*" *(ED2S)*. This can be seen as the Soka discourse of valuing children's ideas and providing opportunities for children to have choices in the classroom. This also contributes to effective learning and recognises that children are able to generate knowledge with others, instead of simply focusing on independent

knowledge acquisition (Watkins, Carnell, & Lodge, 2007). Humphreys (2012) identified shared learning in the classroom as the essence to promoting effective learning and this may create a "participative-style of teaching" that involves "collaborative learning and student decision making" (p. 437) practices that have become increasingly popular in classroom pedagogy.

Educators working in Soka kindergartens emphasised flexibility and diversity in learning delivery for children such as arranging mixed-age open learning environments, project participation and unstructured learning for children with different abilities. Interestingly, educators argued that to allow children this flexibility of learning did not mean simply allowing them to do what they want. Rather, educators are still required to provide some knowledge base and skills before or during any implementation to scaffold children's learning. In these circumstances, it can be seen that quality educator-child relationships are not simply a matter of an educator offering choices and decision-making opportunities to children, but rather power needs to be considered as a two-way mechanism. One educator argued that the use of structured activities allowed children to be empowered in their learning, so they could discuss, describe and present their learning, and there was an important emphasis during learning that "*children are able to learn as well as doing so with joy, happily*" *(ED2S)*. These comments demonstrate the impact of educators' discourse regarding the three concepts of 'value creation, happiness and humanity' which subsequently impacted how classroom learning had been implemented. Makiguchi (1989b) argued that educational knowledge should not be simply transferred but rather be gained through discussion and guidance from educators for knowledge to be created. Educators can only serve as a guide if they recognise that children have equal stake in education with their teachers.

As previously discussed in this thesis educators' discourse and knowledge impact their classroom practice. I would argue that power and knowledge are more complex than I initially thought. I found that power and knowledge are interrelated and often exist in an essential social and cultural relationship with individuals, groups and institutions. From a postmodern perspective, knowledge is "gathered in a way which further reinforces the exercise of power" (O'Farrell, 2005, p. 103). In the *Archaeology of knowledge* Foucault discussed knowledge and he referred to the term "savoir" (1972, p. 181), to signify the construction of knowledge about oneself, and the knowledge which is produced through personal experience and relationships with others (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). This is an important point which allows us to view knowledge beyond oneself. Foucault (1972, p. 191) referred to "connaissance" as received knowledge to construct oneself, but rather interactions and experience help an individual in the construction of knowledge. The argument I am making here is that the practice of educators is framed within the field of possibilities of Soka philosophy, which in turn filters into pedagogical practice. For example, in my presentation chapter (see Chapter Four), I raised a few questions regarding a particular educator who was clearly guiding a child's drawing. I asked this educator about her teaching methods with particular reference to this child's self-portrait session and the teacher did not give any specific answer. Foucault (1972) argued that knowledge is piled up, one on top of another, derived from previous experience, culture and tradition. There is no set form of knowledge which emerges independently regarding the complex networks of power and exercising power produces certain types of knowledge. Since Foucault makes reference to knowledge being piled on top of knowledge, in this context this particular educator may not have a deep understanding of the Soka educational philosophy and she may have been relying upon other knowledge from other sources which subsequently

impacted her pedagogical practice. Other Soka educators, however, may possess a deeper understanding of Soka philosophy and this knowledge enhances their classroom practice.

Recently, there has been an increase in the amount of research into children's views and voices (Cheung, 2012; Harcourt, 2012; Harcourt & Mazzoni, 2012; Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012) in order to encourage children to become more engaged in their own learning processes and to build their capacity to gain knowledge (Humphreys, 2012; Watkins et al., 2007). The level of shared learning found within early childhood education settings varies across a wide range of classroom approaches. For example, I observed the Soka kindergartens allowed children to select their activity materials, have a choice in activities and a voice in the creation of rules when playing games. The common thread was a focus on allowing children to make decisions, provide input and have a voice with respect to their own learning aligned to their interests.

Makiguchi (1989, 2004, 2006, 2010) emphasised that educators seeking quality must be aware that education should be embedded in humanity in order to enhance happiness and values in society. This Soka philosophy emphasises that education should focus on the primacy of the child and not simply fulfil the needs of authority, commerce, educator or parental expectations and demands. Therefore, educators who engage in shared learning are not simply providing top-down directives to children without any questions or reflections. They can be viewed as researchers and knowledge generators who work with the children (Kincheloe, 2008), unlike the traditional role of educators who often used a transmission approach to teaching children (Kincheloe, 1993).

Positive and supportive relationships. Another important finding in relation to the second question was positive and supportive relationships. The research findings demonstrated that the discussion of relationships not only focused on the educator-child, but expanded to include educator-parents, educator-educator and child-child, which are important components in the promotion of quality early childhood education (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009). As stated in Chapter Four, Soka discourses of value creation, happiness and humanity have led to the creation of respect and positive relationships for children, other educators and parents which are fundamental to quality early childhood education. This is in line with a Nichiren Buddhist teaching that expounds that all life is interconnected and how one's reaction subsequently affects another. During the research interviews I observed that educators talked about the importance of respect, compassion and appreciation of each child for others. In a previous section in this chapter (see pp. 216-219), the effect of shared learning in the classroom has also contributed to supportive and encouraging teacher-child relationships. A sense of caring for children and appreciation of their individual potential is characterised by the humanistic educator. Makiguchi (2006) expressed that people are shaped by interactions and there is no genuine education without earnest life-to-life interactions and inspirations. During one of my observations I noted how some educators said goodbye to the children at the end of the school day, which demonstrated a warm and close relationship in line with Makiguchi's interpretive 'life-to-life interactions and inspirations'. It was interesting to see that when educators had a positive relationship with children, this benefited not only the children, but the educators. When educators are happy at work and feel love for the children this encourages their own internal happiness, self-esteem and self-satisfaction. When educators achieve internal happiness this positively impacts their classroom practice and

career stabilisation. A participating educator commented: "*I think my interest is teacher-child interactions and our positive relationship between teachers and children should always be there*" *(ED1S).* The position of this educator is noted by many scholars arguing that positive relationships with children can contribute to their social, emotional and academic wellbeing (Downer et al., 2010; Ostrosky et al., 2006; Smidt, 2009; Thijs et al., 2011). Supportive and encouraging educator-child relationships can reduce the risk of a child failing at school and are correlated with successful schooling (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Similarly, positive relationships can contribute to children's cognitive, social and emotional outcomes (O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Spilt et al., 2010). A recent study confirmed that the interrelated educator-child relationship encourages a child to actively participate and make active decisions which are also an important element of quality early childhood education (Theobald et al., 2011). Rey et al. (2007) predicted that positive reinforcement for young children would lead to a greater interest and involvement in learning as well as resulting in better classroom compliance. Importantly, children would value themselves and create change within themselves, so a powerful transformation takes place (Suleiman-Gonzalez, 2004). Therefore educator-child relationships are correlated significantly with accomplishing quality early childhood education as well as contributing to the holistic development of children (Rey et al., 2007).

There is no doubt that building an effective partnership between educators and parents has a beneficial effect on children's development. The findings of this research showed that Soka educator-parental relationships were supportive and positive; participating parents stated that their particular Soka kindergarten had provided sufficient levels of support in areas such as parenting guidance, early childhood education knowledge and, in some cases, support with parental self-development. In

addition to Soka kindergartens running workshops, family activities and seminars outside of school time the kindergartens also valued parental input through inviting parents to assist with excursions and classroom activities. This opens opportunities for parents to better understand the practices of Soka educational philosophy. These parent/educator communication opportunities would be based upon the grand narrative of the overarching Soka philosophy. Again, this would represent only a limited, single world view revolving around Soka philosophy. The Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten had established a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in which volunteering parents were involved in many kindergarten events and activities. The establishment of a PTA is not typically found within early childhood institutions in East Asian nations. However, the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten clearly understood the value of establishing a PTA, which subsequently provides parents with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of Soka educational philosophy and how their children are learning. It was also noted that the establishment of a PTA was one of the most effective ways to gather ideas from parents at schools with a large number of children, for example, the Hong Kong and Singapore Soka Kindergartens. From a postmodern perspective, this shows how Soka knowledge is the basis for educator's values and beliefs in respect and value for each person; in this particular case it was parents. This Soka discourse can be considered as an exercise in cooperation between educators and parents. This demonstrates how knowledge plays an important role in the shaping of norms of Soka kindergarten practices such as welcoming and encouraging parent's active involvement in various kindergarten activities. Parents commented that the role of the PTA was not only for supporting the daily practice of the Soka kindergarten, but also importantly, to present a common voice for all the parents at the school. At the time of the research I was informed that the Singapore Soka Kindergarten was is the process of establishing a

PTA. A participating parent expressed her thoughts: "*I first really came across this term 'humanist education' when I was in the Parent Teacher Association*" *(P4HK)*. This highlights one of the benefits for parents actively becoming involved in the kindergarten as this allows them to gain an understanding of the practice of Soka education and support their own child's learning. However, some parents who select Soka kindergartens may abide by humanist views and there is a possibility that these parents specifically chose Soka for this philosophical reason, although they may be aware of other world views.

The issue of educator-educator relationships is not often discussed in the literature. The most common discussion regarding this subject refers to research conducted on the induction and support provided for new educators as they adapt to a new school culture and work tasks (Bickmore & Curry, 2013), and mentoring support (Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2011). However, this research in respect of mentoring is typically focused on the impact of the relationship between the mentor and mentee.

Here, I refer to the relationships between mentors and mentees and general educators' relationships within participating Soka kindergartens. Soka kindergartens provide a mentoring program to assist novice educators to become familiar with their kindergarten. When we talk about a power relationship between mentor and mentee this describes how power circulates between them. Foucault (2003a) noted that "power relations form relationships of communication that transmit information by means of a language, a system of signs, or any other medium … communicating is always a certain way of acting upon another person or persons" (p. 135). The power of mentors often refers to the power related to their knowledge and teaching experiences. Interestingly, the findings in this research indicated that how educators conceptualised relationships

between mentors and mentees within the Soka kindergarten context was of particular note for the quality of early childhood education. As an example, during a participating educator interview session an educator commented: "*Although I have more experiences than my partner teacher but I still have much to learn from her*" *(ED3HK)*, she further explained "*especially as she recently graduated from university and she may have more understanding of some new teaching methods or new theories that I don't know*" *(ED3HK)*. These comments highlight the interconnection between Soka discourse and practice including the educator's sense of respect for others. In this particular case, the novice educator would feel valued – that their contribution and knowledge was recognised. He or she may be willing to present their new knowledge gained from their university studies and consequently to create a co-learning atmosphere between educators.

As noted in previous sections in relation to how the Sapporo, Hong Kong and Singapore Soka kindergartens focused on individual capabilities (potential), some Soka educators have additional roles as team leaders, subject leaders or year level leaders. These additional responsibilities have created a sense of cooperation where educators have an opportunity to contribute their thoughts and skills. For example, during my research I noted an educator *(ED5J)* had good knowledge of music and she mentioned she had written a song for other educators to teach in their classrooms. I observed that the educators frequently met in order to share expertise and provide some educational resources for use by their colleagues. In another example, an educator *(ED3J)* leading reading support provided some particularly relevant books and stories for other educators to consider using in their classrooms. This attitude underlines how some educators clearly value team teaching and working together. One participating educator made reference to a Nichiren Buddhist phrase "*many in body and one in mind*"

(ED3HK), referring to how all educators work towards the same goal. This educator's comment highlights the concept of collectivism. Collectivism can be explained as how individuals view themselves as part of "the group or society [that] is the basic unit of moral concern, and the individual is of value only insofar as he serves the group" (Biddle, 2012, para. 3). The educator's collectivism was mentioned by some participating parents whose children attend Soka kindergartens in that Soka teachers have a very strong team spirit and they work towards agreed goals. In summary, I would surmise that educators have generated a genuine team spirit in which they work together and focus on the same goals along the lines. This respect and care for each other is in line with the Soka philosophy of fostering a greater sense of self and greater others, not only for the children but also for the educators and the institution as a whole.

The last relationship to be discussed here is child-child relationship and my observations and data obtained during interviews on how children relate to each other at Soka kindergartens. One educator commented that Soka humanist education "*should let children know how to live together with others*" *(ED2HK)*. From a postmodern view the discourse of educators working in Soka kindergartens contributes to the construction of supportive relationships between children. Activities developed by educators can bring children together to work as a team and support each other. In my presentation chapter (see Chapter Four) I described how a young girl supported another child's learning by using encouraging language to support her. This interaction may be linked with Soka kindergartens being focused on the promotion of harmonious relationships, for example, the program in which older children encourage and take care of younger children. Some participating parents also commented on how their children were learning to care for others within the Soka kindergarten setting and how this was becoming an important contemporary issue within small families. In Hong Kong and

Singapore families often have one or two children who are often looked after by domestic helpers or by grandparents whilst parents go to work. A parent commented that "*Children may tend to more self-centred and have a lack of opportunities to actively care for others as they are the primary centre of care*" *(P3HK)*. This issue relates to Soka discourse regarding the importance of fostering children to have a sense of appreciation, respect and compassion for others.

Inclusive environment. The final major finding related to educators working in Soka kindergartens implementation of quality early childhood education practices was the creation of an inclusive environment. An inclusive environment stimulates children's physical, psychosocial and cognitive development. This is significant as an inclusive classroom allows children with different needs, interests or abilities to work together (Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012). An inclusive environment was observed at Soka kindergartens through a postmodern theoretical lens. The following two examples were previously noted in my presentation chapter: the Singapore Soka Kindergarten provides an inclusive policy in which the kindergarten respects different religious practices and cultures such as the use of Halal certified food. This sense of respect for other cultures was often emphasised. Another example of inclusion was noted at the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten, where extra support is provided to help children of different nationalities. The educators' discourse is that all children have unlimited potential, and respect for diversity and difference which makes an important contribution to creating an inclusive learning environment. Cologon (2010) argued that "the need to uphold human dignity and enable all people to have the opportunity to enhance their potential" (p. 45) is important in creating an inclusive environment. Reflecting upon this view, creating an inclusive environment is not simply with groups of children together in a classroom, but also each child has an opportunity

to contribute their thoughts and skills in order to promote equitable practices, which is thought to contribute to the enhancement of collaborative learning and development (Klibthong, Fridani, Ikegami, & Agbenyega, 2014). Dewey (1961) argued that it is important for children to develop their growth and development. From a postmodern perspective, it is important to value individual differences and a single perspective cannot fulfil these needs. As each child has a unique culture and background; educators need to provide an environment which supports a sense of wellbeing and acceptance. This positively impacts children's self-esteem and emotional development. This approach can also influence curriculum planning and pedagogy, as children need variety. For example, there was a large selection of Japanese books and cultural activities for Japanese children at the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten.

An inclusive environment suggests that when the discourse of educators is working in Soka kindergartens this leads to recognition of the true value of children, which can encourage power relations between them. An inclusive environment is one in which all children feel actively engaged, safe and welcome (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2013). Such an environment also acknowledges and celebrates difference as part of everyday life as well as valuing and encouraging a sense of diversity (Agbenyega, 2012a). Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden, and Surtees (2009) emphasised that a perceived sense of respect for children and their families is an essential element in creating an inclusive environment where children's voices are heard in the classroom setting. Referring to the Soka educational philosophy, clearly there is a strong urge to create a harmonious community which is seen as an important and necessary precursor to a peaceful society.

Educators' Professional Needs

What are the professional needs of early childhood educators working in

the Soka education model?

The third research question was aimed at identifying educators' professional needs to promote quality early childhood education. To respond to this question two main points need to be made: firstly, *the need for deeper insights into theoretical understanding and quality early childhood education* and secondly, *the need for self-awareness and self-reflexivity.*

The need for deeper insights into theoretical understanding. The study revealed that a deeper insight into theoretical understanding is a particularly important consideration for educator's professional needs. The study findings demonstrated three levels of theoretical understanding among educators (see Table 5.1) impacting on classroom practice: basic, intermediate and sophisticated theoretical understanding. In this study, kindergarten principals and long serving educators demonstrated a sophisticated level of theoretical understanding. These professionals shared an in-depth understanding of Buddhist theoretical views which translated into sophisticated classroom practice. Those educators located at basic or intermediate levels demonstrated less sophisticated quality classroom practice, which can lead children to reach a higher level of holistic development. With experience and mentoring these educators have great potential to reach a sophisticated level of theoretical understanding but they are not yet there. This demonstrates the importance of the development of in-depth theoretical understanding for professional educators to improve quality classroom practice. To become an effective Soka educator there is a need to strive towards goals of Soka educational philosophy, which includes seeking to foreground their discourse on the grand narrative scale and not depart from Soka ideals.

Table 5.1

Three levels of theoretical understanding among Soka educators

Dimensions of quality practice in relation to theoretical understanding (Soka philosophy)

Basic understanding	Intermediate understanding	Sophisticated understanding
Basic knowledge of theoretical understanding (Humanism) and quality practice	Detailed knowledge of theoretical understanding and quality practice	In-depth knowledge of theoretical understanding and quality practice
Demonstrate classroom teaching practice is related to their own personal values, experience and beliefs but with limited theoretical understanding	Demonstrate some links between theoretical understanding and quality classroom practice	Demonstrate strong links between theoretical understanding and classroom practice
Teaching philosophy and self-reflection are not closely linked to theoretical understanding	Demonstrate some levels of self-reflection based upon theoretical understanding and classroom practice	Demonstrate a strong sense of self-reflection based upon theoretical understanding, classroom practice and daily living
Demonstrate an awareness of identity as a professional teacher	Theoretical understanding strongly influences teachers' professional identity	Theoretical understanding informs the continuous improvement of self and professional identity as a teacher and a global citizen
Demonstrate an awareness of opportunities for classroom quality practice improvement but have difficulties drawing upon theoretical understanding (Humanism) to support such practice	Demonstrate an awareness of opportunities for classroom quality practice improvement, occasionally drawing on theoretical understanding to inform practice	Demonstrate ongoing engagement with theoretical understanding and humanism to actively seek out opportunities for classroom quality practice improvement

The importance of theoretical understanding of Soka philosophy is highlighted when considering quality classroom practice. One educator commented: "*Sometimes I will share my (Buddhist) knowledge with my colleagues who don't understand the Soka philosophy as I feel this will help to achieve quality in our teaching*" (ED3HK). This educator demonstrated an understanding of theoretical aspects of humanist education that are important for promoting quality. Educators' discourse and the values they hold have a major impact on the creation of quality practice (Leung, 2012; Logan & Sumsion, 2010). Thus Buddhist beliefs provide discourse and knowledge which directly impact classroom practice and the curriculum. For postmodernists, discourse provides a privileged entry and understanding of how one perceives and gives meaning to subjectivity (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Discourse is influenced by our social practices which entail meaning and these meanings shape our thoughts and actions. Following Hall's analysis of Foucault, discourse is "a system of representation" and "production of knowledge" (Hall, 2001, p. 72). That is to say, when knowledge influences and forms oneself, it is a discourse (Hall, 2001).

In this study, I have questioned how a focus on a single theoretical understanding (Soka philosophy) may lead to dilemmas which may limit educators from seeing other perspectives. This goes back to the need for Soka educators to deconstruct their discourse of the grand narrative of Soka philosophy rather than merely seek to better oneself towards Buddhahood. It is important that educators question and challenge the grand narrative rather than simply accept this narrative without any critique of the overarching philosophy. However, educators working in Soka kindergartens explained the main theoretical understanding is located within Buddhist aspects but that alternative theories and approaches have also been applied in their classroom practice. For example, an educator noted: "*…teaching theory, I use a variety*

of aspects like Vygotsky's perspectives together with my own Soka beliefs" (ED3S).

Interestingly, another educator said *"I have heard about Vygotsky and different theories[and] to me, I feel that these theories have been developed for the good of the children, but to me at this point in time I think our own founders Makiguchi, Toda, [and] Ikeda's perspectives of children's potential to grow is very important. So that is why I chose Soka perspective as my practice"* (ED2S). The above educators' thoughts indicate they actually have options to integrate other theories into their classroom practice. Some educators may combine different theories while others simply focus on Soka educational philosophy for their own beliefs. One participating educator mentioned an important point during an informal conversation: every educational theory has its strengths and weaknesses but it is important to make the best use of each theory from time to time and situation to situation.

Soka education, while based on important values and beliefs, is also restrictive in that the teaching and core concepts imparted to children represent mainly one way of perceiving and implementing pedagogical practice to achieve quality. This may limit educators' awareness of alternative perspectives of quality early childhood education. Essentially, this reliance upon a single source of belief may result in educators ignoring other educational perspectives. This point is in line with Foucault's argument that there is no absolute truth and truth is an event which takes place in history (Foucault, 1990). During this study I became aware that many participating educators often refer to the founder (Ikeda) and their principals for guidance. Although Ikeda and school principals base their knowledge on Nichiren Buddhist philosophy, there is still a potential dilemma when considering issues of interpretation and subjectivity. This indicates the need for educators to have a solid understanding of theoretical perspectives in order to utilise such philosophy to create quality classroom practice.

The need for self-awareness and self-reflexivity. The second professional need identified for educators was the need for self-awareness and self-reflexivity. The findings showed that they are crucial processes for inner self-development. Self-awareness begins with self-reflection and this refers to one's ability to identify areas for improvement and willingness to grow and change. Self-awareness requires constant, ongoing reflection, exploration and being open to new perspectives and ideas. The discussion of self-reflection and self-awareness in this context goes beyond classroom practice. One educator commented *"we all have a teaching journal [in] which we record our daily practice to [en]able us to reflect on our work"* (ED3HK). Another educator noted *"there were many opportunities for us to reflect [on] our curriculum, activities plan as well as our own self"* (ED1HK). Educators' inner self-awareness and reflexivity, including the way they construct their thoughts and actions in daily life, is clearly an important factor when seeking to create a better life. The importance of self-reflexivity was addressed in Cologon's study (2012). The study indicated that through a process of self-reflection educators would develop a sense of awareness in their own beliefs which would lead to a change in educators' attitudes with respect to classroom practice. Importantly, educators would be able to explore their needs and enhance their professional knowledge. Keep in mind that Soka concepts of value creation, happiness and humanity are not just for children but also for the educators to develop a greater self. This means greater self is a process of growth that enables us to reflect and, for those who have responsibility, to contribute to the wellbeing of others and the wider community (SGI, 2014k). This sense of responsibility and commitment to others' wellbeing would "drives the growth of our human capacities, extending our ability to be a positive influence on our environment" (SGI, 2014k, para. 5).

Again, to extend knowledge drawn from this study, self-awareness and self-reflexivity are important aspects of educator's professional needs leading to quality practice. Postmodernism values the importance of the critique of thoughts and ideas, and offers a kaleidoscope process for understanding quality practice (Novinger et al., 2005). Therefore, actively participating in self-awareness and self-reflexivity assists educators in developing shared meaning making through their classroom practice. Importantly, through this process of self-awareness and self-reflexivity, educators become aware of their actions (Cologon, 2012). This is especially important for quality teaching practice. For example, an increase in self-awareness involves a deeper understanding of classroom relationships, teaching and learning, leading to shared power relations between educators and children (Richardson & Shupe, 2003).

Implications of Soka Model for Children's Learning and Development

What lessons from the data on the Soka model are pivotal to children's quality learning and development that can be used to enhance quality early childhood practices in other contexts?

The results of this research are significant because they demonstrate how Soka educational beliefs, values, thoughts and cultural factors have added another dimension to the concept of quality early childhood education and practice. Three important implications can be drawn from this study: (1) *personality development*, (2) *emotional and social development* and *(3) cognitive development.*

Personality development. This study found that the first implication pertaining to how the Soka model is pivotal to children's quality learning is the development of personality within the specific context of the Soka educational model.

Personality development is crucial for an organised pattern of behaviours and attitudes that forms an individual's distinctiveness. Makiguchi (2004) explains that the development of children's internal happiness is an important component of building a strong personality. Bethel (1989) reflected on how happiness is a contributing factor in the development of personality; happiness is not just a basic need for a sense of security but also happiness constitutes a positive personality. This statement reiterates that happiness should not be fixated on external causes or basic living needs but everything within the individual child (Bethel, 1989; Makiguchi, 2004; Medcalf, Hoffman, & Boatwright, 2013; Snowman, 2009) such as individual personality, satisfaction and self-actualisation (Makiguchi, 2004; Maslow, 1943). Ikeda (2010) suggests:

> We need to return to the core issue of human values. I believe we need to redefine the crucial concepts of the 'development of personality'. People have come to take this phrase, described as the purpose of education in the Fundamental Law of Education, for granted. But this is a universal goal we must strive to realize and implement … let us experiment by replacing the phase development of personality with the word happiness (2010, p. 86).

To promote happiness in Soka early childhood education, educators have taken a role in developing children's personalities. This development must focus strongly on "representations of self and others" (Rothbart, 2011, p. 225). Self-development can be children's achievements, successes, facing challenges, confidence and can include how children interact with other people, the environment and the things around them. The purpose of Soka early childhood is to build a strong foundation for the child and society. This requires educators take into consideration how a person's contribution to society imbues a meaningful and positive feeling which are the essences of a happy life. Makiguchi emphasised:

> True happiness comes only through sharing in the trials and successes of other people and of our community … it is essential that any true conception of

happiness contains the promise of full commitment to the life of the society (1989a, pp. 24-25).

Within the Soka model, to achieve a strong personality is a process of inner transformation which leads to individual empowerment and constructive action. Ultimately, the goal of each person is to direct people towards creating a peaceful, happy and sustainable world. Every child is unique, no matter where they come from and what they look like. Educators working in Soka kindergartens emphasised that they view each individual child's happiness as a unique treasure and must use this to bring forth the childrens potential, focusing on developing their wishes and a life of contribution. In this way, they will develop the ability to empathise with others (Goulah & Ito, 2012; Ikeda, 2010).

From Foucault's point of view, power and knowledge have been always rooted in particular contexts and histories (2003a). He also argues the production of knowledge is always "crossed with questions of power and the body" (Hall, 2001, p. 78), which is how these relationships represent some sort of meaning. In the above discussion I have clearly explained the relationships and interactions of Soka discourse, power and how knowledge produces new knowledge, such as the importance of personality development for children, which is one of the factors impacting quality early childhood education in these contexts. A participating educator expressed "*Soka is focused on the whole child's development*" *(ED2HK). "Soka is emphasising humanist education, how children can contribute to society in the future" (ED2S).* Within East Asian societies educational systems are often competitive with a focus on knowledge based academic achievements which also have an impact on pre-school education. For example, in many East Asian nations there is a widespread view that educational quality is manifested through children's academic achievements. Within a Hong Kong context the media occasionally makes reference to a contemporary term, 'tiger mother' which typically

refers to a very strict mother who pushes her children to work particularly hard and restricts their free time, so they continually achieve the highest grades (Maxwell, 2012). However, within the Soka model there was still a focus on academic achievement, but also within an overall philosophy of fostering personality development, internal happiness and humanist aspects such as respect, compassion, appreciation and determination of children.

Emotional and social development. The second implication put forward by the Soka model is the emotional and social development of children. Emotion, defined by Campos (2005), is a feeling that occurs when a person is engaged in interaction that is important to them, especially to their wellbeing. Emotion is "characterized by behaviour that reflects the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the state individuals are in, or the transactions they are experiencing" (Santrock, 2007, p. 346). My interpretation is that educators working in Soka kindergartens achieve quality through the attention given to children's internal happiness, which enables them to be actively involved in their holistic education. Bailey (2009) argued that happiness provides psychological and emotional stability to children, leading to sustained attention and involvement when they participate in early childhood programs. By infusing happiness in the core practice of Soka early childhood programs, children are not only being supported to be active members of their learning community, but they are also being developed into future adults who take relational issues seriously (Ben-Shahar, 2007). In this way, the likelihood of children engaging in actions that induce crisis in other people and erode their sense of happiness would be minimised. Ikeda (2010) stated emphatically that happiness is a crucial aspect of being human and happy educators are those who can bring happiness to their students. In this sense the educator's inner self needs to have a sense of happiness because of the flow on effect of

internal happiness on their practice (Makiguchi, 2004). An emotionally stable educator may be able to lead his/her learners to achieve to their maximum potential (Ben-Shahar, 2007; Holder & Coleman, 2009; Ikeda 2010; Layard, 2005; O'Rourke & Copper, 2010).

The research findings also reiterated O'Rourke and Copper (2010) that educators need to reinforce the importance of "a sense of friendship, belonging and optimism" (p. 94) in early childhood education globally. This is also in accordance with Danby et al. (2012) view social relationships such as positive friendships, impact children's wellbeing and possibly being happier and satisfied with themselves. The findings of this research reiterate the need for happiness to be placed ahead of rigid early childhood programs that focus exclusively on achieving optimum literacy and numeracy standards. This means Soka children's attitudes and their views of the educational setting are important to find out what induces their internal happiness. Children need a sense of happiness and belonging to become confident and to feel good about their programs (Makiguchi, 2004; Medcalf et al., 2013; Snowman, 2009). Such positive feelings will contribute to children becoming happy and successful learners. From this perspective Soka early childhood educators are focusing on fostering children's positive attitudes and distinct moral values (Layard, 2005).

Cognitive development. The third implication put forward by the Soka model is the cognitive development of children. Cognitive development considers 'thinking' as a mental activity which makes use of cognitive skills that leads to the inevitable question about how people actually learn cognitive skills. Firstly, the findings showed the Soka discourse of humanist education as meaning making speaks first and foremost about constructing pedagogical work such as environment settings and the curriculum. For instance, a Soka kindergarten created a multi-age unstructured learning environment where children had a free choice of activities based on their interests and

needs. It is important to emphasise that educators become aware that quality teaching always embodies power and this is true of the constructions educators make for children and their pedagogical practice (Dahlberg et al., 2007). This has been stated in a previous section in this chapter, that shared learning allows children to have choices through different activities leading to quality teaching (Humphreys, 2012). This took the form of a large room, set up with various activities and a mix of age groups where more independent children could help others. A participating educator commented: *"The idea for this learning area was drawn from our belief that each child is unique and they have different ways of learning" (ED2HK)*. From this viewpoint the Soka model provides justification regarding how the discourse materialises and is represented through different knowledge, ideas and practices (Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Death, & Farmer, 2014).

Secondly, supportive and positive relationships are highly valued within the Soka model. Close relationships were also addressed from parental perspectives as 'insider observers' at Soka kindergartens. One parent commented: *"I can see all the teachers have a good heart and care about the children" (P6HK)*. This would impact children's wellbeing as well as their learning. Previously in this chapter I discussed how positive and supportive relationships were found in this study. And numerical research confirmed when a child has emotional stability within a supportive social network they are more likely to develop self-confidence, self-motivation and to enjoy learning which in turn positively impacts their cognitive development. This goes back to the previous argument in this chapter, in which I argued that when a child develops a sense of internal happiness this tends to lead to them enjoying learning and enhances their cognitive development.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have deconstructed the pedagogical practices of Soka educators, and their conceptualisation of quality within the framework of value creation, happiness and humanity. This polysemic view of the concept of quality draws on different aspects of knowledge according to the perceptions and episteme of participants, shaped by humanist philosophy. This is consistent with postmodern theory, in that we cannot ascribe universal meaning to quality and its nature in practice.

I have also discussed the key findings of the concepts of human revolution, value creation, internal happiness and hope, humanity and unlimited potential. These are all terms which construct quality early childhood education discourses and practices within the Soka education model. These concepts have positively influenced and impacted educators' classroom practice. This includes shared learning, creating positive and supportive relationships and the creation of an inclusive environment. This chapter also highlighted the importance of possessing a sense of self-awareness and self-reflexivity which are important components of the Soka education model. The educators' conceptualisations of quality were found to contribute to benefits which are pivotal to children's holistic early childhood education including personality, emotional, social and cognitive development.

However, one thing that stands out from the findings was the fostering of a greater self and caring for the happiness of others, which were found to be strong relational concepts that can make a significant contribution to quality early childhood education. I am convinced that developing a sense of responsibility and a desire to contribute to others' wellbeing and to the community drives the growth of our human capacities, as well as creating a positive influence on our environment. To this end, quality early childhood education cannot be considered in isolation, but should rather be

regarded as the bedrock to foster individual children's long-term sense of responsible citizenship and their desire for a better society. Ultimately the goal is to contribute to and attain world peace.

In the following concluding chapter I summarise key ideas gained from this study. I also provide new knowledge gathered from my research results, and discuss the limitations and challenges of this study and present directions for future research. Finally, I also shared my personal transformation gained through this research journey.

Chapter 6

Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion

Introduction

In Chapter One I set the context for this study with an introduction to the research problems and purpose, background of Soka education, the significance of this study and research questions. This final chapter is a summary of key findings, contributions to and limitations of the research. This chapter also includes key recommendations for researchers, educators and policy makers. Possible directions for future research are presented and I conclude with some comments in respect of my personal transformation experienced through this research journey.

Summary of Key Findings

The focus of this study was to explore the perspectives of early childhood educators who work in Soka kindergartens in Sapporo, Hong Kong and Singapore with regard to their conceptualisations of quality early childhood education. This was not a comparative study but rather an exploration of key pedagogical practice within three Soka kindergartens, to contribute to a broader understanding of what quality early childhood practice could look like in three Asian countries. The study was driven by four research questions aimed to provide a greater range of perspectives in respect of quality and an understanding of how culture and values foregrounded the notion of quality practice (see Chapter 1, p. 27). This qualitative multisite case study explored insider perspectives of 12 Soka educators regarding quality early childhood education and their classroom practice. The perspectives of 13 parents whose children attended these Soka kindergartens were also gathered to gain a better understanding of Soka education practices and how these practices impacted their children. The qualitative data

generated from this study was gathered through a combination of informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and field notes from the three participating Soka kindergartens. Analysis of the data through the lens of postmodern notions of discourse, power and knowledge indicated the following key findings.

The main research question which explored how educators working in Soka kindergartens believe and understand quality early childhood education and practices could potentially be achieved through (1) human revolution leading to inner self-development, (2) a process of value creation in which quality EC may be realised, (3) gaining internal happiness and hope, quality EC may be gained, and (4) humanity and tapping the unlimited potential of each child, EC settings may lead to high quality practices. These four keys findings illustrate how Nichiren Buddhist ideological discourses are embedded within educators' beliefs and practices. From a Nichiren Buddhist perspective, the meaning of these keys finding are essentially focused on achieving inner development. The Soka educational intent was found to be the creation of happiness for others resulting in a contribution towards a harmonious society through early childhood education. These key findings demonstrate that Nichiren Buddhism advocates humanism through human practice to develop an individual's 'Buddha nature'. This includes courage, wisdom and compassion gained through overcoming one's challenges, transforming one's life and contributing to the happiness of others. The ultimate goal of Soka educational philosophy is to achieve world peace (Ikeda, 2005). During this study, the participating educators mentioned that Nichiren Buddhists believe that a Buddha nature exists in every person and that each person possesses potential Buddhahood. Buddhahood means "the supreme state of life in Buddhism, characterized by boundless wisdom and compassion" (Soka Gakkai, 1999, p. 1207).

Nichiren was a Japanese priest who stated that Buddhahood is not a static condition but rather it is a dynamic experience through which an individual continues to develop and discover (SGI, 2014a). Therefore, from the discourses of Nichiren Buddhism our personal daily actions can lead to attaining Buddhahood and the development of greater potential. This grand narrative has imbued the pedagogical practices of Soka educators for whom the understanding of quality education and classroom practice should go beyond the mere application of curriculum, procedures, teachers' qualifications and policy directives in order to foster good practice within early childhood education.

The first sub-question highlighted some of the key practices of educators in Soka kindergartens which promoted quality early childhood education in their classroom settings. This included (1) shared learning, (2) positive and supportive relationships, and (3) an inclusive environment. The impact of educators' beliefs regarding children was discussed in the previous paragraph. This is to say that when educators believe that every child has unlimited potential this in turn has an effect on the teacher-child relationship which includes the sharing of learning through classroom practice. This may subsequently contribute to the provision of supportive and encouraging teacher-child relationships. A sense of caring for children and appreciation of their individual potential assisted in constructing respect for diversity. These differences make an important contribution to the creation of an inclusive learning environment.

The second sub-question related to the professional needs of the educators identified (1) the need for deeper insights into theoretical understanding, and (2) the need for educator self-awareness and self-reflexivity. A sophisticated level of understanding of Soka philosophy would assist educators to enact quality teaching practice found to be inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of children and

society. Chapter Five included a table (see table 5.1, p. 229) which highlighted how deeper insights into theoretical understanding is particularly important for the consideration of professional needs for educators. The different levels of theoretical understanding among educators can impact classroom practice. Child development is complex and a single theoretical understanding may limit educators from seeing other perspectives. Therefore, it is necessary for educators to possess a level of self-awareness and self-reflexivity regarding their classroom practice. Based upon educator's conceptualisations of quality, self-awareness and self-reflexivity not only allow educators to remain consistent in their ongoing reflection and exploration into classroom practice, but this goes beyond classroom practice to achieve a greater self in daily life. A greater self includes a process of internal growth and self-reflection as well as a sense of contribution to the wellbeing of others and the wider community.

The third sub-question indicated that the key implications pivotal to children's quality learning and development are (1) personality development, (2) emotional and social development, and (3) cognitive development. Using a theoretical and conceptual framework (see Chapter Two, Figure 2.1, p. 42) as a lens to examine educator's perspective of Soka beliefs, values and thoughts has added another dimension to the concept of quality practice. Firstly, it could be seen that when educators promote inner self development, value creation, internal happiness and hope, as well as humanity and an understanding of fostering the unlimited potential of children, these values help to build a strong personality. Subsequently, through a process of inner self-transformation this can lead to individual empowerment and constructive action. Secondly, how educators respect and view children with an understanding of their unlimited potential and compassion promotes supportive and encouraging teacher-child relationships. A

sense of caring and appreciation for children can contribute to children's social, emotional and cognitive development.

Relevance of Soka Beliefs in Quality Early Childhood Education

The unique selection of the Soka education model is of significance to this study as an exploration of Nichiren Buddhist philosophies embedded within Soka kindergartens have created an alternative understanding of quality. In the Soka education model, educators share a social constructionist view based on such concepts as value creation, internal happiness, hope, humanity and unlimited potential. These concepts mainly focused on developing an individual's sense of responsibility and commitment which drives the growth of human capacities and contributes to the wellbeing of others. I also make use of Soka terms such as *greater self* and the desire to foster *greater others* and ultimately build a *greater community*. In view of the significant findings in this study, I propose an extension of the following re-conceptual framework (Figure 6.1) to provide an alternative perspective to view quality early childhood education.
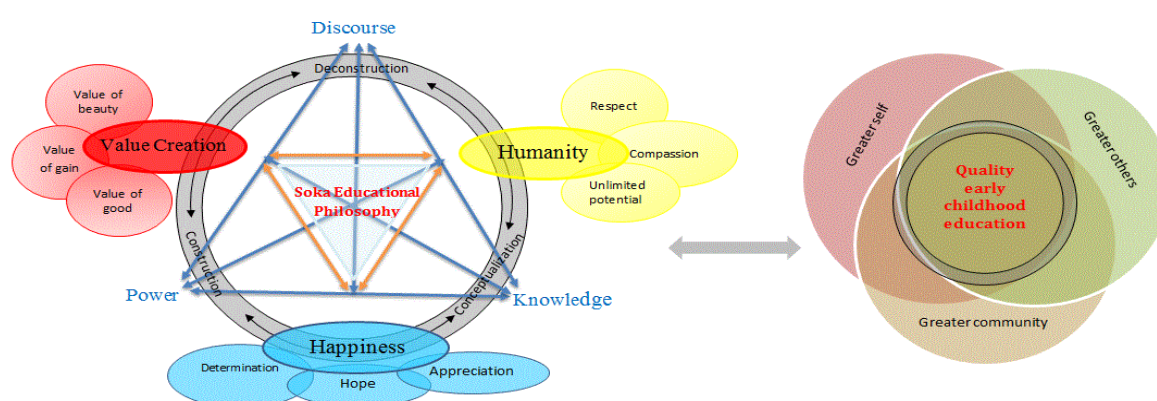

Figure 6.1: Extension of the re-conceptual framework for Soka quality early childhood education (see Appendix 15 for a larger scale diagram)

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The above re-conceptual framework for quality early childhood education illustrates a fruitful way of approaching Foucault's theory of discourse, power and knowledge to deconstruct, construct and reconceptualise the key findings of educators' discourse based on Nichiren Buddhist knowledge. Three core concepts were generated from this study which led to an alternative understanding of quality. A greater self, greater others (caring for others) and creating a greater community are drivers in the creation of quality early childhood education and teaching practice. The diagram on the right includes a circle in the middle that shows how a combination of these three concepts, depending upon individuals, may lead to quality early childhood education within a changing and fluid relationship. For example, when teachers tend to focus on their own individual needs, and do not pay attention to how children learn or children's individual needs, this would impact their classroom practice. Kincheloe argued that "teachers never see the same classroom twice, as teaching conditions change from day to day" (1993, p. 22). This argument is in line with Foucault's idea of the complex interplay relationship between educators' discourse, power and knowledge. The study discovered that self-awareness in respect of teaching delivery created a positive impact on educators' quality classroom practice. Soka philosophical literature explains that:

> It is precisely through challenging our self-centeredness through committed altruistic action that we can expand and extend the lesser self toward the ideal of the greater self. Our being expands, as does our capacity for joy, to the degree that we take action for the happiness of others. Such an expansion brings forth wisdom from our lives, enabling us to be ever more effective in these compassionate efforts (SGI, 2014k, para. 1).

This Soka philosophy discusses the desire for all educators to become aware of self-centeredness, which may include the deconstruction of our thoughts and values. Self-centeredness often blocks us from considering others' feelings or listening to

others' voices. The discourse of achieving a greater self could potentially impact how educators think about children and classroom practice.

New knowledge in respect of a greater self describes a fundamental process of inner transformation, in which people break through the constraints of a 'lesser self', bound by self-concern and ego. This means inner improvement that Josei Toda termed "human revolution" (SGI, 2013e, para. 1) and creating value in our life. A participating educator addressed the importance of the 'current moment' and practice in daily life: "*the knowledge we learn can be used in our daily lives or that human life can increase value meaning a better life" (ED1HK)*. Being reflective and possessing self-awareness may assist educators to change their life states. Self-awareness refers to a process in which, for example, educators become aware of their feelings and behaviours (Richardson & Shupe, 2003). Life states refer to how each person interacts with others. This also includes people and the environment. This can be seen as a power relation. Power is not a thing but rather it is a relationship with any interaction or environment. Human revolution is "the work of transforming our lives at the very core. It involves identifying and challenging those things which inhibit the full expression of our positive potential and humanity" (SGI, 2014b, para. 1). Ikeda (2005) explained that the term 'revolution', whilst widely used, typically refers to political or industrial contexts. Ikeda argued that to create a better world (greater community), the fundamental answer can be found through people themselves. In this respect, the human revolution is the most fundamental of all revolutions, and at the same time, the most necessary revolution for humankind (SGI, 2014b). Ikeda (2014) emphasised that individuals should take responsibility for transforming their own lives and this represents the first step towards creating a human society based on compassion and respect for the dignity of all.

New knowledge drawn from results gained from this study of Soka showed that the consideration of quality early childhood education is not simply focused on self-happiness but also caring for others (greater others). This study points out that caring for others is important in achieving our own internal happiness. The Nichiren Buddhist views that:

> There is no separation between ourselves and the environment. According to Nichiren Buddhism, everything round us, including work and family relationships, are a reflection of our inner lives. Everything is perceived through the self and alters according to the individual's inner state of life. Thus, if we change ourselves, our circumstances will inevitably change also (SGI, 2014l, para. 1)

Thus the Nichiren Buddhist perspective refers to the interconnection between oneself, others and the environment. This concept essentially means there is no need to seek happiness outside ourselves or others but rather we create happiness within ourselves. Based upon the desire to contribute to knowledge in this field, this study identified an alternative approach to the development of quality early childhood education. The fostering of children's internal self-development, caring for and seeking happiness for others, and creating harmonious communication forms a major part of the research findings.

Contribution of New Knowledge to Theory, Policy and Practice

This thesis makes a contribution to new knowledge in three major areas: theory, policy and practice.

Theoretical contribution. Through this study it can be seen how quality early childhood is a constructed concept, located within diversity and subjectivity. Quality early childhood education in this context is not just about physical resources and

children's output in learning; it is about a form of human revolution as inner self-development. The quality of early childhood education cannot be conceptualised merely as a product. It is a process of value creation through which educators support children to add value to themselves and that every child has the potential to create value when supported. Quality can be seen beyond academic achievement to include children's internal happiness and sense of hope. Internal happiness is not just on the surface but, through this understanding, we can go deeper to create a sense of compassion, hope and appreciation for each child.

Policy contribution. This study identified the need for developing flexible early childhood policies around the curriculum. When policy and curriculum become flexible; this will allow teachers to adapt or modify the curriculum in order to help children to attain inner self-development, create value, and to achieve internal happiness and unlimited potential. Whilst the grand narrative of the humanism of Nichiren Buddhism clearly framed the thinking of Soka educators, the way educators implemented their daily curriculum and classroom practice was found to have considerable flexibility. This included how the teaching of children was conducted in the classroom, with respect to allowing children to have flexibility of choice and what they wanted to learn.

Practice contribution. This study identified the need for professional development to help teachers go beyond teacher training, but to recognise and understand the value that is embedded in each child. A key point here is that teacher's education which foregrounds the needs of children, beyond academic outcomes, can lead to a broader understanding of human capabilities such as inner self-development, value creation, happiness, hope and unlimited potential.

Recommendations for Quality Early Childhood Education

Based upon inspiration gained from the Soka education model the following two recommendations are presented: firstly, to consider the adoption of postmodern theory by using discourse, power and knowledge to reconceptualise quality within early childhood education (see Chapter Two, Figure 2.1, p. 42). Secondly, the importance to consider value creation, happiness and humanity as elements of quality found at the three Soka kindergartens. Therefore it may be very useful of considering the application of these three elements to our understanding of quality education.

Framing quality early childhood education within postmodern theory. The first recommendation focuses on the adoption of postmodern perspectives in the reconceptualisation of quality within early childhood education. Numerous authors have come to understand that universal, standardised and positivist perspectives of quality early childhood education have become problematic and create challenges in diverse nations (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Mac Naughton, 2005; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005; Tobin, 2005). I have argued that the monolithic conception of quality is unable to provide full insight into what constitutes the needs of every child (see Chapter One, Introduction), including the potential of early childhood education, in response to the challenges children face in different contexts in contemporary times. Pence and Moss (1994) argued that "quality in early childhood services is a constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs and interest, rather than an objective and universal reality" (p. 172). This means that to investigate the complex and abstract concept of quality, firstly we must go beyond the singular ideological definition of quality to acquire a new perspective. Dahlberg et al. (2007) termed it as "meaning making" (p. 6). This perspective allows us to challenge modernist concepts of quality and to locate quality as subjective, value based, relative and dynamic (Dahlberg et al., 2007). With

reference to Dahlberg et al's arguments, deconstructing the concept of quality also includes "uncertainty, complexity and increased risk that characterize living" in the contempory world (2007, p. 92). It is necessary to consider quality within various contexts and local influences in order to understand the meaning of this term as conceptualised by people of a particular culture. Figure 6.2 below illustrates that quality is not a formalisation; for example, low teacher-child ratios do not necessarily equate with quality practice. I have included this diagram to argue how complex relationships in which each discourse (policy making, educators, children, parents) and knowledge (professional training, social constructions, ontology and epistemological knowledge) provide circumstances for power to exercise, manifest, produce and circulate within discourse. At the heart of this diagram is the diverse and complex network showing how the concept of quality early childhood education can be constructed and viewed from multiple perspectives. Deconstruction, conceptualisation and construction are the tools that allow us to discover quality in different cultures and nations.
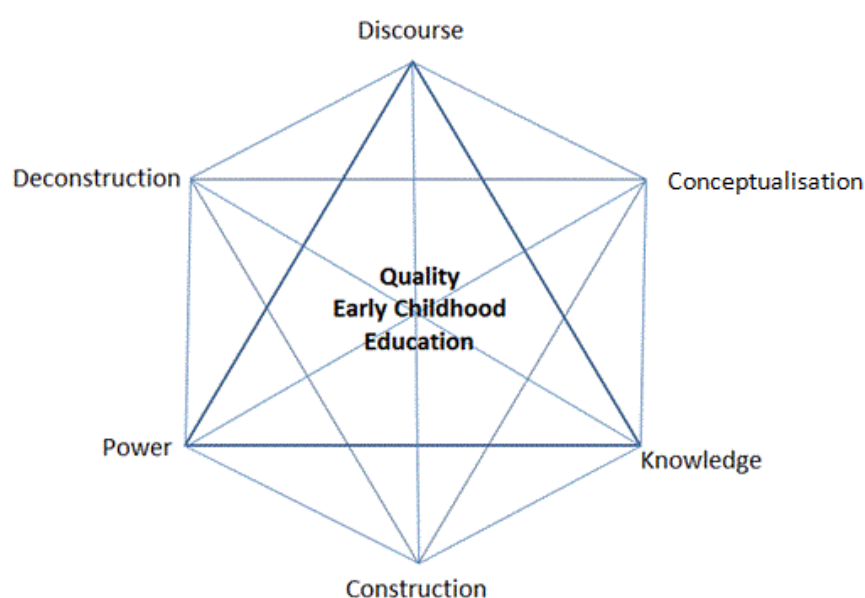

Figure 6.2: A conceptual framework model of quality early childhood education

Educators should have opportunities to disrupt and deconstruct the absolute truth of modernist perspectives by producing new models of thought. For example, in this

study Soka educators could have been provided with the opportunity to critique or deconstruct the teachings of Buddhism. This would have allowed the educators to subsequently analyse their own practice and experience other world views. This is very important as empowering educators to question their beliefs in the classroom is a very powerful tool for creating quality education. Postmodern theory plays a significant role in researching people's ontology and epistemology of knowing. For example, this study demonstrated the justification of the application of postmodern theory by exploring quality within educators' discourse and practice at three Soka kindergartens. Postmodern theory is polysemic and draws on different aspects of knowledge according to the perceptions and episteme of the various stakeholders.

The recommended use of postmodern theory would enable educators to deconstruct traditional conceptions of quality which are often defined in unified and objective terms (Mac Naughton, 2005; Taylor, 2005). To deconstruct quality is to critically analysis and reflect on a social construction of power and meaning which often relates to cultural and political issues. The process of critical analysis and reflection of educators' discourses plus daily classroom practice would provide a lens for openness to new alternatives, new interpretations, new meanings and new configurations of knowledge relations (Sumsion, 2005). In particular, during this study I offered an alternative perspective for theorising quality early childhood education using Foucault's ideas of discourse, power and knowledge. For example, educators' discourse in respect of their knowledge of Buddhist philosophy provided new insights into concepts of quality such as value creation, happiness and humanity. A key finding from this study was that educators working in Soka kindergartens possess a strong discourses about every child having unlimited potential. The research indicated that to value children as having unlimited potential resulted in participating educators having a

similar humanistic approach, when viewing each child with respect and compassion. In this context, I argue that the discourse of respect and compassion manifests in power through positive interactions with others. This indicates that educators looking for goodness and potential in each child positively impacted their position as an equal with the children, rather than being above with the children below as in a hierarchy. Children may feel their voices and thoughts have actual value leading to a sense of wellbeing and happiness. This may become a crucial focal point when educators seek to implement quality practice in the classroom.

It is important to be aware that the concept of quality is not out there to be discovered: it is socially constructed discourses. The beliefs, values, politics, and thinking of people and cultural factors have contributed to the construction of the discourses of quality (Tobin, 2005). In this way, postmodern perspectives offer a kaleidoscope process for understanding the concept of quality instead of a single, narrow view of quality (Novinger et al., 2005).

Framing quality early childhood education within dimensions of value creation, happiness and humanity. The second recommendation refers to the consideration of future development of the concepts of value creation, happiness and humanity studies of quality. These beliefs strongly underpin the Soka education model. Makiguchi (2004) addressed that the main purpose of education is to create children's happiness. Educators working in Soka kindergartens believe in fostering children with a strong determination, hope and sense of appreciation of others and the environment. These are the key aspects of Soka education in creating quality early childhood education. Due to complex global issues, such as economics, humanitarian crises, poverty, natural disasters and an information overload, education has become not merely knowledge and skills but fostering individual people with interpersonal skills.

For example, if children develop a sense of internal happiness, then they have hope and strength to face or overcome unforeseen obstacles or difficulties.

Drawn from this study of the Soka education model I present the following diagram (see Figure 6.3) as an alternative understanding of quality construction through the concepts of value creation, happiness and humanity. This model's epistemology is grounded in the findings of this study; the components constructing quality include the value of beauty, gain and good. Also included are compassion, respect, unlimited potential, determination, hope and appreciation. The diagram illustrates how these qualities link with the major consideration of one-self, others and the wider community. The perception of quality through value creation, happiness and a humanist approach allows children to develop a sense of respect and compassion for others and the environment, contributing to the creation of a peaceful and harmonious society.
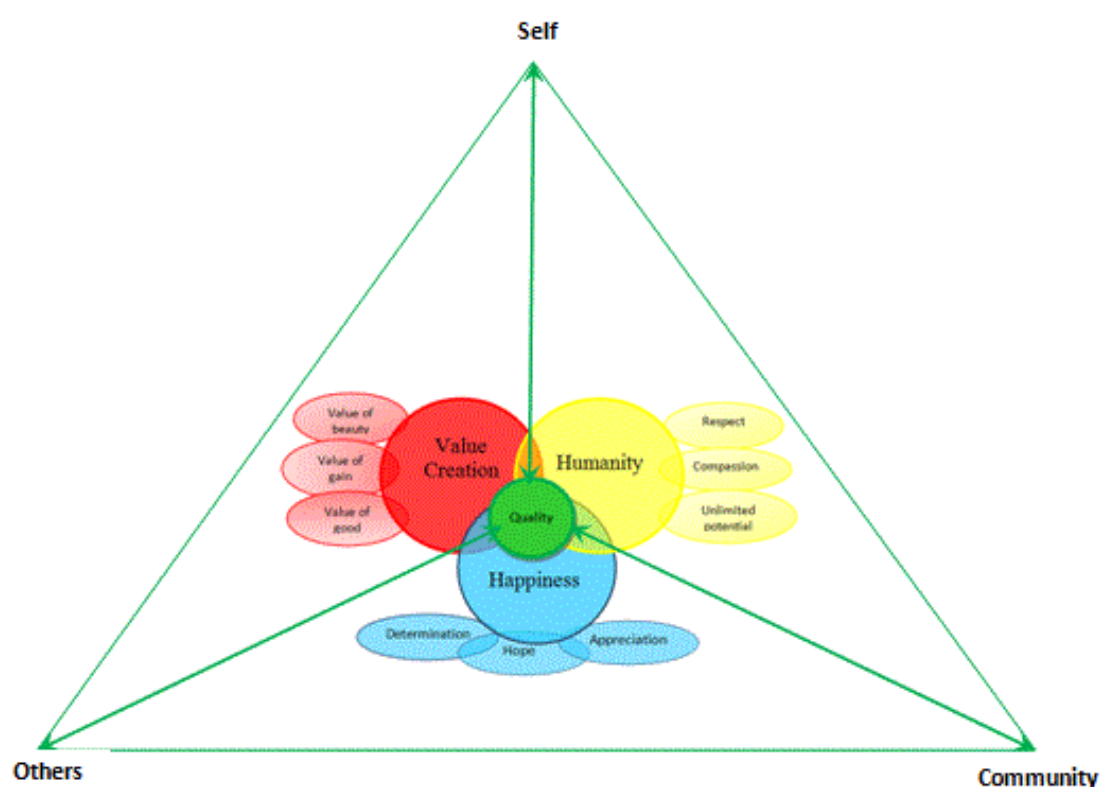

Figure 6.3: A conceptual framework model of humanist qualities of early childhood education (see Appendix 16 for a larger scale diagram)

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The Soka education approach emphasises that 'happiness' is a strong relational concept which makes a significant contribution to individual children as well as the wider society. Soka has conceptualised happiness as fostering children to have determination, a sense of hope, respect and appreciation of others and the environment. Contemporary social issues, such as bullying in schools and coping with study pressures, have a high impact on children's mental and physical health (Lee, 2012; McDougall, 2013). Children found that dealing with these emotional situations was difficult, leading some to self-harm or suicidal intentions later in their schooling (McDougall, 2013). Ikeda (2010) argued that an important requirement for quality education is to develop children with a strong personality, skills and a positive attitude in order to face and positively overcome any difficulties or dilemmas in their lifetime. A sense of respect, compassion and appreciation of others is also a contribution for the creation of a harmonious society (Ikeda, 2010). Therefore, this study is significant in bringing a new direction and alternative perspective of defining and creating quality early childhood education, and how this subsequently impacts individual people and society to live in peace and harmony with the environment.

Limitations and Challenges

This research faced several limitations and challenges which included limited time constraints and selection of research participants during the field work.

The first limitation noted was in respect of the limited time available to conduct field work, in particular collecting data from the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten. In Chapter Three I noted my original approach to the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten for data collection was rejected, due to the kindergarten having a small number of educators available and the school being unable to allow visitors for research purposes. However, as Soka philosophy originates from Japan and there is only one Soka kindergarten

located in Sapporo, it was crucial that this institution be included in the study. Fortunately, upon resubmission of a second request with more details of the purpose of the study, it was agreed with a compromise for limited access to the centre. Although the original intention for site visits was to interview educators and conduct three separate observations over three days; this was reduced by the kindergarten to three 30-minute classroom observation sessions and a series of interviews conducted over one day. However, this was possibly due to the study being perceived as not directly benefiting the children. However, it was observed in the Soka newsletter that there had been frequent overseas and local Japanese visitors entering the school, which did bring benefits to the children. Nevertheless, the one-day visit was very well organised, to such an extent that there were ample opportunities to conduct valuable interview and observation data, albeit somewhat limited in scope.

The second limitation was associated with participating parents at the Sapporo Soka kindergarten. The original request was to interview a group of six parents; however the kindergarten provided a short interview with only one parent, a former non-teaching member of staff, to represent the other parents. This was clearly a limitation as this represented a single opinion which cannot be considered as representative of a group of authentic voices of other parents. Despite this limitation the data collected from the single parent still retained some value and was included in the study.

The third limitation experienced during field work was entering the Singapore Soka Kindergarten. Upon visiting the site there was an apparent issue with the K2 children being busy preparing for their graduation ceremony, which is one of the largest events held by the kindergarten. This became a limitation particularly during the observation phase of typical classroom practice with K2 children.

The fourth limitation experienced was the selection of research participants. This issue was also discussed in Chapter Five where it was noted that participating educators who were already Soka Gakkai members possessed a general understanding of Nichiren Buddhism. This provided an advantage, as these participants allowed me to quickly discuss in some depth their understanding, discourse and practices in respect of the Soka educational philosophy. On the other hand, it should be noted that this also led to a disadvantage, as the data did not provide holistic perspectives regarding how other non-SGI member educators conceptualised quality and their subsequent implementation of quality in daily classroom practice. This is a possible area for future research. In the next section I have made use of some of these research limitations to frame ideas and directions for further research into the study of quality early childhood education.

Directions for Further Research

Postmodern perspectives seek to define voices and not create just one way to construct knowledge (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). In light of the research results the following section outlines areas for potential future research regarding quality early childhood education.

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, most research in respect of quality early childhood education has been carried out within western nations which provide a limited and one-sided aspect of our understanding of quality. Having an Asian dimension of quality may enrich our understanding of quality and move this research from a very confined understanding to a much broader one. The majority of research exploring issues of quality early childhood education has been conducted in western countries (Fenech, 2011). To be able to present voices from a wider range of non-western sources may strengthen the research into quality from wider contexts. The inclusion of different beliefs, values, thoughts and cultural factors shape how quality

discourses have been constructed. In Chapter Five I discussed how the voices of children and parents would provide a greater range and depth of perspectives regarding conceptualisations of quality. Firstly, I recommend that parents and children be included in any further research into the Soka education model in order to gather additional perspectives of quality. This would expand the understanding of quality practice within and beyond Soka kindergartens and potentially produce new knowledge in the early childhood education field.

Secondly, this research could be expanded to include other Soka kindergartens in Malaysia, Brazil and South Korea. For example, further research may seek to address how educators working in other Soka kindergartens in other countries, with different social and cultural backdrops, conceptualise quality practice within the Soka educational model.

Thirdly, to be reflective, postmodern perspectives were found to be a useful tool in the exploration of quality. The use of postmodern theory allowed deconstruction of the educator's conceptualisations of quality early childhood within different Asian nations and cultural contexts. This would provide diversity such that evidence may indicate that standard norms or positive approaches to quality cannot be universal. My experience with the use of my conceptual framework model of quality early childhood education (Chapter Two, Figure 2.1, p. 42) leads me to consider that these theories can be utilised in future research into quality education as a useful tool to capture alternative perspectives.

Personal Transformation

On a personal level I discovered that this research led to an exciting and colourful new way to explore quality early childhood education. Soka education and Nichiren Buddhist philosophies provided significant and alternative perspectives to

view quality through humanism as the ultimate purpose of happiness in our lifetime. Whilst humanism brings forward important elements, such as happiness, one needs to note that humanism can be a very confining theory where only people who abide in this way of thinking, with certain ways that children have to behave, are actually sharing one view of the world and this is a limitation in and of itself. This was discussed in my literature review (Chapter Two, pp. 47-50) in which Foucault addressed disciplinary power. The research found that internal growth of individuals rather than simply external influences created quality within the selected Soka kindergartens. As a postmodern researcher I was not purposely looking for a form of absolute truth into what constitutes best quality but rather I sought to explore openness, alternatives and diversity within the field. Whilst I understand that humanism was the truth within these three Soka kindergartens, I was not analysing humanism, but rather I was looking at the pedagogical practices that were considered quality practice from the educator's perspectives. The use of a postmodern lens in this research resulted in a personal transformation of my thoughts and beliefs. Doubts and confusions allowed me to question my research data as well as my own beliefs. I am not suggesting that this research provided me with all the answers but created further questions which I would like to investigate. More specifically, this research investigated quality education and not a manufacturing or business environment. Education is often related to human to human integration. People can be complex and personal discourses are constructed through different life experiences within a constantly changing environment. This is to say that it is not possible to diminish the complex and multifaceted nature of quality to a normalised link with a universal standard. From a Soka perspective:

Education is in no way limited to classrooms but is a mission that must be undertaken and realized by human society as a whole. We must now go back to the original purpose of education--children's lifelong happiness--and reflect

upon the state of our respective societies and our ways of living (Ikeda, 2010, p. 107)

In some ways the results of this research indicated that educators working in Soka kindergartens value individual, personal internal growth and the happiness of others as the ultimate goals of quality education. I acknowledge these ideas and as a former early childhood educator I can visualise the importance of inner self-development when considering a child in ten or 20 years. The children may not in fact remember what they learnt at kindergarten but they may remember the emotional feelings and interpersonal relationships as treasured experiences. I can see positive potential when an educator cares about and values a child's happiness and this attitude may in turn impact teaching practice, planning of activities or the curriculum. As such, quality practice is constructed through the beliefs and values of educators.

According to Soka educational philosophy, self-reflection is important in order to achieve and foster a greater self. To put this concept into an educational context, this sense of reflectivity may assist educators to view their teaching approach differently, and to view self-development as crucial to achieving quality. This is to say that educators who love and believe in the potential of children will make a change in their teaching practice. In contrast, a skilful and experienced educator who possesses less compassion may not necessarily deliver quality education in the classroom. The discourse of educators holds an important position in the promotion of quality classroom practice. Foucault (1977) describes 'discourse' in which not only how we think but how we construct and shape our thoughts is about the production of knowledge through interaction. This research has not only explored educators' discourses of quality early childhood education in a cohesive narrative, but also how

this has shaped and influenced their classroom practice and interactions with children, parents and other teaching colleagues.

As I mentioned earlier in this section; this research has led to a personal transformation and provided me with a new lens from which to view the world around me. To conclude, I would like to ask questions in respect of our fundamental thoughts and in-depth reflections. What is the purpose of early childhood education, and what do value creation, happiness and humanity bring to early childhood education? Furthermore, what can we learn from these three concepts of quality pedagogical practice and how these can be included in our broader understanding of quality?

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Human ethics certificate of approval

MONASH University

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Research Office

Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

Date: 17 September 2012

Project Number: CF12/2411 – 2012001305

Project Title: An Exploration of Early Childhood Quality: A Case study of Soka Kindergarten
                       Models

Chief Investigator: Dr Joseph Agbenyega

Approved: From: 17 September 2012   To: 17 September 2017

Terms of approval

1. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to MUHREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. Failure to provide permission letters to MUHREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel): Requires the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. Future correspondence: Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. Annual reports: Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. Final report: A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. Monitoring: Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. Retention and storage of data: The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

Professor Ben Canny
Chair, MUHREC

cc: Ms Kiiko Ikegami

Postal – Monash University, Vic 3800, Australia
Building 3E, Room 111, Clayton Campus, Wellington Road, Clayton
Facsimile +61 3 9905 3831
www.monash.edu/research/ethics/human/index/html
ABN 12 377 614 012 CRICOS Provider #00008C

Appendix 2: Permission letter of Soka Gakkai International

Soka Gakkai

32 Shinano-machi, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-8583, Japan

Permission Letter

Permission Letter for "An Exploration of Early Childhood Quality: A case study of Soka Kindergarten Models"

27 August 2012

Kiiko Ikegami
Faculty of Education
MONASH UNIVERSITY
McMahons Road, Frankston
Victoria 3199
Australia

Dear Kiiko,

Thank you for your request to recruit participants from **Soka Gakkai** for the above-named research.

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research LR 2012001305   and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

Yours Sincerely,

Hirotsugu Terasaki
Soka Gakkai
International Office of Public Information
Executive Director

Appendix 3: Permission letter of Sapporo Soka Kindergarten

Permission Letter

Permission Letter for "An Exploration of Early Childhood Quality: A case study of Soka Kindergarten Models

2012/8/

Kiiko Ikegami
Faculty of Education
MONASH UNIVERSITY
McMahons Road, Frankston
Victoria 3199
Australia

Dear Kiiko,

Thank you for your request to recruit participants from Sapporo Soka Kindergarten for the above-named research.

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research * *LR 2012001305 and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

Yours Sincerely,

███████████████████████

Manzo Kakuuchi
Principal,
Sapporo Soka Kindergarten

さっぽろそうかようちえん

Appendix 4: Permission letter of Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten

香 港 創 價 幼 稚 園
HONG KONG SOKA KINDERGARTEN
香港九龍德慕道四號
4 Moray Road, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong
☎ 2336 6090   Fax: 2337 1898   E-mail: hksk@pacific.net.hk

23 August 2012

Permission Letter for
"An Exploration of Early Childhood Quality:
A case study of Soka Kindergarten Models"

Kiiko Ikegami
Faculty of Education
MONASH UNIVERSITY
McMahons Road, Frankston
Victoria 3199
Australia

Dear Kiiko,

Thank you for your request to recruit participants from the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten for the above-named research.

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research LR 2012001305 and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

Yours Sincerely,

(Ms WONG So-yuk)
Headmistress

Appendix 5: Permission letter of Singapore Soka Kindergarten

SOKA KINDERGARTEN

创 价 幼 稚 园

7, TAMPINES ST. 92, SINGAPORE 528888 TEL: 6784 4232 FAX: 6784 4901

Permission Letter

Permission Letter for "An Exploration of Early Childhood Quality: A case study of Soka Kindergarten Models
27 August 2012

Kiiko Ikegami
Faculty of Education
MONASH UNIVERSITY
McMahons Road, Frankston
Victoria 3199
Australia

Dear Kiiko,

Thank you for your request to recruit participants from **Singapore Soka Kindergarten** for the above-named research.

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research LR 2012001305 and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

Yours Sincerely,
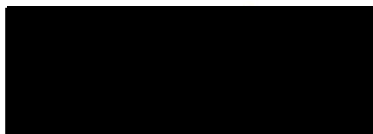
Angelina Tay
Acting Supervisor

Appendix 6: Explanatory statement to educators

MONASH University
Education

Explanatory Statement

17 September 2012

Explanatory Statement for Educators

Title: An Exploration of Early Childhood Quality: A case study of Soka Kindergarten models

This information sheet is for you to keep.

My name is Kiiko IKEGAMI and I am conducting a research project with Dr Joseph Seyram Agbenyega, a Senior Lecturer and Dr Corine Rivalland, a Lecturer in the Department of Education towards a Doctor of Philosophy with specialisation in early childhood education at Monash University. This means that I will be writing a thesis which will be the equivalent of 100,000 words.

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before making a decision.

Why were you chosen for this research?
You have volunteered to participate in this study and you are currently an educator working in a Soka kindergarten.

The aim/purpose of the research
The aim of this study is to explore the quality of early childhood education through the study of the Soka Kindergarten education model. The study intends to understand the practices that the Soka model use and how these contribute to the quality of early childhood education in your service, as well as the professional needs of educators working in this model.

Possible benefits
The results of the research will be beneficial in the overall understanding of teacher's concepts of quality education which is a major contributory factor in the long term development of young children.

What does the research involve?
The study involves interviews, classroom observations and review of curriculum documents.

How much time will the research take?
Interviews with each participating educator may take up to 60 minutes and observations are expected to last for 2 hours a day for five days totalling 10 hours.

Withdrawal from the study

Your participation in this study is purely voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participate. You may withdraw your consent up to the commencement of the initial interview with the researcher. Withdrawal of consent maybe verbally to the researcher directly or the kindergarten principal. Once you consent and commence participation with the first interview there is an expectation that this consent will continue for the duration of the research.

Confidentiality

Your name and any specific personal identifiers will not be disclosed in the final published thesis.

All data collection notes, voice recordings etc will be held in a secure manner to prevent any unauthorised access and will be destroyed five years after the date of collection by the researcher.

Storage of data

Data collected will be stored in accordance with Monash University regulations, kept on University premises, in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

Use of data for other purposes

All data collected from you will not be used for any other purposes other than for this particular study.

Results

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact Kiiko IKEGAMI on ███████████████████████████████████████ The findings are accessible until 31 December 2014.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact my Supervisor	If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research CF12/2411 - 2012001305 **is being conducted, please contact:**
Joseph Seyram AGBENYEGA **Faculty of Education,** **Monash University,** **McMahons Road,** **Frankston,** **Victoria 3199,** **Australia.** █████████████████ ████████████████████████	Keiko Kakurai Soka Gakkai International Office of Public Information 15-3. Samon-cho, Shinjuku, Tokyo 160-0017 Japan █████████████████ █████████████ ████████████

Thank you

Kiiko IKEGAMI

Appendix 7: Consent form for educators

Consent Form - *Educators*

Title: An Exploration of Early Childhood Quality: A case study of Soka Kindergarten Models

NOTE: **This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records**

I agree to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I can keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

List all procedures relevant to your data collection – delete those not applicable

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to make myself available for a further interview if required ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to allow access to documents related to my educational journal, ☐ Yes ☐ No
activity plans and other relevant documents

and/or

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am under no obligation to consent to this participation. I understand that I may withdraw my consent up to the commencement of the initial interview with the researcher and that I may withdraw my consent verbally to the researcher directly or the kindergarten principal. I understand that once I participate with the first interview there is an expectation that I consent to continue with the study for the duration of the research.

and/or

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview / focus group / questionnaire / survey for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

and/or

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning my participation for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

and/or

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

and/or

I understand that data from the **<interview/focus group/transcript/audio-tape>** will be kept in secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

Participant's name:

Signature: **Date**

Appendix 8: Explanatory statement to parents

![MONASH University Education logo]

Explanatory Statement

17 September 2012

Explanatory Statement for Parents

Title: An Exploration of Early Childhood Quality: A case study of Soka Kindergarten models

This information sheet is for you to keep.

My name is Kiiko IKEGAMI and I am conducting a research project with Dr Joseph Seyram Agbenyega, a Senior Lecturer and Dr Corine Rivalland, a Lecturer in the Department of Education towards a Doctor of Philosophy with specialisation in early childhood education at Monash University. This means that I will be writing a thesis which will be the equivalent of 100,000 words.

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before making a decision.

Why were you chosen for this research?
You have volunteered to participate in this study as your child attends a Soka kindergarten.

The aim/purpose of the research
The aim of this study is to explore the quality of early childhood education through the study of the Soka Kindergarten education model. The study intends to understand the practices that the Soka model uses adopts and how these contribute to the quality of early childhood education for your child.

Possible benefits
The results of the research will be beneficial in the overall understanding of how the practices are contributing to the long term development of young children.

What does the research involve?
The study involves interviews with you, selected educators and observation of educators in classroom activities.

How much time will the research take?
Group interviews with participating parents may take up to 60 minutes.

Withdrawal from the study

Your participation in this study is purely voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participate. You may withdraw your consent up to the commencement of the group interview with the researcher. Withdrawal of consent maybe verbally to the researcher directly or the kindergarten principal. Once you consent and commence participation with the first interview there is an expectation that this consent will continue for the duration of the research.

Confidentiality

Your name and any specific personal identifiers will not be disclosed in the final published thesis.
All data collection notes, voice recordings etc will be held in a secure manner to prevent any unauthorised access and will be destroyed five years after the date of collection by the researcher.

Storage of data

Data collected will be stored in accordance with Monash University regulations, kept on University premises, in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

Use of data for other purposes

All data collected from you will not be used for any other purposes other than for this particular study.

Results

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact Kiiko IKEGAMI on ███████████████████████████████████ The findings are accessible until 31 December 2014.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact my Supervisor	If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research CF 12/2411 - 2012001305 **is being conducted, please contact:**
Joseph Seyram AGBENYEGA **Faculty of Education,** **Monash University,** **McMahons Road,** **Frankston,** **Victoria 3199,** **Australia.** ████████████████ ██████████████████████	Keiko Kakurai Soka Gakkai International Office of Public Information 15-3. Samon-cho, Shinjuku, Tokyo 160-0017 Japan ████████████████ ████████████████ ████████████

Thank you

Kiiko IKEGAMI

Appendix 9: Consent form for parents

Consent Form - *Parents*

Title: An Exploration of Early Childhood Quality: A case study of Soka Kindergarten Models

NOTE: **This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records**

I agree to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I can keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

List all procedures relevant to your data collection – delete those not applicable

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher	☐ Yes	☐ No
I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped	☐ Yes	☐ No
I agree to make myself available for a further interview if required	☐ Yes	☐ No
I agree that educators may be observed in classrooms in which my child attends	☐ Yes	☐ No

and/or

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am under no obligation to consent to this participation. I understand that I may withdraw my consent up to the commencement of the groupinterview with the researcher and that I may withdraw my consent verbally to the researcher directly or the kindergarten principal. I understand that once I participate with the group interview there is an expectation that I consent to continue with the study for the duration of the research.

and/or

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview / focus group / questionnaire / survey is for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

and/or

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data, concerning my participation, for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

and/or

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

and/or

I understand that data from the interviews and observation will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

Participant's name

Signature   **Date**

Appendix 10: Flyer for participant recruitment

Early Childhood Education Research Participant Recruitment

Purpose of this Research:
To explore quality Early Childhood Education through a study of the Soka Kindergarten education model. The study intends to understand the practices used in the Soka model and how these contribute to the quality of early childhood at your service as well as the professional needs of educators working within this model.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
The result of the study will be beneficial to the overall understanding of teacher's concepts of quality education which is a major contributory factor in the long term development of young children.

What does the study involve?
The study involves interviews, classroom observations and review of relevant documents (for educators) and a group interview (for parents).

Withdrawal from the study:
Your participation in this study is purely voluntary and you may withdraw from further participation at anytime.

Voluntary participants: Two in-service Educators
Five to eight Parents

Any further questions please contact the research – Kiiko Ikegami on email: kiiko.ikegami@monash.edu

If you are willing to participate in this valuable study please contact your Kindergarten.

MONASH University

Appendix 11: Interviews questions for principals

<u>**Interview Questions with Soka Principal (Individual)**</u>
Time: Approx 45 mins – 1 hour

Personal Questions

1. Please introduce yourself (such as your experience in the ECE field, this Soka kindergarten, educational and professional qualifications).

Personal view Questions

1. In your own view, what are your perceptions (mission) of kindergarten teachers?
2. In your own view, what are your expectations of children? How do you view children?

Soka Philosophy Questions

1. What are the differences between this Soka Kindergarten and other kindergartens?
2. Please tell me more about the philosophy of Soka Education and its main values?
3. Could you tell me how Soka philosophy (originally from Japan) can be carried out and practiced in your own country?
4. Please describe how you apply Soka philosophy in your daily practice? (Examples?).
5. What are the benefits of Soka kindergarten to the children? (Examples?).
6. Apart from the Soka philosophy, are there any other theories or philosophy applied in educator's classroom practice at this kindergarten?
7. How does the kindergarten management help educators to understand the Soka philosophy?
8. How does the kindergarten management assure educators apply the Soka philosophy in their practice?

Related Quality Education Questions

1. How would you describe the service you provide to children in your service? What does quality early childhood education means to you?
2. How do you implement quality service within your daily practice?
3. Please provide a situation / example within this particular Soka kindergarten which demonstrates quality of teaching and practise?
4. What aspects in this particular Soka kindergarten that you find are most helpful in assisting you to provide quality education to children?
5. What aspects in this particular Soka kindergarten that you find hinder or restrict you in providing quality education and care to the children?

Kindergarten Policy and Classroom Planning Questions

1. Do educators have any influence in the making of kindergarten policy making, if yes, how? If No, why?

2. How is a team spirit created at this kindergarten?

3. How is this Soka kindergarten involved in the community?

4. How is educator classroom planning and documentation of student learning related to Soka philosophy at this kindergarten?

Conclusions

1. Is there anything you would like to add?

2. Is there anything you would like to tell me more about?

Appendix 12: Interviews questions for educators

<u>**Interview Questions with Soka Educators (Individual)**</u>
Time: Approx 45 mins – 1 hour
Background and Introduction

1. Please can you introduce yourself (such as your experience in the ECE field, at the Soka kindergarten, educational and professional qualifications or anything you are currently studying?).

2. Describe your professional teacher training in your country, how long was the course and where did you receive this training?

Personal view Questions

1. In your own view; what are your perceptions (mission) as a kindergarten teacher?

2. In your own view; what are your expectations of children? How do you view children?

Related Quality Education Questions

2. How would you describe the service you provide to children in your service? What does quality early childhood education mean to you?

3. How do you implement quality service within your daily classroom practice?

4. What specific teaching theories do you draw upon in your daily classroom practice?

5. Please provide a situation / example within this particular Soka kindergarten which demonstrates quality of teaching and practise? (Prompt: It might help to consider ways this service supports quality or are there any barriers to providing quality care?)

6. What aspects in this particular Soka kindergarten that you find are most helpful in assisting you to provide quality education to children?

7. What aspects in this particular Soka kindergarten that you find hinder or restrict you in providing quality education and care to the children?

Soka Philosophy Questions

1. What are the differences between this Soka Kindergarten and other kindergartens?

2. Please tell me more about what Soka Education philosophy is and its main values?

3. Please describe how you apply Soka philosophy in your daily practice?

4. What are the benefits of Soka kindergarten to the children?

5. Apart from Soka philosophy; is there any other theory or philosophy applied in your classroom practice?

Kindergarten Policy and Classroom Planning Questions

1. What influence do you have regarding the kindergarten policy making?

2. How is your classroom plan and documentation of students learning related to your understanding or associated with Soka philosophy?

Conclusion

1. Is there anything you would like to add?

2. Is there anything you would like to tell me more about?

Appendix 13: Interview questions for parents

Interview Questions with Soka Parents (focus group 6 – 8 participants)
Time: Approx 30 - 45 mins

Personal Questions

1. Participant introduction

   (Such as name, how many children study at the Soka kindergarten and at what level).

Personal view Questions on Soka kindergarten philosophy

1. Why did you select the Soka kindergarten for your child?

2. What do you know about Soka Philosophy? (Example?)

3. What is your view about the Soka Philosophy?

4. Has the kindergarten explained to you the Soka philosophy? (How?)

Personal view Questions on Quality Education

1. What do you expect from your child attending this particular kindergarten?

2. What are your expectations of quality early childhood education?

3. What are your expectations regarding what your children can achieve from this kindergarten?

Personal view Questions on children's experiences at the Soka Kindergarten

1. What is your view regarding your child's learning experience at this Soka kindergarten?

2. Describe how your child has expressed their experience at this Soka kindergarten?

3. What information allows you to understand the process of your child's learning at this kindergarten? Is there enough information for you to understand your child's learning experiences?

4. What elements provide you the most satisfaction with this Soka Kindergarten?

5. Is there anything the kindergarten could enhance or improve?

Appendix 14: Analytical themes generated from the theoretical framework and research questions

Theoretical Framework		Data sources	Research questions		Theme
	→	Informal conversations Interviews Observations Photography Field notes Documentation	***Main research question:*** What conceptions of the quality of early childhood education are held by kindergarten educators working in the Soka education model and how do these conceptions influence practice?	→	*Beliefs and knowledge* Value creation education Happiness education Humanist education
					(Influence/Impact) ⇩ ⇧ (Re-shape/Re-confirm)
	→		***Sub research questions:*** What is the nature of the practices of educators working in the early childhood Soka education model? What are the professional needs of the early childhood educators working in the Soka education model? What lessons from the data on Soka model are pivotal to children's quality learning and development that can be used to enhance quality early childhood practices in other contexts?	→	*Practices:* Kindergarten policy Health and hygiene Structure (physical) environment Learning environment Relationships

Appendix 15: Extension of the re-conceptual framework for Soka quality early childhood education
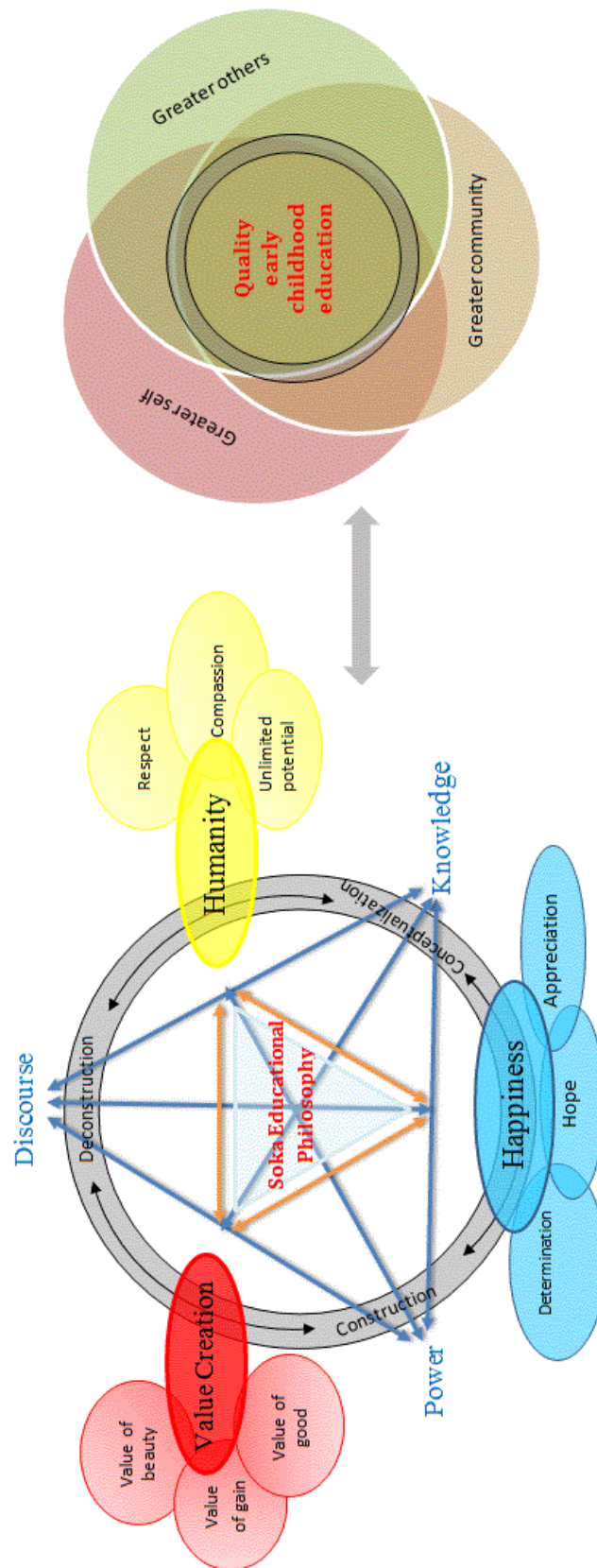
Appendix 16: A conceptual framework model of humanist qualities of early childhood education