A study of reasoning talk between Australian Chinese mothers and their preschool children: What messages are mothers sending?

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Abstract:
The everyday conversations which occur between mothers and children, particularly those involving reasoning, are a major vehicle for the transmission of information and values to young children. This study explored the manner in which 5 Australian Chinese mothers engaged in reasoning talk with their preschool aged children. A total of 83 instances of spontaneous reasoning talk was identified and analysed according to the manner in which the mothers justified their claims or statements, using Hasan’s (Hasan, 2009, 1992) reasoning structure framework to underpin the analysis. Both regulatory and non-regulatory contexts were analysed. The analysis revealed that in regulatory contexts, where a child’s behaviour is being controlled (for example “eat up your dinner quickly”), mothers provided more socially based reasons to justify their directives. In non-regulatory contexts, such as shared reading, they used more logical reasoning based on universal laws of nature. The findings suggest that the reasoning talk which takes place between mothers and children provides a rich opportunity for mothers to convey their values to their children, with implications for children’s learning across a number of domains.

Key words: reasoning talk, preschool, Chinese children, Chinese mothers

About the Speaker:
Dr Helen (Jiangbo) Hu, an academic staff in the Institute of Early Childhood Education of Macquarie University, has rich experiences in the field and management of early childhood education in both China (7 years) and Australia (10 years). Her working experiences in the two countries and her understanding of the two cultures inspired her study to focus on the cross-cultural language experiences of preschool-aged children in home and early childhood centres. Currently she is working for a research project relating to the language development of infants (0-2 years old) in Australian early childhood centres, investigating the interactions between Australian early childhood educators and infants in their centre-based contexts.

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