The Resource Centre of The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (FPAHK)

Patrick Lo

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The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (FPAHK) is the leading non-government organization that advocates for sexual and reproductive health in Hong Kong. The Association was first founded in 1936 as the Hong Kong Eugenics League (香港優生學會). In 1950, it changed its name officially to the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (香港家庭計劃指導會). The FPAHK was founded with the initial mission of wide-spreading the 'family planning' message. The Association is perhaps best known for its “Two is Enough (兩個夠晒數)” campaign launched in the 1970s with the aim of tackling the social and economic burdens generated by the rapid population growth in Hong Kong.

Unknown to many people, the FPAHK is also equipped with its own unique Activity & Resource Centre (ARC) / Library. Over the years, the library has evolved itself from a very modest book room for self-learning amongst the in-house staff to a multi-purpose Resource Centre, with the most up-to-date interactive installations to address the drastically-changing sexual health needs in Hong Kong.

In the following interview, Grace Lee (Education Manager) and Ava Chan (Resource Centre Officer) at the FPAHK discuss in details the unique services and functions offered by the ARC, as well as how they use the ARC as a ‘one-stop gathering place’ for the promotion of sexuality education for the Hong Kong society.

The following face-to-face interview was conducted at FPAHK on 21st March, 2013.

Patrick Lo (PL): Could you please begin by first introducing yourselves, as well as your major roles and responsibilities at the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (FPAHK)?

Grace Lee (GL): My name is Grace Lee, and I am the Education Manager at The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (FPAHK)\(^1\). My core duties and responsibilities

\(^1\)The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong
are to oversee the planning and implementation of the programs and services on sexuality education provided by our Education Division. The range of services provided by our Association include providing training workshops and other education programmes for both parents and local school teachers, with the aim of enabling them with the knowledge, skills and confidence in delivering sexuality education for their own families, as well as school students. I am also responsible for overseeing the overall operations of the Activity & Resource Centre (ARC), and some people might refer it as the ‘Library’ sometimes.

Ava Chan (AC): My name is Ava Chan. I am the Resource Centre Officer at ARC at the FPAHK. I am also referred as the “Librarian” at the ARC. Our Centre is located inside the FPA Jockey Club Youth Zone (家計會賽馬會青 Zone). The Youth Zone allows young people to conveniently access education programmes and resources, clinic and counseling service. As the Resource Centre Officer, my major roles and duties include managing the daily operations, as well as the collection and resource development of the ARC. I also assist with the promotion of various activities for the general public and other visitors, such as our ARC study tour and summer programmes. The main functions of this ARC are to provide different educational supports to the local community (schools, families, parents and social workers) by providing convenient, centralized access to educational programmes and other printed materials and online resources for self-learning and other research purposes. Our Centre also allows our users to borrow or even purchase our in-house-produced publications, audio-visual materials, and education kits in either Chinese or English for education purposes. The ARC is open to the general public in Hong Kong.

**PL:** Could you please briefly describe the history and establishment of the FPAHK? Could you tell me what were the original aims and purposes for establishing the Association, and how the Association has changed and evolved over the past few decades in Hong Kong? More importantly, could you tell me what contributions the Association has made to the Hong Kong society as a whole?

GL: The FPAHK has over 60 years of history, and may date all the way back to the 1950s. The FPAHK began as a volunteer group at the very beginning. Back in the 1950s, the initial mission of the FPAHK was to widespread the ‘family planning’ message, with the aim of responding to the rapid population growth in Hong Kong. During the early 1970s, the average number of births per family in Hong Kong was simply overbearing at that time, creating both social and economic burdens on the
couples as well as on the society as a whole. In order to tackle the situation, the FPAHK started its “Two is Enough (兩個夠晒數)” campaign4.

About 30 to 40 years ago, our services were limited to the promotion of family planning, including provision of information and service on contraception and birth control. As time went by, since the late 1970s and early 1980s, the population growth in Hong Kong slowed down gradually. At the same time, we witnessed an increasing need and demands for sexuality and health education amongst different social classes in Hong Kong society, demands for sexual and reproductive health education.

For that reason, starting from the 1970s, the FPAHK already began to develop a wide range of sexuality education programmes for advocating adolescent sexual health amongst the secondary school students in Hong Kong. With further years of development, the services and functions provided by the FPAHK have become increasingly versatile and diversified, in order to meet the fast-changing needs and expectations of the Hong Kong society. In terms of sexuality education programmes, in addition to local secondary school students, we have also developed other education programmes at different levels for catering different social groups, including young children, adolescents and youths, university and college students, parents, volunteers, and social workers and teachers.

PL: Could you tell me the history and development of this ARC? Has there always been a library or a resource centre of some sort, since the first day the FPAHK was established?

GL: The ARC used to be called the “Reference Library”. During the early days, the Reference Library was only meant to provide basic learning and reference materials for the FPAHK in-house staff for self-learning and staff-development purposes. The Reference Library was not open to the public at that time. However, owing to the fact that a large portion of the library collection focused on family planning and sexuality/love education and our centralized location for access to such materials, since the 1980s the FPAHK also decided to open the Library to the general public, with the hope that people outside the Association, i.e., parents, social workers, volunteers, school teachers as well as students could also make good use of our library collection for teaching and self-study purposes. In order to encourage usage and access amongst the general public, we did not implement a membership system for using our Library at that time.

PL: Are you saying that there was already a small library built inside the Association since the mid-1950s?

4香港家庭計劃指導會 1975 宣傳廣告-兩個夠晒數[YouTube video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xSKWUZExbo
GL: Yes, that is correct. But the Library was very small scale at that time. It was not until the 1980s that we decided to open the Library to the general public in Hong Kong. Since the original library was so small, and with so few and limited resources, we would only call it a “resource room (資源室)” instead of a library.

PL: With reference to the ARC, could you tell me who or which organization in Hong Kong provides the funding for the ARC? How many people does the ARC employ? How many items does ARC hold; and what range of materials does the ARC provide?

GL: We receive regular funding from the Department of Health (of HKSAR)\textsuperscript{5} to support the personnel emoluments and expenses such as purchase of resource materials. In terms of staffing at the ARC, in addition to our Resource Centre Officer; there is also one full-time clerk, plus one part-time Clerk for running the daily operations of the ARC.

PL: I have a question for Ava, since this ARC is housing such unique collections, catered for very special user groups, what special knowledge did you need to acquire? Or what kind of training did you need to undertake before serving as the manager of this Resource Centre?

AC: My specialty is library and information management, and I also obtained an MLIS degree (master’s of library and information science). Obviously, the resources, facilities and setup of our ARC are very different from that of a regular academic library. For example, the resources at our ARC are arranged and classified under the categories related to sexual and reproductive health, and sexuality education, for example gender studies, sexual orientation, men’s / women’s health family / school sexuality education. On the surface, we are not that much different from a small-scale public library; however, on an operational level, we tend to put more emphasis on community development and outreach / educational programmes. For example, the ARC hosts various youth programmes and guided tours for the local primary and secondary school students on a regular basis, which I think sets us apart from a regular public library.

PL: I understand a majority of the ARC users tend to be local school students and teachers, but since the ARC is open to the everyone in the public, and the backgrounds of your users are so diverse, I wonder if your colleagues also needed to undertake other additional or special training, e.g., learning a different set of skills, knowledge for serving or interacting with your users?

AV: That is correct. For example, we have many parents coming to the ARC who expect us to have substantial knowledge in sex and love education, and they also

\textsuperscript{5} Department of Health, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
In such circumstances, we will try our very best to introduce them to the different resources available inside the ARC. We hope they could eventually find something from the Centre that could meet their expected information needs.

GL: Please allow me to further explain - when we are hiring people to work for our Association, we always prefer to look for someone who is non-judgmental in a moral or religious sense... instead of telling these young people what they “should do” or “should not do”, our colleagues would teach them how to develop a positive and correct attitude towards sex, so that these young people could make wise, informed, and responsible decisions about their own actions... [W]e do very much hope that our job applicants / candidates would already be competent in sexuality education by the time of appointment, but what is more important for our Association is for them to have an open, accepting and non-judgmental attitude towards sex. I think such employee ‘selection criteria’ set us aside from other voluntary organizations or information centres.

PL: As you understand, in many Asian societies, people do not talk openly about sex. While working at the ARC, I wonder if you have encountered any users or parents who feel shameful or embarrassed, or even face difficulties in articulating their needs? In the face of such situations, what kinds of techniques would you use to ease their burdens, so that they feel comfortable to tell you what they really need?

GL: From my own personal perspective, for many parents, if they have already decided to come to our Association or to the ARC to seek help, it means that the issue / problem has already been started; or it has turned into ‘problem’ that they cannot managed by themselves, and that is the reason why they came to us for help. In order to ease their worries and fears, we need to try our best to demonstrate that we care about them, and we understand their situations... In addition, although Ava [Chan] operates most of the time alone at the ARC, whenever ARC receives any special requests or demands from our users, the Education Division colleagues will always be there to provide any additional supporting services or follow-up care if necessary, with services ranging from volunteer workers to consultation services for school teachers and parents. Furthermore, in case some of the parents are not satisfied with our existing ARC collections, or the readily available electronic resources, our professionals and experts from the other operational units within our Association can also come to provide them with further assistance if necessary.

PL: When it comes to the recruitment of new staff, do you always look for someone who shares the same values and viewpoints with the Association at the job-interview stage? Or this is something that your Association hopes to develop within the employee during the initial job training, along with other job skills and knowledge?
GL: Even at the job-interview stage, we will already highlight to the job applicants / candidates about our Association’s mission and strategies, and what kinds of character traits or attitudes we look for amongst our employees. This is an indispensable part of our interview or selection process. Because the FPAHK is a fairly large organization, in addition to sexuality education, we also have clinics and youth health care units that provide a wide range of health care and medical services that our new staff need to become familiar with. At the same time, during the orientation we introduce to our new staff the goals and practices of the FPAHK, as well as our Association’s missions and policies. Moreover, we will provide many valuable opportunities for our new staff to work on the front-line, so that they could obtain first-hand experiences in working with the clients of various backgrounds.

PL: I have a question for Ava. You bear the title of a librarian, but judging from what you have just described to me, the nature of your job seems to gear more towards a social worker. Would you not agree?

AC: I would say, generally speaking, about 30 to 40% of my working time is spent on answering enquiries from parents. But my core duties still remain on managing the daily operations of the ARC. Because without a well-equipped and fully-operational library or resource centre to serve as a central gateway for our Association, promoting and educating sexual health to the general public would simply be very difficult or impossible.

PL: Before taking up your current post as the Librarian at the ARC, have you ever worked in other libraries as a librarian or library assistant?

AC: Yes, when I was still in secondary school, I worked as an assistant librarian for a few years.

PL: Compared to your previous working experiences at your former school library, can you describe what the major differences are? Would you say that your previous experience at your former school library has helped you a great deal in terms of identifying your users’ needs or even to anticipate their needs? What part(s) of your work do you find most rewarding?

AC: I would say being able to answering the parents’ questions satisfactorily, and being able to help them to find solutions to their problems, and by thereby easing their concerns and worries is definitely something that I find most rewarding. Many of these parents come to us with their worries and fears, because they truly believe that we are the only one who could help them. . . . They need more than just books or information. If I could in anyway help them solve their problems, this gives me a real sense of satisfaction. And this is also a kind of satisfaction that I could not derive from simply managing the book circulation activities. The mobility rate
within our user group is relatively high. As a result, we need to establish a kind of trust, understanding and rapport with these users. We need to let them know that you are willing to listen to their problems, ideas, suggestions and needs. All such information is in fact very helpful when it comes to further developing the ARC's resources, as well as launching other education programmes for the Association as a whole.

PI: **Given the convenience brought by Internet connectivity, there is already so much information that one could easily find or harvest via the Internet. Could you tell me why they still chose to come to the ARC instead of searching Google for their desired information? Do you have an answer for this question?**

GL: In my opinion, at the ARC, the theme of sexuality education is considered 'healthy'. Furthermore, our ARC collection on sexuality education is very rich and comprehensive. In addition to our printed books, many of our teaching resources are also interactive—in other words, they are very engaging for young people for self-learning purposes. In addition, the environment of the ARC is also very inviting and attractive. The classification of our ARC resources is also very detailed and yet simple to follow. Many college and university students, when they need to write their term papers or conduct research on sex or sexual behaviours, also choose to come to the ARC at FPAHK to collect their research materials. It is simply because the information available here is so complete and comprehensive. At the same time, the FPAHK is a volunteer organization with a long history. We have almost become an icon for sexuality education in Hong Kong. In many Hong Kong people's minds, even for many local school teachers, as long as it is related to sexuality education or sexual health education, they will immediately think of the FPAHK. In addition, we would like to highlight that resources available at our ARC are also very centralized and yet complete, in comparison to what one can find at a regular public library. Although one can always find a large amount of information via the Internet, no one could guarantee that all information found on the Internet is always correct. Internet resources can never measure up to the quality of the resources available at the ARC, or simply cannot replace what we [the FPAHK staff] could do for our users at the Association.

PI: **As part of your ARC's collection, besides your collection of literature on sexual culture, it seems that the ARC also holds a large section of Chinese erotic fiction or translated erotic stories, e.g., The Plum in the Golden Vase (金瓶梅). Could you tell me what is the purpose of having such erotic fiction in the ARC collection, and what target audience do they serve? How is such classical Chinese erotic fiction related to the people who live in modern-day Hong Kong?**

GL: With reference to such classical Chinese erotic literature, e.g., 金瓶梅, which you just mentioned – via which, we could learn so much about the traditional values and attitudes towards sexuality in ancient China. When we talk about China, the first
thing that comes to people’s minds are usually, “repressive”, “conservative”, and “sex is a topic that cannot be discussed in public or with parents.” In fact, China has a long tradition of erotic literature that dates all the way back to the 16th century. This traditional Chinese erotic literature allows us to better understand the different cultural and social factors contributing to the evolution of sexual attitudes in history, as well as major events that influenced such evolution during different time periods. In addition, they enable us to obtain an overview of how we arrived at the sexual attitudes and behaviours in today’s society. Perhaps such classical Chinese fiction does not seem to have much relevance to our modern-day life on the surface; however, on a deeper level, from a cultural or social perspective, such classical literature is closely associated with the values, attitudes and behaviours towards sex in modern-day Hong Kong.

PL: What are the major difficulties and challenges you are currently facing? The point of my question is that nowadays, the Hong Kong public already recognizes the important roles functions and roles of the FPAHK in terms of what the Association could do for the local community, so what other challenges and difficulties are you currently facing?

AC: The Education Division of the FPAHK has already developed a series of resources for sexuality education that include sex-education-related books, education kits, toys, interactive AV resources, and web classroom. Such educational resources are unique and are only available at our FPAHK ARC, because they are mostly produced in-house.

At the same time, finding an effective way to expand our ARC resources has become one of our major challenges. I have managed to find many resources related to sex or sexuality education, but many of them are not published by the local publishers in Hong Kong. For example, many of such resources are published in Taiwan or by other overseas publishers. The contents of such foreign-published resources might not always be 100% appropriate to our local audience in Hong Kong. Still, adding such foreign resources to our ARC might be a good way to supplement or complement our existing collection by filling the gaps in our collection, in terms of both subject contents and formats. For that reason, when we are consider resources from overseas, we always have to consider how to make them applicable to the local Hong Kong context. I think this is the most challenging part for the ARC.

PL: With reference to the ARC, I wonder if it is also similar to other school or academic libraries, that is, having low and peak seasons; or are the demands for ARC’s services even throughout the whole year?

AC: Unlike other school or academic libraries, the seasonal differences are not always that obvious for us. However, based on our observations and statistics, there seems to be more parents coming to use our ARC resources during the long summer and
winter holidays. Having taken various school-related factors into consideration, when we are hosting the outreach or educational activities for the young adults or teenagers, we always try to schedule them either before or after their major examinations, with the aim of encouraging the attendance rates. In addition, when we are hosting major events during the long summer or winter holidays, we also try to allocate more resources and manpower to station at the ARC, in order to respond to the increasing number of users.

**PL: With reference to the ARC, in addition to the regular library services, what other extra functions or services do you provide for your users?**

GL: Since we are called the “Activity & Resource Centre”, one of our specialties is to launch various kinds of outreach and educational activities for our teenage users. As mentioned earlier, our ARC used to function merely as a small ‘for-in-house-staff-only’ library for reference and self-learning purposes. At the same time, via our library services, we already hoped to outreach a larger number of students or teenage users, as many as possible. Unfortunately, this younger user group did not take the initiative to come to check out the books from our former library. For this reason, we decided to expand our former library, and to convert it into the current ARC. Such conversion has included the installation of a number of interactive facilities for self-learning inside the ARC. At the same time, we also preserved the original functions and purpose of our former ‘reference library’. The whole idea of the ARC is to equip ourselves with the most up-to-date technologies, facilities and other resources, complimented with a very attractive environment, all with the aim of attracting a lot more young audience members to come to use our resources at ARC.

**PL: Could you tell me what are the most rewarding parts about your work at FPAHK?**

AC: With reference to satisfactions and rewards, since I am the only manager working at this ARC, I have a lot a freedom in terms of how I want to manage the Centre’s daily operations, ranging from circulation, collection and resource development, to designing the workflow. The Association’s Education Division also gives us a great deal of support when it comes to the overall planning and implementation of the ARC’s activities. The ARC and Education Division are always working closely with each other, side by side, supporting each other. We truly depend on each other. Because we have such wonderful working relationship, we are able to maintain a very ‘open’ attitude: we are willing to listen to each other’s views, comments and suggestions in a positive way. . . . I think this is the core reason why we have been so successful in maximizing the educational potentials of the ARC.

Compared to a regular school library, the ARC can offer far more resources and manpower. For that reason, on many occasions, I could really translate my ideas and
plans into actual actions and practice—actions in terms of implementing actual programmes or activities that could fulfill our users’ needs. This is something which I found truly satisfying and rewarding. In addition, after long period of close collaboration with Education Division colleagues, we have also developed a mutual trust and understanding, as well as a strong sense of belonging to the Association. Such a working environment is very positive in terms of building a high working morale amongst the colleagues, enabling us to work together towards the same goals and ideals that are beneficial for both the Association and our Centre users.

**PL: Could you please describe your typical at work at the ARC? Would you say that your daily work is very routine and it is almost the same everyday, or it is different drastically from day to day?**

AC: With reference to my work at the ARC, every day is almost completely different. Answering users’ enquiries is part of my daily routine. But for some days, I might spend more time in handling membership matters, selling in-house publications and other in-house-produced education materials to our users. Whereas for other days, I might spend more time on giving out information about our Centre’s functions and services, etc. Occasionally, the ARC will receive unexpected or last-minute visits from different local and overseas groups. In that case, we will immediately put our library work aside, and receive these guests and show them around the ARC.

**PL: Since you already have been working at the ARC for some time, I wonder if you have witnessed any major changes in the users’ needs, demands or even preferences? In addition, I wonder if you would agree that the ARC is wonderful place for observing the different social changes happening in Hong Kong – because the user community here at the ARC kind of represents a miniature of our current society in Hong Kong.**

AC: Let me put it this way. My working experience at the ARC has allowed me to better understand what ‘education’ is about; and how ‘education’ should be carried out; and what is considered ‘successful education’. For a school library, the major library users then were school students. From my observation, many student users came to the library because they wanted to finish their projects or assignments. Two main performance indicators of the school library would be the number of books borrowed by the students; and the number of book reports submitted by the students, so these were the things that the school library staff would be focusing on, or interested in. However, I am kind of doubtful that the actual reading culture amongst the students could be truly reflected through such performance indicators.

On the other hand, the daily interaction with our users has enabled me to develop an empathy for our users, to really try to understand their needs, their concerns and their situations, and to express our care for them via the ARC’s services, instead of just doing it as a regular routine of my job. This I think is also the ‘essence’ of
education, and this is something very valuable that I have learnt during my time working at the ARC.

**PL:** Would you agree that for a non-profit organization like the FPAHK, it is very difficult to measure its successes or the effectiveness of various activities or programmes implemented by the Association via the ARC?

**GL:** That is correct. In comparison to many profit-making organizations, we do not always many clear indicators or financial spreadsheets that we could measure our success or effectiveness against. Because education is like ‘planting the seeds’, it is a long process and could take time for the results and benefits to become self-evident. After you have planted the seeds, you must have faith that they would eventually [grow] tall and strong. For this reason, its results and successes are not always so immediate and apparent; and very often, they cannot be measured by sheer numbers or financial gains. This is indeed the trickiest part of education for the society as a whole. For example, it would take a long time and many efforts for someone to change his or her attitude towards sexuality via education, because changing someone’s attitudes and mindset is simply a very long process; it is something that cannot achieved in a few days. It could take a few months or maybe even years. For that reason, the ultimate goal of our Association is to tell everyone in the Hong Kong public that they are welcome to seek supporting services from to the FPAHK anytime, if they should need any help regarding sex and love education.

**PL:** Throughout the years, I wonder if you have witnessed any major and minor changes in terms of your users’ information needs and demands when they come to use the ARC?

**AC:** Because our ARC holds many unique resources and collections, and many of them are simply not available elsewhere, many users come to us with the expectation that, “What I am looking for must be available at ARC.” However, it is not always the case. For example, some school teachers would prefer electronic resources or educational kits that are more interactive. For such requests, we will always suggest them to use our E-resources available online (性教育網頁上的互動教室)6. At the same time, there are always other teachers, volunteers and social workers who would prefer the more traditional printed educational guides in paper form. So the issue lies in our hands, i.e., how to make our resources widely available in different formats, so that we could fulfill the very diverse needs amongst our users; and at the same time, allowing us to archive the same goals and end results. As you can see, some users are very confident and competent in using new technologies, and they always want to look for the most up-to-date information, and to obtain as much information as possible. On the other hand, there is always the other group who prefers the more traditional paper form. This is something that we need to take into serious consideration when

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we are preparing and launching our publications or resources.

GL: Based on my observations, parents and volunteer workers who came to use our resources in the past mainly aimed at upgrading their own knowledge via further self-reading, as they felt inadequate in the area of sexuality education. In other words, the needs for self-learning and self-development amongst parents and volunteer workers or teachers were greater then. Whereas nowadays, many school teachers expect us to provide them with educational packages, kits, handouts, pamphlets or even practical techniques / guides which they could use immediately and directly with their students when they return to school.

PL: Are you saying the nowadays, people expect more ready-to-use resources, so that they themselves would not need to invest a lot of time and effort in preparing the materials themselves or learning how to use them?

GL: That is correct. Nowadays, people expect us to provide them with resources or information packages (including CD-ROMs and kits) that are readily available and ready-to-use so that they would not need to spend so much time and effort in figuring out how to operate them, or how such materials could be applied to their own teaching in the classroom environment. On the contrary, in the past many users (especially school teachers) used our Library resources for self-learning and self-development purposes to fulfill their individual learning needs, to deepen their own knowledge of different aspects of sexuality education, or to broaden their own thinking so that they themselves could become more effective sex educators or better social workers. These I would say are the major differences.

In addition, in the past, our training workshops spent more time on exploring individual attitudes towards sex and sexuality, including identifying appropriate solutions to problems related to sexuality. In contrast today, instead of self-exploring, the users come directly and ask for practical techniques in the form of readily available education packages that they could use directly with their students as part of the integrated resources for their school curriculum.

Having said that, the wide use of such ready-to-use resources [produced by FPAHK] amongst the local school community could no doubt unify and ensure the standards of sexuality education carried out amongst the different schools. In addition, by encouraging school teachers to bring students to take part in the guided tours at our ARC allows the students to have direct, first-hand exposure to the resources, facilities and exhibitions held at ARC. In fact, many of our exhibitions and facilities are interactive. This guided-tour arrangement also saves the teachers the trouble of bringing our educational kits back to schools and explaining it one more time to the students. At the same time, it allows students to engage directly with our facilities and resources. Hopefully, both the students and the teachers will leave with long-lasting impression of the FPAHK.
Photos of the Activity & Resource Centre at The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong