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Math Across Cultures

The Erikson Institute staged its first-ever international symposium on math education recently. The event brought together speakers who discussed approaches to teaching early-grades math in a number of countries, including Singapore, Japan, Australia, and China. The event was part of **Erikson's Early Mathematics Education Project**, which seeks to improve teaching of that subject in Chicago.

You can see all of the speakers' Power Points and presentations [here](#).

The guests at the forum included Lyn English, a professor of mathematics education in the School of Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education at Queensland University of Technology in Australia. She's also the founding editor of the international journal, *Mathematical Thinking and Learning*. She spoke about research on early math learning in her country.

Another presenter will be familiar to many readers: Liping Ma, who has compared the skills of elementary math teachers in China against those in the United States, and found the Americans lacking in certain skills. In a book she published about a decade ago, *Knowing and Teaching Elementary Mathematics*, Ma found that Chinese teachers were far more likely to have developed a "profound understanding of fundamental mathematics."

I went to China two years ago and found some **clear differences** between how math is taught in that country and how it's presented here. Chinese education officials, I should note, found a lot to like about the U.S. curriculum. There are also clear cultural differences in how Chinese students tend to regard math and science—and for that matter, how they think about **teaching** as a profession.

Posted by Sean Cavanagh on May 5, 2009 4:07 PM | [Permalink](#)

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