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ARNEC  
Asia-Pacific Regional Network  
for Early Childhood

# Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the Asia-Pacific region

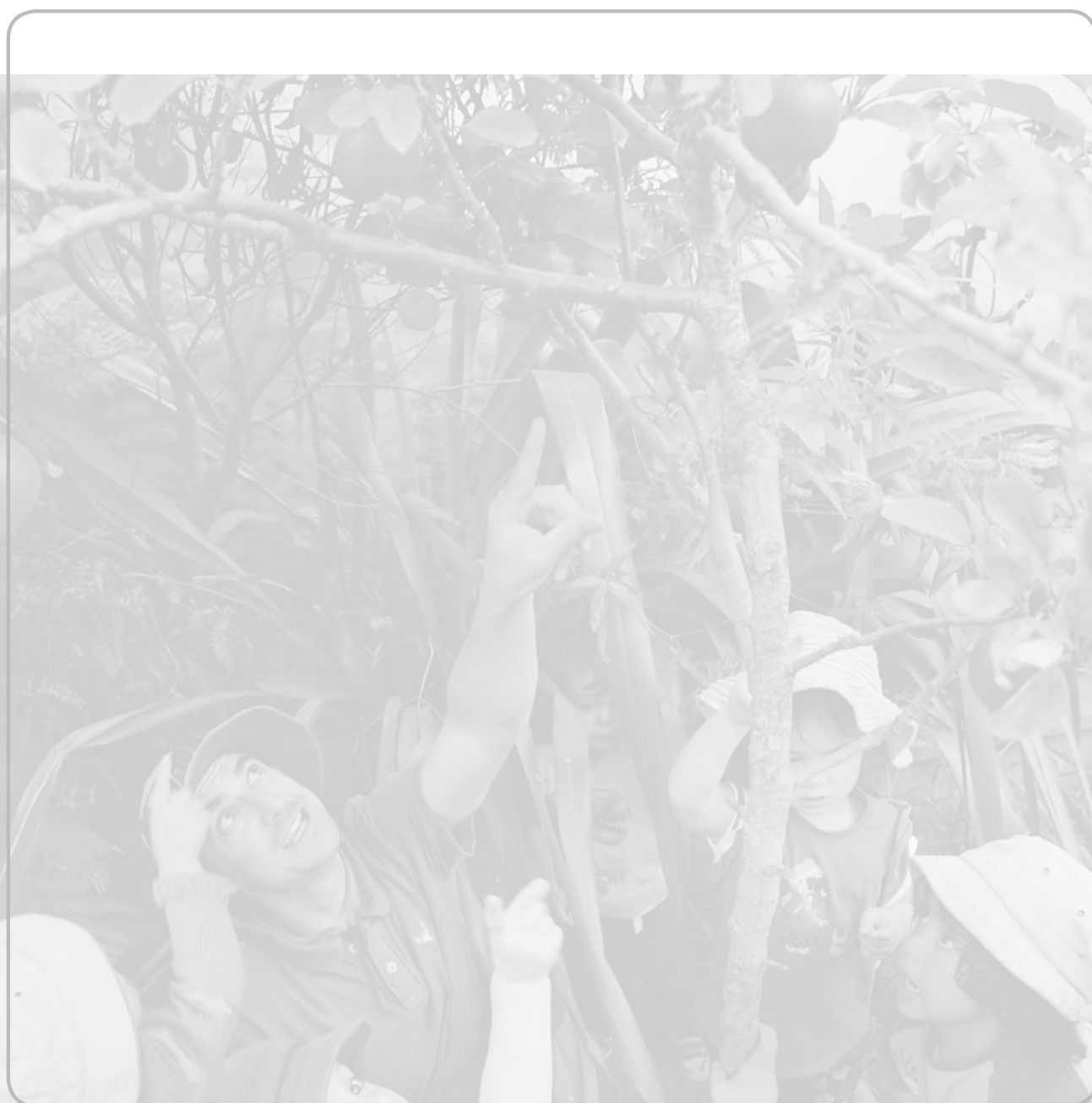
## A resource pack



**Innovative Pedagogical Approaches  
in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)  
in the Asia-Pacific region**

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### **This resource pack is meant to support:**

- Practitioners, educators and researchers (the tools provide insights and practical ideas for applications/adaptations in practice across diverse contexts);
- International development partners (the tools promote understanding of how locally grown, community-based ‘innovations’ can respond effectively to localised, as well as broader, needs and priorities); and
- Policy development professionals (the tools may be used to raise awareness about policy needs and solutions in ECCE).

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We dedicate this resource to all of you who tirelessly work and advocate for inclusive quality early childhood care and education. We hope that this resource pack with the accompanying videos will inspire you to be creative and experiment innovative strategies and approaches to improve the learning experiences of young children in the Asia-Pacific Region and beyond.



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## Introduction

The 'Documentation of Innovative Pedagogical Approaches and Tools in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)' project has involved collaboration among the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) and Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA), the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) and the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP). This initiative is aimed at contributing to improved equity and quality of ECCE provision in Asia and the Pacific through two lines of action: a) increasing the political commitment of Asia-Pacific countries to improving the equity and quality of ECCE and b) providing early childhood teachers and teacher educators in Asia and the Pacific with access to tools, approaches and information that support effective and innovative pedagogies in teaching and learning.

### Purpose of the project

The need for documentation of 'innovative pedagogical approaches'

There are several important justifications for a project of this kind. First, there is a real need, in published knowledge about approaches to teaching and learning in early childhood, for greater acknowledgement of the vastly diverse range of settings in existence across the Asia-Pacific region. Across the region, 'ECCE' could refer to privately-funded, highly-resourced centres providing access to 'state of the art' resources, as well as to community-based programmes designed to support both children and families living in remote areas operating with very basic resources and depending largely on voluntary support from community members. This is reflected in the diversity of approaches studied for the purposes of this project, which range from an example based on a project in a private kindergarten in Japan, to one based on a programme located in building sites in India that has sought to provide basic access to early childhood education for migrant children living in the context of severe resource constraints. Better understanding of the range of approaches that have been found to work well in terms of providing necessary ECCE supports for children and families across unique sets of circumstances is therefore crucial for supporting 'effective', responsive practice and for achieving goals of sustainability, inclusivity and equity.

A UNESCO report on pedagogical approaches in early childhood education (Chartier & Geneix, 2006) makes the point that the nature and form of formalized early childhood education in developed country contexts is relatively straightforward to define because of established policy structures. While there are some variations in philosophy and curriculum across countries in the developed, largely Westernised world,<sup>1</sup> provision of ECCE in the vast majority of these countries is assumed to be delivered via designated centres through formalized, state-regulated early learning programmes. Because most of these programmes are required to produce regular reports for validation and purposes related to justification for expenditure, information on widely used practices, curricula and preferred educational approaches (sometimes defined as 'pedagogical approaches') is easily accessible and relatively standardised.

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<sup>1</sup> We have adopted UN terminology in referring to the 'developing' and 'developed' world.



In many 'other countries', on the other hand, care and education of young children is made available through a range of both formal and informal networks. As the report cited above suggests, provision of ECCE in many non-Westernised contexts varies considerably across countries and context. Provision tends to be diverse and dispersed, managed by a range of non-regulated philanthropic foundations, local village development committees, local non-government organisations, religious bodies, non-profit making associations, private profit-making crèches or schools. Services are not limited to education but rather address a broad range of health, education and welfare purposes. These diverse organisations or initiatives can provide important sources of support for children and families and, due to their community connections and wisdom, often find effective ways to engage with local communities. Connection with communities, as many of the cases documented for this project illustrate, is crucial for purposes of engagement and sustainability, as many of the settings in which ECCE programmes are being implemented are highly dependent upon inputs from community members. However, as Chartier and Geneix (2006, p.5) suggest, the informal nature of such provision means that 'it leaves few traces in the official reports'.

As a result, much of the work on developing early learning programmes for young children across both developed and developing / Westernised and non-Westernised contexts tends to be strongly informed and shaped by information on approaches that are adopted by programmes operating in developed countries. This information does not adequately address differences in goals; access to resources; community needs and priorities, or beliefs and practices. What is therefore needed in the field is a more representative body of 'grass roots' knowledge that is applicable and can be used to inform ECCE programmes operating across diverse cultural, linguistic, physical, religious and economic contexts for various purposes.

The second important justification for documentation of innovations within this region is that, while there has been a lack of documentation accompanying the expansion of ECCE in recent decades, anecdotal evidence suggests that highly innovative approaches to providing ECCE responding effectively to unique circumstances, restraints and opportunities do exist (please refer to Young, 2015, for examples from this region). A review of early childhood programmes (Pearson & Tan, 2014) made the point that what is needed in terms of understanding how to most effectively provide ECCE for young children in the Asia-Pacific region is closer documentation of approaches that are currently working effectively within the region with a focus on studying for whom, how and why these approaches are effective. Indeed, the Harvard University Center on the Developing Children recently released a set of policy briefs, one of which is titled 'From best practices to breakthrough impacts' (Center on the Developing Child, 2016, p. 3) and reiterates this with the following point: *'... when successful services are not described precisely, they are difficult to replicate and impossible to scale. In contrast, when an explicit theory of change is articulated and services are well-defined, pre-identified impacts are more likely to be achievable, replicable and scalable.'*

The concepts of 'pedagogy' and 'innovation' apply as much as, if not more, to the informal, unregulated settings to which Chartier and Geneix refer above – both in terms of their needing to be guided by appropriate knowledge relating to innovations in pedagogy and in terms of their potential to contribute to current global knowledge about innovations in early childhood pedagogy. Young (2015) provides insight into a range of notable efforts by ECCE programmes operating within the Asia Pacific region to address issues such as environmental sustainability ('Green' schools in Bhutan) and geographical access constraints ('floating' preschools in Bangladesh). Such innovations could have the potential to address important issues. However, in order for them to become useful as models or guides, published information on contexts, processes and challenges of implementation, as well as impact on stakeholders, is needed.

Related to the points raised above, further justification for this work is that it has the potential to support aspirations outlined in the new global development agenda or the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Early childhood development (ECD) is central to achieving the SDGs. In the words of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon: 'The Sustainable Development Goals recognise that early childhood development can help drive the transformation we hope to achieve over the next 15 years.'<sup>2</sup> Documenting innovative and effective pedagogical approaches shown to enhance children's learning and development outcomes can help countries scale up their ECD/ECCE efforts, significantly contributing to achievement of sustainable development.

## Scope of the project

This initiative involved documentation of innovative pedagogical approaches reflected in nine 'cases' across the Asia-Pacific region. Each case is presented via (i) a narrative, which highlights features of the innovative approach, focusing on ways in which the innovation effectively fits with, or responds to, the unique cultural, social, economic and / or geographical and physical context in which it is situated; (ii) a video, providing valuable insights into the reality of each innovation and accompanied by (iii) a written description of each video, with prompts / questions for further discussion.

Documentation of the nine cases was guided by a conceptual framework developed in consultation with experts in early childhood pedagogy from across the Asia Pacific region. A synthesis of important 'findings', presented towards the end of this resource, also draws on evidence collected as part of the documentation process. Taken together, this set of narrative reports and videos of the nine innovative pedagogical approaches is designed to provide a starting point from which practitioners can learn and reflect in relation to the following issues:

- Concepts of 'innovation' and 'pedagogy'.
- The contextual and multi-dimensional nature of ECCE provision, which as these cases demonstrate, can serve not only young children but whole communities.
- Ways in which existing *resources and structures already in place* within organisations and communities can be built upon, to enhance and innovate in the provision of ECCE.
- Ways in which connections and collaborations can be built and maintained in order to support, enhance and sustain the provision of ECCE

### ***This set of resources is designed for use by:***

- Practitioners, educators and researchers (the tools provide insights and practical ideas for applications/adaptations in practice across diverse contexts);
- International development partners (the tools promote understanding of how locally grown, community-based 'innovations' can respond effectively to localised, as well as broader, needs and priorities);
- Policy development professionals (the tools may be used to raise awareness about policy needs and solutions in ECCE).

### ***In addition, this set of resources is designed to promote:***

- Expanded partnerships and dialogue between ECD networks/groups addressing and advocating specifically for quality ECCE practices in the region;
- Efforts to strengthen the evidence-base on innovative approaches and efforts from within the Asia-Pacific region, contributing to capacity building in the context of both regional and global ECD advocacy in the post-2015 era.

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2 <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2015-09-22/secretary-generals-remarks-event-investing-early-childhood>

## Conceptual Framework

In consultation with experts in early childhood pedagogy from across the Asia Pacific region, a framework for this project encapsulating aspects of the issues outlined below was developed. During a regional experts' meeting, facilitated by UNESCO and ARNEC, a decision was made that documentation would focus on 'innovative pedagogical approaches'. Such approaches might include, or reflect at some level:

- An interactive approach to facilitating and extending children's learning in a specific social, cultural or physical context and / or
- an approach whose implementation might strengthen the capacity of teachers, practitioners or caregivers and
- an approach whose process of implementation can be documented in order to inform others about how to incorporate/adapt such innovative approaches in their own contexts.

In order to reflect the 'idiosyncratic', 'situated' and 'fluid' nature of pedagogy, documentation processes would be underpinned by a commitment to gathering information about the role of socio-environmental influences on selected cases, as well as information about the processes and nature of implementation.

The framework is guided by arguments that the concept of 'innovation' is heavily context-dependent and that studies of innovation need to include elements of (i) openness to unfamiliar terrain / unexpected outcomes, and (ii) consideration of the range of factors that can shape 'innovations' and their implementation.<sup>3</sup> This approach reflects Grossberg's (2014) contention that scholars need to make better use of their authority to enable 'risk' and 'experimentation', particularly when an intended goal is to better respond to peoples' everyday life circumstances. The argument seems to have particular relevance to a project such as this, which aims to enhance 'equity and quality' in ECCE by contributing to broadening knowledge on diverse approaches.

### Defining key concepts / terms

#### **Pedagogy**

A clear, shared understanding of what is meant by 'pedagogy' and 'pedagogical approaches' was essential as a starting point for this project, particularly given the range of meanings that have been attached to this term, both within and outside of the field of formal education and across a range of cultural and policy contexts.

Many experts in formal education refer to the complex and often confusing range of meanings attached to the term pedagogy, as it is used within the field (Alexander, 2001; Murphy, 2008; Shulman, 1987). Others point out that pedagogy, simply defined by many as the act (or art) of passing on esteemed knowledge, values and skills, is not confined to formal educational settings and can also be applied to parenting, therapeutic and various other professional and informal settings where knowledge is shared (Edwards, 2001).

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<sup>3</sup> We note the inclusion of 'effective' in the Terms of Reference: 'Documentation of Innovative and Effective Pedagogical Approaches and Tools...!We would like to propose some discussion at the Bangkok workshop around the issue of whether an 'innovation' could / should be assumed to be inherently effective' in some way.



Most reviews or summaries that attempt to define 'pedagogy' in Western European contexts include a focus on historical dimensions that have shaped both its use and, more broadly, the teaching and learning contexts in which it has been used. These are important in that they highlight the range of meanings attached to this term; for example, Murphy (2008) points out that 'pedagogy' has tended to be associated fairly narrowly in the United Kingdom with technicalities of dominant, espoused *procedures* of teaching and learning (for example, see Siraj Blatchford, 2007), possibly recently as a result of the dominance of a national curriculum that does not leave much space for more profound discussions regarding learning processes and 'pedagogy'. In Germany and other European countries, on the other hand, the term is used to describe not only the act of teaching, but also deeper, more philosophical aspects of education, including policies, beliefs and complexities that shape the experience of *being a teacher*; see, for example, Oberhuemer's (2005) use of the word '*early childhood pedagogue*' to represent early childhood professionals whose practice is shaped by their unique interpretation of a wide range of personal, professional and contextual factors that influence education.

In the field of early childhood education, discussions of pedagogy and classroom practice tend to be dominated by Western European philosophies. For example, most early childhood educators around the world who have completed an undergraduate degree will have been introduced to the 'pedagogical approaches' of one or more luminaries such as Montessori, Froebel, Pestalozzi, Vygotsky and, more recently, Loris Malaguzzi. Most will also be familiar with Piagetian, and more recently Vygotskian, approaches and policies outlined by the US-based National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Outside the boundaries of early childhood education, some experts who write about pedagogy in the broader context of formal education more recently have pointed out that contemporary pedagogical approaches in some parts of the developed world are shaped more profoundly by curriculum goals and learning targets than by philosophies or ideals about the purpose of education (for example, Alexander, 2004).

It is important to note, however, that classroom practices found around the world may also be grounded in both historical and contemporary approaches and philosophies. Subramanian (2012), for example, highlights connections between the cultural importance of 'learning through listening' and a tendency found in Indian classrooms for teachers to shape classroom interactions through the use of teacher-directed questioning. Linkages between classroom practice and culturally-based philosophies have also been identified in Hong Kong, where emphasis on structure and hierarchy tends to be relatively strong (Pearson, 2011). In terms of examples of current approaches within the region that can be seen to respond to contemporary concerns, Young (2015) describes the 'Green Schools' in Bhutan that are responding to the important contemporary issue of environmental sustainability, drawing on values that underpin the country's Gross National Happiness philosophy. As mentioned earlier, more empirical evidence on the values and goals that shape diverse, unique (possibly 'innovative') teaching and learning approaches, as well as methods of implementation and impact, is needed to broaden current understandings.

The term 'pedagogy' is also attached to theoretical models, or approaches, in teaching and learning (also referred to as 'pedagogical approaches'<sup>4</sup>). These approaches include (but are not limited to): feminist pedagogy (Murphy, 2008); child-centred pedagogy (Chartier & Geneix, 2006); and socio-cultural pedagogy (Edwards, 2001). A recent online academic blog suggests that the meanings or models attached to 'pedagogy' are shaped by beliefs about the nature and purpose of education (Smith, 2012). Smith suggests, for example, that based on Pestalozzi-an ideas, a useful interpretation

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<sup>4</sup> Anders (2015) defines a 'pedagogical approach' as referring to a set of instructional practices that is grounded in particular values or beliefs about the purpose and delivery of formal education

of pedagogy might be that it defines *‘the process of accompanying learners; caring for and about them; and bringing learning to life’* (para 2). Indeed, ‘pedagogy’ in a deep sense extends well beyond the ‘practice’ of teaching and is transformational in that it seeks to orient learners towards imagined possible futures. It seeks to connect learners with dominant learning and social tools which are believed to bring benefits to individuals, groups and societies (Grossberg, 2014).

The purpose of presenting (briefly) this range of understandings is to highlight the extent to which ‘pedagogy’ can be interpreted to reflect the particular purposes or intentions of different initiatives, projects, reports and / or policies. In establishing a definition to suit the particular purpose of this project, we considered it important to account for the complex range of influences that shape any setting in which ‘teaching and learning’ occurs, particularly if the purpose of the project is (i) to discover what makes a particular set of practices (or pedagogical approach) ‘effective’ and (ii) to achieve this in relation to innovations, or ‘pedagogical approaches’ that are not yet established / defined. As Mundy (1993, cited in Murphy, 2008, p. 35) has suggested:

*‘Pedagogy is...live processing developed in a practical and idiosyncratic situation...goals can be written down, but pedagogical experience cannot be easily theorized, owing to its unique interactive aspects. Though action research and reflection reveals the existence of basic principles underlying practical classroom experience, no matter what rules might be inferred, pedagogy still remains an adventure.’*

As these ideas suggest, pedagogy needs to be conceptualized as situated in place, space and time – geographies, ideologies, value structures and cultural representations will both inform and be informed by pedagogical practices. This understanding of ‘pedagogy’ is central to the purposes of the *Documentation of Innovative Pedagogical Approaches and Tools in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) initiative*:

*Pedagogy is not simply the ‘act of teaching’ but instead is the ‘act of teaching’ as informed by the ideas, values and beliefs which sustain and motivate it. Pedagogy is also praxical – in that it aims to produce skills, knowledge structures or ways of thinking which will enable people to participate in, and transform their current and future lives.*

## Innovation

‘Innovation’ is similarly convoluted in usage and meaning. An innovation could refer to an improvement in existing models, approaches and / or tools, or it could apply to a completely new, unfamiliar idea. When applied to education, innovation has been associated with ‘advancing the international equity agenda’ ([http://www.unicef.org/education/bege\\_73537.html](http://www.unicef.org/education/bege_73537.html)); ‘improving learning outcomes’ (OECD, 2014); and, in more recent times, with the integration of information technologies in teaching and learning. Once again, therefore, a clear and shared understanding of usage of the term for the purposes of this project is important.

One fairly recent conceptualization of innovation is that of ‘disruptive innovation’, developed by a Harvard Business School professor Clayton M. Christensen. This particular concept is designed to explain ‘the phenomenon by which an innovation transforms an existing market or sector by introducing simplicity, convenience, accessibility, and affordability where complication and high cost are the status quo’ (<http://www.christenseninstitute.org/key-concepts/disruptive-innovation-2/#sthash.5veOzlsZ.dpuf>). The concept has been adopted and applied in a range of fields to highlight the importance of being open to innovations that may be quite simplistic in nature, yet novel in

that they are effective in serving a particular purpose and / or responding to a particular unmet need / set of circumstances. In addition, because of their simplicity, such innovations can be easily and effectively built upon, 'taken to scale', or expanded. Christensen, Baumann, Ruggles and Sadtler (2006, p. 101) have referred to these phenomena in terms of social change, as 'catalytic innovators':

*'...(C)atalytic innovations are focused on creating social change. Catalytic innovators are defined by five distinct qualities. First, they create social change through scaling and replication. Second, they meet a need that is either overserved (that is, the existing solution is more complex than necessary for many people) or not served at all. Third, the products and services they offer are simpler and cheaper than alternatives, but recipients view them as good enough. Fourth, they bring in resources in ways that initially seem unattractive to incumbents. And fifth, they are often ignored, put down, or even encouraged by existing organizations, which don't see the catalytic innovators' solutions as viable.'*

This conceptualization of innovation is valuable in that it serves as a reminder that (i) innovation does not necessarily require or reflect the use of sophisticated or costly techniques or tools, and (ii) in identifying innovations, the extent to which a particular approach is useful in meeting the needs of a particular purpose or set of participants / clients is just as important as the extent to which it reflects what may be widely espoused as 'advanced' or 'novel' approaches. This approach also fits with Grossberg's (2014) depiction of 'difference' in pedagogy as involving politics and risk. For the purposes of this initiative, the following concept of 'innovation' was considered to be fundamental:

*An 'innovative' pedagogy in any particular context could possibly be defined, in terms of its effectiveness in challenging, or at least adapting, dominant approaches in order to produce experiences for participants that empower, equip and support within a particular set of everyday lived experiences.*

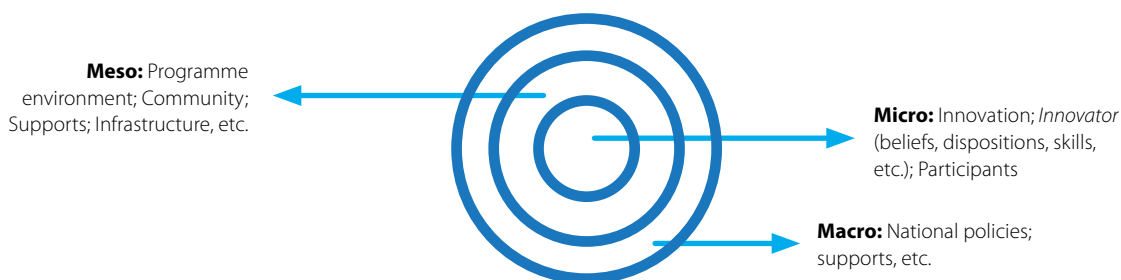
In a review of 'barriers' to educational innovation, Kirkland and Sutch (2009) highlight that successful innovations tend to be characterized by the nature of links between an *innovator*, and the environment in which an innovation is occurring. These, in turn, are likely to be influenced by dispositional characteristics and skills of the innovator as well as a range of both micro-level and macro-level factors within the programme / school environment. As these authors point out, successful innovations are likely to occur when they are perceived positively by their implementers. Such perceptions will be shaped by levels of support provided, the extent to which an innovator (teacher) feels equipped personally and professionally to deliver the innovation and whether or not the innovation is viewed as being important to achieve an agreed-upon outcome. Because of the particular context about which Kirkland and Sutch are writing (formal schooling), their albeit useful review seems underpinned by an assumption that 'innovation' tends to be imposed, perhaps a result of new policies or the introduction of novel, 'state of the art' teaching and learning 'tools' (for example, new information technologies). In the case of ECCE, particularly in developing world contexts, the innovation is as, if not more, likely to emerge from 'ground up'— from a grass roots organization or individual. This could be one reason why there is currently limited evidence based on documentation of ECCE innovations originating within classroom, or programme settings.

As these sources of information demonstrate, 'innovations' are highly contextualized and their success is dependent upon availability of a range of supports. Any attempt to document an innovation, therefore, needs to incorporate an understanding not only of the innovation itself, but of the supportive (and possibly adverse) contextual factors that have contributed to, or hindered, its



success. Kirkland and Sutch (2009) suggest that a useful conceptualization of educational innovations and their implementation could be presented using the figure presented below. Naturally, the particular aspects to be studied / documented should be determined by the contextual features of each innovation.

**Figure 1** Factors in the conception and implementation of ‘innovations’ (Kirkland & Sutch, 2009)



Current priorities in international development indicate that transformational changes may be needed in dominant approaches to service provision. In recent years, there has been a tendency for early childhood programmes to be designed and rolled out based on generic policy goals (i.e. improving enrolment rates) rather than specific, targeted goals (for example, ensuring that children in hard-to-reach communities are provided with access to supportive programmes that achieve specific outcomes). In establishing an understanding of ‘innovation’ for the purposes of this project, given the major donors and the context of this work, we drew on the ideas expressed in the *United Nation’s Road to Dignity by 2030* report, thinking of ‘innovation’ in terms of:

*Achieving the objectives of equity, inclusion and sustainability that underpin the post-2015 sustainable development goals (SDGs) that seek to support global development, (which) will require more nuanced approaches (in the provision of ECCE), informed by an evidence-base that has global relevance and is applicable across diverse settings and programmes.*

### Pedagogical innovation: The role of ‘innovators’

A recent review of pedagogy, curriculum, teaching practices and teacher education in developing countries produced by the Department for International Development (DFID) in association with Sussex University (Westbrooke et al., 2013), outlines ‘effective teaching practices’ identified on the basis of a comprehensive review of available research. The set of practices described, referred to in the report collectively as ‘communicative strategies’, is fairly predictable. It includes flexible use of group work; thoughtful use and extension of learning resources; effective use of questioning techniques to extend learning; demonstration and explanation on the basis of sound content knowledge; use of local languages and code switching, and careful planning to maximize learning.

Importantly, Westbrook and colleagues also make reference to the types of teacher attitudes that are reported to support use of these practices. As they point out, ‘pedagogic practice is developed through interaction between teachers’ thinking or attitudes, what they do in the classroom, and what they see as the outcome of their practice’ (Westbrook et al., 2013, p. 2). Based on the evidence reviewed, positive attitudes towards training and students are likely to support teachers in establishing interactive learning environments where communication is open and rich. In turn, teachers are more likely to feel, or be able to see, the positive impact of this approach on their students’ learning. As the DFID report highlights, the most important element of an ‘innovative’ or ‘effective’ pedagogy is the teacher.

Understanding pedagogical innovation requires a focus on the role of teachers in conception, planning and implementation. Indeed, as 'evidenced' in the nine cases documented for this initiative, many 'innovations' in the provision of ECCE across the region include a focus on empowering early childhood teachers / facilitators through training and provision of teaching and learning resources.

Also important to note is that the DFID report is based on reviews of practices that are occurring in traditional formal education settings: classrooms. As outlined earlier, formal provision of ECCE across the Asia Pacific region is delivered across a much more diverse and complex range of settings, to meet a broader range of goals (often including, for example, parent and community involvement and support; integrated services that include health and welfare, and strategies to accommodate diverse mother tongue languages used by children and families). For the purposes of this project, representation of a range of 'innovations' was preferred, in order to incorporate two forms of innovation: teachers (pedagogues) using 'innovative' approaches, and programmes that have adopted 'innovative' pedagogies.

### Documenting 'innovations'

Important in establishing a starting point for the project was clear and shared understandings of what is meant by, and required of, 'documentation'. The term 'documentation' is used in the context of this project intentionally (as opposed to 'evaluation' or 'assessment') to avoid connotations of external appraisal or 'checking'.

In professional fields, 'documentation' serves a range of purposes, and the nature of information gathering varies based on which particular purpose is being served (Day, 2009). For example, in the field of nursing, documentation is used to track patients' progress and often to determine whether a particular line of treatment is (i) being implemented effectively and (ii) resulting in positive change. Documentation of teaching and learning in the field of formal education also tends to be driven by goals related to tracking outcomes and, more recently, processes of teaching and learning. However, as in other professional fields, purposes and methods for documentation are likewise complex, diverse and often controversial. Data gathering in educational settings is often associated with either some element of assessment (of learning outcomes; teaching strategies; management styles and so on) or with the need to fulfil regulatory obligations. As Loughran and colleagues (2000) illustrate, documenting aspects of teaching assumed to reflect 'good' practice is notoriously difficult. These researchers attempted to document demonstration of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), one aspect of teacher knowledge / competence described by Shulman (1987) as reflective of effective practice. Loughran and colleagues conducted observations of daily practice and interviewed participating science teachers in order to discern teachers' descriptions and use of PCK in classroom settings. As these researchers found, open-ended methods were not effective in identifying examples of PCK either in teachers' descriptions of their teaching, or in the teaching itself. These researchers also discovered that, although PCK is often depicted as a discrete form of knowledge / competency, in practice teachers' decisions, planning, use of resources and interactions with students are dependent not only on what teachers know about various teaching strategies and how best to apply them in delivering particular aspects of learning content, but also on a range of contextual factors that include a teacher's individual perceptions or interpretations. Loughran et al. (2000, p.2) explain:

*...views of learning; views of teaching; understanding of content; how that understanding has developed and changed; knowledge and practice... understanding of students;... pedagogical practice; decision making; reflection; and, explicit vs. tacit elements of knowledge of practice/beliefs/ideas.*

Effective documentation, therefore, requires a degree of both openness and structure: openness to documentation of the range of factors that are widely recognized as playing a role in 'pedagogy', but sufficient structure, or clarity to capture elements of particular interest to the researcher / project.

## Pedagogical Documentation

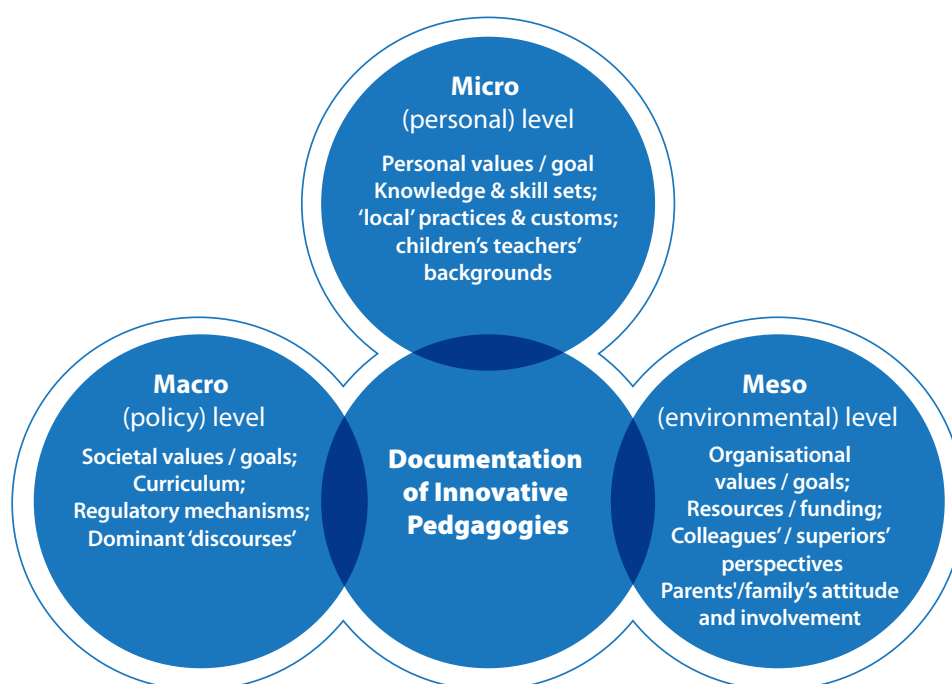
In considering a framework/methods for documenting innovations in pedagogy for the purpose of this initiative, principles and methods underpinning 'pedagogical documentation' (an approach that is used widely in formalized early childhood settings as a tool for reflective practice as well as documentation of children's experiences and progress), provided useful insights. As Paige-Smith and Craft (2011) explain, pedagogical documentation (described in simple terms as documentation that is designed to promote discussions around pedagogy) in most early childhood settings uses information gathered on processes and products of learning to provide an evidence-base of events and interactions occurring within the setting, which can then be used to prompt teacher / practitioner reflection and analysis. Used effectively, this form of documentation can provide important insights into various aspects of pedagogy (including values; perceptions; interpretations; pragmatic concerns; programmatic factors; the place of children and other stakeholders and so on).

The concept of 'pedagogical documentation' originated in the early childhood settings of Reggio Emilia in Italy, where it forms part of a unique philosophy regarding early education (Rinaldi, 2006). The concept has since been adapted and applied across diverse settings globally, with varied interpretations and purposes (Grieshaber & Hatch, 2003). Drawing on the idea of pedagogical documentation as a process of illuminating key practices to highlight children's and community experiences of ECCE, as well as promoting reflective practice, this initiative adopted the following definition:

*Documentation involves holistic data gathering using a variety of methods, including (but not limited to) video / audio footage; photographs; selected examples of artefacts (such as children's work and teacher plans / outlines); programmatic documents (including policies and statements of vision and mission); and interview transcripts. This provides those involved in documentation (teachers, children, parents and other stakeholders) with important opportunities to think deeply about, and take note of, the perceptions, values, circumstances and so on that have contributed to, and perhaps detracted from, the approach / programme's success.*

The framework for innovative pedagogies used in this initiative is presented in Figure two (below). The figure depicts the 'innovation' at the centre, with a range of possible influencing factors presented in the surrounding bubbles. These reflect a range of influences that are reported in the literature on both 'pedagogy' and 'innovation'.

**Figure 2** Framework for Conceptualising Innovative Pedagogies / Tools (based on literature reviewed above)



Across all nine approaches, efforts were made to access information relating to the following aspects, outlined in the conceptual framework as important for understanding the nature of and processes supporting each 'innovation' (during the documentation process, the nature of data collected and used varied slightly for each case, depending on availability of materials and information):

**Macro (policy) level**

- Programme documents / reports; Reviews of policy priorities for the programme and / or national context; Reviews of context-specific goals, values and purposes.

**'Meso' (immediate environment) level**

- Audio / photograph / video footage of the innovation; Programme documents / reports; Artefacts (children's work; plans and outlines; other artefacts according to the 'innovation' being documented); Interviews with key programme / Centre staff, to gather information on processes, drivers and supportive factors in implementation.

**'Micro' (personal) level**

- Self-reports gathered from key staff via Skype meetings: as above, key members of staff (where available) from each case were interviewed as part of the documentation process in order to gather data on processes, drivers and supportive factors in implementation.



## Documentation Process

This section presents an overview of the documentation process. Full narrative reports for each of the cases documented are then presented in the next section.

### The Process

Documentation of the innovative pedagogical approaches from the nine programme sites was undertaken following a highly rigorous process which involved on-going feedback and collaboration between and amongst the project stakeholders. Key steps include the following:

#### **1. Formation of the regional experts group**

ARNEC facilitated the formation of a group of regional experts, with eight (8) specialists in early childhood education, curriculum, instruction and teaching in ECCE from different sub-regions in the Asia-Pacific region. This expert group met in Bangkok at the start of the Project to review the draft conceptual framework and processes for documentation prepared by the consultants. The group reviewed and provided feedback to all the narrative reports.

#### **2. Development of a conceptual framework for innovative and effective pedagogical approaches and tools**

A conceptual framework for documentation of early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes identified as having adopted innovative pedagogies and/or tools was reviewed and approved. The framework included the following elements: (i) overview of the importance of documenting innovative pedagogical approaches, highlighting gaps in current discussions of 'innovative pedagogies' and tools; (ii) background information on conceptualisations of 'pedagogy' and 'innovation' and proposed definitions that could be adopted for the purposes of the project; and (iii) a framework, or set of considerations, in moving forward with methodology and calls for expression of interest.

#### **3. Call for applications for innovative pedagogical approaches and tools**

A Call for Expressions of Interest was developed with the accompanying Application Form (please see the Annex). This was launched in September 2015 via ARNEC and UNESCO websites.

The Call clearly articulated that the application should be an 'innovative pedagogical approach' which could include, but was not limited to, the following:

- I. An interactive approach to facilitating and extending children's learning in a specific social, cultural or physical context;
- II. An approach whose implementation can strengthen the capacity of teachers, practitioners or caregivers; and
- III. An approach whose process of implementation can be documented in order to inform others about how to incorporate/adapt such innovative approaches in their own contexts.

The Call also outlined that applications would need to demonstrate one or more of the following principles in the innovation: (i) child-centeredness; (ii) holistic development; (iii) equity; (iv) inclusiveness; (v) sustainability; and (vi) cultural relevance.

#### 4. Selection of cases, approaches and tools from the applications

ARNEC received more than 30 applications from different organizations. Out of these applications, the regional expert group selected nine (9) cases/approaches following the criteria outlined in The Call.

#### 5. Development of narrative reports for the cases/approaches selected

The consultants, with assistance from ARNEC, compiled available data from each selected case and communicated with programme sites to gather additional information. Nine narrative reports were produced, reviewed by the regional expert group, and revised in line with their comments.

#### 6. Video Documentation

ARNEC developed a terms of reference for video documentation and hired both regional and local videographers. Following the draft narrative reports for each of the cases, the video documentation focused on capturing what makes each approach innovative, what and who are the driving forces behind the innovation as well as the emerging outcomes or observed changes from such innovations. Video clips underwent a series of reviews before they were finalized. In some cases, existing videos were used and edited to fit the purpose of the Project.

### Brief description of the cases documented

Following the criteria outlined in the call for proposal, the regional expert group selected the following cases for documentation:

#### **Djarlgarra Bush School: On-Country Learning (Australia)**

On-Country Learning is a pedagogical approach that has been specifically designed to meet the educational needs of Australian Aboriginal students. This approach integrates culturally relevant outdoor, 'on-country' learning for 4- to 8-year old children with these children's regular classroom school experiences. The children, their teachers and the On-Country Learning facilitators engage together in learning experiences that are led by an Aboriginal Elder and supported by the project team. Results have shown increases in student school participation and wellbeing, with the children demonstrating increasing pride in their cultural responsibilities and connections to the Land.

#### **Sihuan Playgroup (China)**

Sihuan Playgroup was established by Professor Zhang Yan, through the Migrant Children's Education Research Center at Beijing Normal University, in response to concern about provision of early childhood care and education opportunities for children from migrant backgrounds. The Playgroup adopts a **participant-centred** approach. It is staffed / supported by parents of the children who attend, student volunteers from Beijing Normal University, and academic staff from the University. The Playgroup, which was established in 2009, has received international acclaim for its achievements in drawing on parent and family strengths to provide valuable early learning opportunities for young children, as well as bridging gaps between rural migrant communities and Beijing residents.

#### **Opportunity and Freedom to Learn (India)**

The Education for Children of Migrant Labour (ECML) programme was developed to meet the educational needs for children of migrant construction workers in Bengaluru, India who were often excluded from mainstream educational settings due to the transient nature of the employment and their low socio-economic status. The programme provides an educational foundation for the children, regardless of their previous educational experience, using child-centred, interactive

techniques designed to foster children's curiosity and love of learning. The children, families, teachers and construction managers collaborate to provide this programme, which is seeing real and long-lasting effects in school attendance and educational success.

### **Play Makes Us Human (Japan)**

Kaede Kindergarten is a private early childhood education centre located in Hiroshima, Japan. The 'innovative' approach depicted here reflects Kaede's firm conviction that children develop through play; indeed, that 'play makes children human'. Through the 'Tower Building' competition documented here, children at Kaede Kindergarten (facilitated by their teachers) are encouraged to engage in learning that promotes autonomy, creativity, cooperation and collaboration. Importantly, a unique aspect of Kaede's approach is that it acknowledges and supports children's emotional responses to 'winning' and 'losing', viewing these emotions as important aspects of children's socio-emotional and cognitive development.

### **Educate the Future (Nepal)**

As part of the EtF initiative in Nepal, Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) Facilitators in remote areas of Nepal are being supported through development of a 'customised' curriculum adapted to suit the local language and context of children attending Centres, accompanied by training and support designed to assist Facilitators in successfully implementing the curriculum and managing / administering early childhood centres. As a result of this 'package', Facilitators have gained confidence in developing various important skills needed for creating holistic, child-friendly learning environments, ranging from creating learning materials and centres within classrooms, to establishing codes of practice and monitoring procedures to track children's development.

### **Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano (New Zealand)**

Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano is an urban early childhood centre, based in Wellington, New Zealand which aims to teach and live the traditional ways of the Māori indigenous culture while using the Māori language to contribute to the revitalization of the Māori culture and language. The pedagogical approach weaves cultural ways of being throughout their day-to-day programme with the aim of building reciprocal relationships between people, spiritual beings and the earth. The programme fosters a deep sense of cultural identity in children, families and teachers, who are working together to create an ethical, sustainable future for the land and contemporary New Zealand culture.

### **Broadclass Listen to Learn (Pakistan)**

The 'Broadclass – Listen to Learn' Programme is a radio-delivered pedagogical approach which aims to improve literacy, numeracy and healthy habits among young school-aged children in Pakistan. The approach delivers short, freely available radio broadcasts that include curriculum content through interactive games, songs and stories. The teachers, who often lack professional development opportunities, are encouraged to adopt child-centred approaches through the provision of initial training, then through the broadcasts themselves and related supporting materials. The use of radio, as a culturally acceptable broadcasting platform, reaches whole families in remote communities, encouraging increased school attendance and fostering educational outcomes in these children as well as more accepting families.

### **A Play-based School Approach (Solomon Islands)**

The Solomon Islands form the third largest archipelago in the South Pacific, consisting of six main islands spread over almost 2,000 kilometres. Many communities in the Solomon Islands are remote and have little access to facilities or resources, resulting in multiple challenges related to provision of early childhood education. In response, Save the Children has focused on strengthening skills of ECD

Facilitators, who are nominated by community members, through development of a user-friendly early childhood curriculum and provision of training opportunities for ECD Facilitators. Enabling teachers to draw on community support for ECD and to create child-friendly teaching and learning environments / resources using natural resources, this initiative provides insight into ways in which resource constraints can be effectively overcome in the provision of early childhood education.

### **Our Language and Way of Life: How Young Children Learn at the Mae Tien ECD Centre (Thailand)**

The Foundation for Applied Linguistics (FAL) works to establish Community Child Development Centres (CCC's) in remote communities of northern Thailand, where there has been little access to pre-school learning opportunities. The pedagogical approach used in these programmes is underpinned by a concern for protecting and preserving cultural heritage in ethnic minority communities and engaging community members in formal learning. FAL has developed a community based curriculum and innovative pedagogical approach using children's mother tongue as a means of instruction, as well as developing culturally- and linguistically-relevant teaching and learning materials. As a result of FAL's work in developing and implementing MTB learning, young children have not only obtained important literacy skills to enable them to enter primary school successfully; they enjoy learning and look forward to progressing into the formal education system.



## The Nine Documented Cases

Innovative Pedagogical Approaches from: Australia, China, India, Japan, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Solomon Islands and Thailand



Djarlgarra Bush School:  
On-Country Learning (Australia)



Sihuan Playgroup (China)



Opportunity and Freedom  
to Learn (India)



Play Makes Us Human (Japan)



Educate the Future (Nepal)



Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano  
(New Zealand)



Broadclass Listen to Learn  
(Pakistan)



A Play-based School Approach  
(Solomon Islands)



Our Language and Way of Life:  
How Young Children Learn at the  
Mae Tien ECD Centre (Thailand)







# Innovative Pedagogies

**Djarlgarra Bush School: On-Country Learning (Australia)**



# Innovative Pedagogies

## Djarlgarra Bush School: On-Country Learning (Australia)

*We sought to demonstrate that learning outcomes required by the formal schooling system can be met in 'unconventional' ways, drawing on children's funds of knowledge (Moll, 2005) and building their cultural capital as Indigenous students.*

(Libby Lee Hammond, Project co- leader)

### Introduction

*On-Country Learning* is a unique pedagogical approach to Aboriginal early years education that aims to address new ways of meeting the educational needs of Aboriginal students. It is well established that educational outcomes for Aboriginal children are in need of improvement and it is vital to raise the expectations and outcomes for this cohort at the cultural interface – classrooms (Nakata, 2007<sup>5</sup>). Globally, indigenous children tend to demonstrate low levels of engagement in conventional school systems, and Australian Aboriginal children face similar challenges. Conventional systems of learning and teaching often do not tap into their interests and cultural ways of knowing and often render students in deficit. As a result, school attendance and engagement can be low, resulting in poor educational and social-emotional attainments for these children. On Country learning is way of recognising the knowledge children bring with them to school and engaging them in a central tenet of their being, their relationship to *Country*.

**We explored the possibilities of redesigning pedagogy to assist the many Aboriginal students who are still not engaged with their education.**

*Libby Jackson-Barrett / Project Co-Leader*

The *On-Country Learning* programme was initiated by Associate Professor Libby Lee Hammond and her colleague Libby Jackson-Barrett, both academics from Murdoch University, who had been working in the area of Indigenous education for some time. Their

5 Nakata, M. (2007). "The cultural interface." *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 36(1): 7-14.



experiences with Western Australian Indigenous communities lead to a belief that there were better ways to engage Indigenous students with the school curriculum – that sometimes traditional pen and paper classroom tasks were, as they explain, *‘boring for these children. There was a fundamental aspect missing.’* They therefore sought alternative models that might better tap into children’s motivation to learn. In addition, they wanted to develop an approach where the children’s culture was at the core of all that was taught and learned. Originally inspired by Norwegian forest schools, where young children learn in outdoor environments, the programme was developed to encourage Aboriginal children to make strong connections to the land, and therefore to foster a strong sense of cultural identity. Recognising that a strong sense of wellbeing can ameliorate risk of poor educational and social outcomes, a culturally-relevant educational programme was developed in the hope that it would spark both cultural and learning engagement in the local Noongar children.

The approach was developed by the Murdoch University team, in consultation with the Indigenous community in the area. The initial programme was situated in a West Australian school with a high Aboriginal population. The local principal was concerned about the poor attendance and outcomes of the local Noongar children, and was therefore supportive of the initiative from the start. Thus began a collaboration between the Murdoch team, the school and the local indigenous community, to develop a programme which would address their shared vision for a different way of approaching education.

The curriculum grew organically, but centred around local knowledge and values. Local Aboriginal Elders provided knowledge about important cultural places, Indigenous knowledges and practices. These initially revolved around important cultural artefacts that the Elder would bring and share with the children. The children gave feedback in terms of what they wanted to learn more about, and the programme thus developed over time. As the content developed, the project team integrated learning outcomes from the Australian Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum so that Indigenous knowledges were clearly connected to the curriculum teachers were obligated to deliver. Libby Jackson-Barrett explained that the programme was designed to connect being on-country to their classroom – to *‘navigate the space in-between ...we looked at science, we looked at art-scape, we looked at waterwise, sustainability ...quite a lot of what is done in a bricks-and-mortar classroom is what we achieve on country.’*<sup>6</sup> In this way, both local knowledge and curriculum-based learning could be made explicit, which provided a greater avenue for the justification and assessment of the programme.

There is currently a lot of traction in early childhood education around the idea of nature play. But for us, it had to be more than that. It had to be about the relationship with the land that has been there for 1000s of years.

*Libby Jackson-Barrett / Project Co-Leader*

## Description of the approach

The approach integrates outdoor, ‘on-country’ learning for half a day a week for 4 to 8-year-old children into these children’s regular school experience. The children leave the school to travel by bus with their teachers and project team members to this local site, where they conduct cultural learning experiences lead by a local Elder and supported by the project team. The learning environment is the local land itself, chosen because it is a site of significance for the Noongar people. While the programme took as its inspiration the importance of outdoor learning, it aims to extend beyond forming connections with nature to foster a deeper cultural sense of belonging to, and responsibility for the land.

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6 Extract from Bush Rangers video: <https://vimeo.com/102322116>

The programme runs over a school term, and is initially offered to the Aboriginal children in the class. The Elder shares his knowledge and ancient wisdom with the children through stories, activities and games. Each week has a specific conceptual focus which starts with traditional creation stories, traverses through shelter, fire, food, hunting and fishing, and visual and performing arts to culminate with cultural celebrations. Through these experiences, children learn what it means to be Noongar, and learn about ways of being on, and caring for the local environment which is their traditional country.



Once back in the classroom, the teachers, who attend with the children, draw on their shared experiences to incorporate elements of the programme into the regular classroom activities. Learning is extended and sustained when, in the following school term all children, both Aboriginal and on-Aboriginal, in the class are invited to attend the On Country Learning programme. The Aboriginal children are encouraged to share the responsibility of teaching cultural knowledge and practices to their non-Aboriginal peers with the Elder and project leaders. This has enhanced self-worth in the children, as they develop pride in sharing their new knowledge. As Libby Lee-Hammond explains, this fosters a strong cultural identity – *‘To be able to proudly say ‘I’m a Noongar’ is a significant step for these children.’*

## What makes this approach innovative?

### A ‘child-in-culture’, strength-based approach

The approach is child-centred and holistic, using principles of hands-on, active learning to engage the children, and to foster their language, cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual development. Drawing on Laever’s (1993) principles of involvement, the children are active participants in the experiences, and are encouraged to explore and experiment in collaboration with their peers, teachers and Elders. Through this participation, the children adopt an active role in constructing meaning from their experiences, and thus develop a deep understanding of the curriculum content. Through their participation, the children’s wellbeing, as measured by Laever’s Wellbeing Scale has increased, and qualitative interview data points to real flow-on effects on the children’s engagement and educational outcomes.

However, this active child-centred aspect is not the defining innovative feature of the On-Country Learning approach. The defining aspect is the guiding principle that Aboriginal cultural knowledge is the conduit through which children’s identity, belonging and wellbeing can be strengthened, and their learning therefore enhanced. The approach takes children’s cultural identity as their strength, rather than a point of difference. Their connection to the land and their culture is noticed by their teachers, as they accompany them on the programme. The shared experiences draw teachers’ attention to the ways in which children learn and the knowledge that they bring to their learning. As one teacher explained:

*‘when we first arrived I was overwhelmed, I think the word would be, at just being out in that environment and automatically seeing the changes in the students from the get go (sic). It was very natural for them to just be there. It was just a really positive experience for them’*

(Teacher E, interview transcript)

Children's cultural knowledge and their connection to the land is therefore the central premise, from which all other benefits can flow. Through the programme, the children become involved in an outdoor learning environment that has a deep and ancient meaning for them and their community. By learning through the wisdom of the Elders, the children learn to connect with that history, and learn through the experiences, stories, songs, dances and materials that exemplify this unique connection to land and culture that is just as relevant today and in the future.

### Equity and inclusion

The On-Country Learning approach was developed to address serious inequities relating to Aboriginal attendance and educational outcomes in Australia today. By fostering children's cultural identity and wellbeing, they are increasingly included in the education system, not only during the On-Country Learning sessions, but also in their classrooms. Before the project, some of the children were unengaged in the classroom, and lacked involvement and presence in the learning that was taking place. Now, the children are excited about what they are learning and doing, and therefore want to share their new-found knowledge with their peers and teachers at school and their families at home.

Children's language and literacy levels are boosted as children use spoken, written and visual modes to record and share their experiences with others. This increased involvement at school is also supported by the teachers' involvement in the programme. The classroom teacher attends all the sessions with the children, and therefore gains first-hand knowledge about Aboriginal culture. They are able to make connections between what they and the children are learning during On-Country Learning and the classroom curriculum. When discussing the way that the On-country learning programme is integrated into the classroom experiences, one teacher stated:

*'It was really something good that we could refer back to with our writing and they had confidence in their memories of it to be able to write about it, they really liked the activities they did, so they felt that they enjoyed writing about it... it wasn't difficult for them to remember because it was so fresh in their mind.'*

Another explained how her involvement has deepened her knowledge of the children and their culture and how this has transformed her teaching:

*'it's definitely increased my own awareness... I've worked with Aboriginal children pretty much my whole career but I've never brought it into the classroom as much, you know, the understanding for the children and everything, because I didn't know.'*

### Cultural and environmental sustainability

Through their involvement, the programme aims to help children to regard themselves as the caretakers of the Land. Aboriginal peoples lived sustainably on the land for thousands of years, so by teaching children about practices such as hunting, fishing, food gathering and land care, the programme teaches children about long-standing cultural values and beliefs around respect for the land and the reciprocal relationship with Country that sustains life. Cultural sustainability is fostered as children's knowledge for their culture grows. Libby Jackson-Barrett describes how this culture is then shared by the children, who took their knowledge back to the classroom 'so they taught their peers because they became Djarlgarra rangers, so they've taught their peers about Country because they've become the knowledge holders.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Extract from Bush Rangers video: <https://vimeo.com/102322116>

With this respect comes a shared feeling of responsibility for the land. By learning to take care of Country, the children not only learn about ancient sustainability practices, but are also now applying this to contemporary challenges. For example, Libby Lee-Hammond explained how the children and programme leaders began to notice that rubbish was being left around the lake by fishers and other visitors to the lake. The children now collect the rubbish as they walk around the lake, realising that, as Noongars, it is their responsibility to care for their country.

### Personal Story: Matthew's Experience

The following story is written from the perspective of Matthew, who was a year one student participating in On Country Learning. At the time of the project, Matthew was living with members of his extended family but had not had contact with his Aboriginal family for some time. His understanding of his Noongar identity was quite limited. He was a shy child who lacked confidence in his ability to do things independently. Matthew's story exemplifies how the programme enabled Matthew to understand and be proud of his identity and how this shaped his ongoing confidence and leadership at school. Forming a relationship with the Elder during the programme was significant in Matthew's social and emotional wellbeing and growth.



*'I'm feeling excited because today the bus is coming to take my class to Djarlgarra (Canning River). Every week we go to school there for the morning instead of learning in our classroom. At the river we will meet Kongk (Uncle) Leonard. He is a Noongar Elder and he tells us lots of stories and shows us how the Noongar people used to live in this place. He also shows us things we need to know now to live in harmony with the bush so that our children and grandchildren can enjoy it one day.'*

*'Last week we went hunting! I put on a yonga bwoka (kangaroo skin coat) and used a*

*spear to find snakes in the grass. They were just rubber snakes, but Kongk showed us how to make a line and walk through the grass side by side to find the 10 snakes he had hidden there. Every time*

*one of us found a snake we thought about how many were still there to find. I found three snakes! It didn't take very long for my class found all the snakes. It was fun to hunt in the bush.'*

*'Kongk and I walk along the Bilya (river) together and he shows me the different plants and animals and how to care for my ancestral country. We sing songs in our language and act out the*

*stories of the Dreaming. We learned a story about how a bird helped the Noongar people to get the karla (fire) from the meeka (moon). I didn't know much about my culture before I came to Djarlgarra but now I know what being Noongar means and I feel really proud that I am a Noongar. When Kongk painted my baranga (totem) on my face I couldn't wait to get back to school to show the other kids.'*

*'My teacher asked me if I would do a 'Welcome to Country' at our school assembly for the National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration. I wore some traditional clothes and stood up in front of everyone and did the traditional welcome. My family and teacher were really proud of me and I felt proud of myself. My teacher said she's never seen me happier or more excited about learning.'*

## Conclusion: Achievements and next steps

***'The aspirations of a programme such as this are that it can go anywhere. It can go into every school all over Australia'<sup>8</sup>***

A research project, examining the effectiveness of the programme, has demonstrated positive effects on children, communities and teachers. Children's attendance at school has increased by up to 40% for some children, demonstrating children's overall enjoyment and engagement in the programme. Children's engagement has been assessed using the Laevers' Wellbeing Scale in both school and On-Country settings. This assessment has demonstrated that, when compared to the traditional classroom setting, the children exhibited higher overall levels of engagement and wellbeing in the outdoor setting. This has demonstrated that participation in a culturally centred outdoor learning project provides a direct and measurable benefit to Aboriginal children's levels of wellbeing. Semi structured interviews were conducted with classroom teachers, parents and children. These data have demonstrated benefits in terms of social and emotional development, cultural knowledge and understanding, and curriculum and pedagogy outcomes. For example:

***'they're retaining information a bit more and excited to share it with other people...they became teachers for each other and to their parents and things like that...Carl really loved it he really found value in the lessons he was learning at Bush School and he would go home and talk to his mum'***

(Aboriginal Education Officer)

***'The project categorically increased our Indigenous attendance; importantly, it gave our students life skills and experiences, but most significantly, it provided students the opportunity to learn things that they may never have had the opportunity to be taught in a 'standard' classroom. As a direct result of the Project, our students wanted to be at school.'***

(School Principal)

## Next steps

The work to date has involved urban schools. In 2016, the project team is commencing work with a remote desert community to develop the On Country Learning approach in an entirely different setting. Although located in remote Australia, cultural sites are some distance away from where the community lives, and hence opportunities to visit these places are limited to times when transport is available. It is hoped that the resources that come with this project will support the development of the On-Country Learning approach in this very distinct geographical setting

The Western Australian Department of Education is very interested and supportive of this work, seeing the potential for the approach to support teachers to meet the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (1.4 and 2.4) as well as the cross-curricular priorities of the Australian Curriculum. As team leaders Libby Lee-Hammond and Libby Jackson-Barrett explain, with the increasing awareness of the need to include Aboriginal cultural knowledges and histories into the school curriculum, the potential is there to extend to all schools across Australia, and not only those serving large populations of Aboriginal children.

Finally, the team continues to seek funding for the ongoing research and documentation of the project. They hope to gather longitudinal data with the children who participated in the programme. They wish to monitor their ongoing wellbeing, school attendance and their sense of cultural identity in the years ahead.

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<sup>8</sup> Libby Jackson-Barrett, extract from Bush Rangers video: <https://vimeo.com/102322116>



## About the Video

The video – ‘Djarlgarra Bush School’ – commences with footage of Australian Aboriginal children, dressed in kangaroo skins, playing with spears and engaging with traditional art and body adorning experiences. The children are outside, in ‘the bush’ or the natural environment. An Aboriginal Elder is seen talking to the children, and their teachers walk with them to the bush site. It is the engagement of children, teachers and Aboriginal community members in a blending of traditional and contemporary, curriculum-based learning which makes this programme unique and innovative.

Programme leader, Associate Professor Libby-Lee Hammond explains how the programme evolved from the need to find a way to engage Aboriginal children more deeply in the Australian school curriculum. An Indigenous Elder is featured showing the children natural objects, cultural artefacts and sharing his knowledge about the use of those items. He shows the children a coolamon, which is a wooden vessel, and demonstrates how it can be used as a cradle, a digging implement as well as a bowl for holding seeds and drinking water.

Programme-co-leader, Libby Jackson-Barrett explains how the Elder and the programme leaders collaborated from the start to develop the programme. This collaboration meant that curriculum areas such as science, art, maths and literacy could be taught through cultural practices and On-Country experiences. We see children, their Elder and teachers working together to make a shelter out of natural resources, using their

developing social and language skills to work together, to share ideas and contribute to each other’s learning. The children’s confidence and involvement in their learning is evident as they learn from their Elder and each other. Libby Jackson-Barratt tells us that this confidence has spread to the regular classroom where the Aboriginal children teach their non-Aboriginal peers about their country – *‘they have become Djarlgarra rangers – they have become the knowledge holders’*

The changes in the children through their participation in the programme are made clear through the interview with Jazmin Yavo-Kama, the programme’s Aboriginal project worker, who worked closely with the children in both the bush and school setting. In the video she explains how the children were quiet and shy in the classroom – *‘They were so quiet, they would basically blend into the background.’* She tells us the story of one child who gained confidence during the programme to such an extent that he was able to conduct the Welcome to Country (A traditional spoken welcome by an Aboriginal traditional land owner) in front of the school during their school assembly. She relays how he is now talking to others, sharing his learning with others and taking it back to the regular classroom. The importance of the connection with the Elder is reinforced by Libby-Lee Hammond, who explains how this young child developed a stronger sense of identity through the bond that he established with the Elder. The Elder provides children, who may not have strong current connections with their Aboriginal heritage, with opportunities to learn about, and be proud of their culture.

## About the Video

The video concludes with both programme leaders explaining how this programme has the potential to be used in every school to increase knowledge of Aboriginal culture and land care amongst both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Through footage of the children painting tapping sticks and boomerangs, having their faces painted in traditional designs,

Libby Jackson-Barrett tells us how the programme aims to create a future where everyone can develop connections to Aboriginal culture.

*'So, we have to make you On-Country rangers, because you've got to show your classmates about what it's like to be on country'*

(Libby Jackson-Barrett).

## Discussion Points

1. The Narrative and video explain how Australian Aboriginal identity is defined by a strongly connection with 'the land' / natural environment. Does this apply to the community that you work with? What are some of the positive, unique beliefs that define the cultural identity of children who attend your programme?
2. Discuss how children's confidence influences their learning. How can you enhance the confidence of quieter or more hesitant children in your own setting?
3. The On-Country Learning programme is run collaboratively by researchers, teachers and Aboriginal Elders. Discuss the benefits of these kinds of collaborations and consider how you may develop or strengthen collaborations in your own setting.
4. The teachers involved in this programme report that their classroom teaching has improved due to their increased understanding of Aboriginal culture. Why might this be the case? How might this apply to your own setting, and how could you build cultural understanding in your setting?
5. What have you learned from this approach and how can you make use of this new knowledge in your own context?

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Photos courtesy of Dr Libby Lee-Hammond, Australia



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# Innovative Pedagogies

**Sihuan Playgroup (China)**



# Innovative Pedagogies

## Sihuan Playgroup (China)

### Transforming the lives of migrant children and their parents:

*'Everyone has the right to experience more open, richer ways of living.'*

### Introduction

It is estimated that around half a million preschool-aged migrant children live in Beijing, many of whom are not eligible for the city's residence permit, which enables access to basic social services including education. According to Zhang (2010), in the three years up to 2010, unregistered new-born babies of migrants accounted for 51% of the total number of babies born in Beijing, with predictions for significant increases in this number into the future. This situation presents challenges for government authorities and, more importantly, is likely to put children from migrant families at risk of marginalisation from vital education and health support systems.

In response, informal playgroups operating outside the 'official' preschool education system have developed around Beijing city. One of the most successful of these is Sihuan Playgroup, situated near Beijing's Rundeli Market Place and operating with the support of the Migrant Children's Education Research Center of Beijing Normal University. Sihuan Playgroup was established eleven years ago by Professor Zhang Yan from Beijing Normal University. Professor Zhang and a team of researchers had studied the needs of migrant parents who were selling vegetables at Rundeli market. The research team noticed that children of parents working in the market had nowhere to go during the day and that the environment around the vast market place was unsafe for them. The team were also aware that migrant families often struggle to settle in this very large, sprawling city as they have left their communities and extended families behind. Many parents are very busy working and do not have time to spend with their children.

Following some initial work with parents, Professor Zhang and her team established Sihuan Playgroup, which is non-profit-making, low cost and jointly operated by parents from the market with student volunteers from Beijing Normal University, monitored and supported by professors from the

University. Over the years since it was established, the role of parents and community members in the daily operation of Sihuan Playgroup has strengthened and there are now more mothers working at / supporting the playgroup than volunteers.

Sihuan Playgroup provides a place for children and parents to come and participate in educational activities seven days per week for two hours every morning and two hours every afternoon. Due to the shared nature of 'management' of the programme, the Playgroup is able to stay open every day. The Playgroup programme aims to support preschoolers' cognitive, motor, social-emotional and literacy skills. It is also underpinned by a commitment to empowering parents and strengthening communities among migrant families, so that they can form support networks, build new lives in the city, and provide a positive environment for their young children. As this narrative report illustrates, importantly, the Playgroup has also informed student volunteers and staff from Beijing Normal University about the challenges faced and unique strengths of families who migrate from the countryside to Beijing, strengthening mutual understanding and social cohesion. This case supports the view of pedagogy as influencing not only the learning of children, but also its capacity to change lives for the better:

*Pedagogy is also praxical – in that it aims to produce skills, knowledge structures or ways of thinking which will enable people to participate in, and transform their current and future lives.*

(Extracted from Conceptual Framework)

## Description of the approach

Sihuan Playgroup uses a **participant-centred** approach, drawing on the strengths and resources children, parents and student volunteers bring to the playgroup. The Playgroup is staffed by parents of the children who attend and student volunteers from Beijing Normal University, supported by academic staff from the University. The Playgroup provides a range of experiences and activities designed to support both children and parents. The volunteer programme also provides students from Beijing Normal University opportunities to contribute to and learn from their involvement in the operation of the Playgroup. Activities include:

- *Educational experiences for migrant children:* student volunteers collaborate with parent volunteers to design, organize and conduct activities together for two hours in the morning and afternoon, from Monday to Sunday. Planning for these activities involves the students and parents working together to create learning materials that are appropriate and relevant for the children.
- *Activities for migrant parents:* Parents are strongly encouraged to become actively involved in the Playgroup 'community' via activities that are designed to support and welcome. These include parent forums / meetings, information sessions on child-rearing, entertainment and quizzes.
- *Parent and child interaction:* A series of activities designed to promote parent-child interaction is also introduced every month. Each month follows a theme, with activities including sports, story-telling and / or toy-making. For parents who are reluctant to read, the Playgroup encourages them to create books about their children, which tell the 'story' of their child's life.

Cultural events and materials form an important part of the Playgroup's curriculum. Parents are encouraged to bring stories and materials from the rural communities that they have left behind. For example, traditional and folk cultural activities that are deeply rooted in Chinese rural areas, such



as paper-cutting and reading of the traditional Chinese guide to child-rearing based on Confucian values (Di Zi Gui) are used. Through this approach, the Beijing-raised student volunteers have begun to learn about the rich cultural heritage of China's rural villages and towns.

Following a framework introduced when the Playgroup was established, parents work together to organize rosters for volunteering at the Playgroup, so that when some parents are volunteering at the Playgroup, others cover their business at the market place. This has built a strong sense of collaboration, community and ownership within the Playgroup, so that in recent times parents have become strong advocates for the Playgroup, even in times when regulatory systems and lack of funding have presented challenges to its existence.

The pedagogical approach used at Sihuan Playgroup is strongly underpinned by a commitment to equity, relevance and child-centredness. In developing the Sihuan curriculum, Director and founder, Professor Zhang, has been influenced by a wide range of Chinese and Western scholars. Influences range from Chinese progressive scholars such as Hu Shi and Tao Xingzhi, who promoted mass education through child-centred methods, to Chairman Mao and Jiang Zemin, who promoted non-formal and lifelong learning. The approach emphasises 'localization' and 'humanization' over importation of formalized, standardized methods of teaching and learning and seeks to provide educational experiences that are both developmentally and culturally appropriate for migrant children.

### What makes this approach innovative?

In line with the areas of focus defined in the conceptual framework for this study, this pedagogical approach is innovative in that it (i) responds directly to a unique 'problem' that is faced by both the authorities in Beijing and families from migrant backgrounds building new lives in this big city; (ii) it is underpinned by a commitment to developing individual and community capacity; (iii) it achieves this through a highly collaborative, community-centred pedagogical approach, and (iv) it has resulted in authentic 'two-way' learning, in which experts and students from Beijing Normal University have engaged deeply with and are learning from children and parents from migrant backgrounds.

Sihuan Playgroup programme presents an important response to the ever-rising need of migrant preschoolers and their parents, who struggle with obtaining access to formal education in Beijing. It is a grass-roots, non-profit-making organization that started with 'nothing' but effectively draws on willing participation and donations from parents, student volunteers and the wider community. Through developing and strengthening these networks and relationships, the Playgroup is not only benefitting young children and their families, but also contributing to greater social cohesion between 'natives' of Beijing and families who have migrated into Beijing from the countryside. The Playgroup also provides a valuable learning resource for students and staff from Beijing Normal University who, by participating in the programme, are able to enhance knowledge and expertise regarding the provision of early childhood education for children from diverse and migrant backgrounds. Specific areas of innovation include:

*'Everybody cares very deeply about this programme. . . Beijing is a big city and it is easy to get 'lost' – people don't know each other. We (Sihuan Playgroup) are like a little village. . .'*

*'We truly value the things (artefacts) that parents bring from the country to share with the Programme. . . these things have tended to be undervalued in China. Our parents are encouraged to bring their culture into the Programme through toys, stories and music. . . cultural heritage in rural China is rich and it is important that we acknowledge this in our Programme. . .'*

*' . . . Their lives used to be sell, sell, sell, with their children as a second thought. . . . now parents live their lives through their children. . .'*

*(student volunteer who teaches in the Sihuan Playgroup programme)*

- **Involvement of all stakeholders and low-cost inputs:** college students, migrant parents and community members all collaborate in managing the Playgroup to promote holistic development of migrant children. Playgroup learning materials make wide use of natural and recycled daily materials. The Playgroup also regularly receives equipment and resources donated by kindergartens nearby. In addition, the playgroup makes full use of locally available public educational and cultural facilities, such as the public children's library, Beijing's Houhai square, and Rundeli comprehensive market.
- **Parents training and empowerment:** involving migrant parents in exploration of education resources and drawing on their abilities enhances their self-efficacy in parenting as well as their cultural identity, which supports parent investment in and sustainability of the Playgroup.
- **Parent-centred and community-based:** it recognizes and encourages parents as teachers, promotes and guides parents to exchange their child-rearing experiences with each other. Parents are also encouraged to take charge of the Playgroup's management. It is located in, and mobilizes, the communities' resources, which promotes communication between migrant families and local communities, enabling greater integration into city life.
- **Easily generalized to other context:** Sihuan Playgroup has created and published a curriculum model, teacher resources package, and parent training handbook. These have been used by other programmes that seek to promote integration between rural and urban regions of China.





## Personal Story

## Building a Community of Practice – when Sihuan Playgroup lost its ‘place’



The concept of ‘communities of practice’ is often referred to in the field of education.

A ‘community of practice’ refers simply to a group of people who work together towards a common goal and in the process are able to find ways of developing new skills and knowledges related to that shared goal (<http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>). This concept is strongly reflected in the active, committed community of children, professionals, parents and community members who form the heart of Sihuan Playgroup, as illustrated in the following story:

In 2010, government changes to security regulations resulted in Sihuan Playgroup having to move from its original premises at Rundeli market. As a non-profit-making kindergarten with no income, the Playgroup had no place to go. Supporters of the Playgroup including parents and volunteers, who were determined to keep the kindergarten running, continued to run activities for the children in any community space that they could find. Despite sometimes receiving negative comments and feedback from people who were disturbed by the noise, or who did not like activities being conducted in community spaces, the parents

and volunteers persevered in providing on-going opportunities for children to keep attending, while at the same time searching for alternative premises.

After some time, new supporters were identified and a new location for the Playgroup was found. Although rents charged at the new location meant that parents would need to contribute much more in terms of finances, they agreed that it was worth it and that they would try their best to both come up

with the funds and continue supporting the Playgroup. During the period of uncertainty when no-one was sure where the Playgroup would end up being located, all involved (including parents, volunteers and teachers from the University) continued to actively support the Playgroup by contributing to running activities for children and / or finding ways to re-locate the Playgroup.

As one of the volunteers, who is now involved in management of the Playgroup comments:

*‘This experience formed a turning point for the Playgroup. We never gave up. We worked together. And we found out how committed parents were, even if it meant that they would have to pay more.’*

The strong sense of community reflected in this story continues to define Sihuan Playgroup. Since 2010, the Playgroup has faced further challenges related to location, staffing and funding. Always, everyone involved has continued to work together to overcome these challenges, ensuring that the Playgroup continues to operate to meet the needs of children and families for whom it is so important.

## Conclusion: Achievements and where to from here?

In terms of impact on children and community members, this pedagogical innovation has achieved significant outcomes:

- More than 600 children have benefited from this project. As a result of their attendance at the Playgroup, they have been supported in making a smooth transition to formal learning at primary school through the development of healthy living habits, literacy skills, social skills and a positive sense of identity.
- During the past 11 years, migrant parents have become increasingly active in management of the Playgroup. Three of the mothers have now taken over as 'teachers' and, since 2014, daily schedules and operations have been managed by these three full-time 'mother-teachers'.
- Enhanced child-rearing knowledge and skills of parents have resulted in greater confidence in parenting, as well as strengthening of their own unique ethnic identity. Parents have also benefitted from opportunities to develop the autonomy to contribute to management of the programmes. Many parents say that their involvement in Sihuan Playgroup has changed their life and their family.
- Almost 100 college students have volunteered to participate in this project, providing opportunities for them to gain a sense of social responsibility and citizenship. After graduation, some of them have also promoted the concepts and practices adopted in Sihuan Playgroup.
- The approach modelled by Sihuan Playgroup has attracted international attention and has been published in peer reviewed journal articles, monographs and training handbooks.
- In addition to broader achievements, Sihuan Playgroup has supported or initiated the following supports for children and families
  - In 2006, launched Mutual reading between migrant parents and their left-behind children.
  - In 2008, launched Reading workshop for primary children who had graduated from Sihuan Playgroup.
  - In 2011, launched Parents' reading workshop.

In 2007, the Sihuan Playgroup model was replicated in Liuniangfu community, Shijinshan, when staff from the Playgroup helped a local community to establish a child activity centre.

In 2009, the Sihuan Playgroup model was replicated in Xiaojahe community, Haidian district of Beijing, as part of a new-citizen parents and children interaction project.

In 2010, Sihuan Playgroup took over the *seeds teachers training* programme from cottage preschools (so called 'shanzhai kindergarten') serving migrant children which are auspiced by Beijing municipal education commission.

*I have two examples of the positive interactions that take place in our Playgroup... (i) many parents are very self-conscious when their children behave differently or do not fit in very well. In some Playgroups, parents judge each other when their children misbehave or do not follow instructions... recently, we had a case of a 3 year-old who was having a hard time settling in. He could not keep his hands to himself and kept disrupting other children and the teacher. In this case, the parents were open, positive and supportive about the child and his parents... they did not judge but wanted to do whatever they could to support the child.*

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*There is an open and very supportive atmosphere here where parents work together and support each other... (ii) one of the mothers who joined the Playgroup was not from Rundeli market but had also migrated to Beijing and struggled to find a good place for her child... She noticed that in other kindergartens, children did not play and her little girl just sat quietly, not joining in... the mother was very happy when she found Sihuan Playgroup and ever since her daughter joined us, she has continued to volunteer here. In fact, her daughter is in Grade 2 now and she still works with the Playgroup as 'mother-teacher'. I think she found the support here very important. Her little girl has a scar on her neck from where she was scalded as a baby... the mother always blamed herself for this scar and was very protective of her little girl... with our support, she finally was able to let go and treat her child like any other...'*

Nan Ma, Student Volunteer

## Next Steps

*Sihuan Playgroup, and its 'community' are constantly evolving and is always making plans for the future. At present, some of these include:*

- *Working with local municipalities to promote community-based early childhood education to improve access among marginalised families and children;*
- *Some parents are intending to promote the concept of community-based Playgroups in their own communities in rural locations across China;*
- *Professors at Beijing Normal University are constantly engaged in promoting the Playgroup, receiving international visitors, and advocating for expansion of the concept to other locations across Beijing and China, in order to cater for children from migrant backgrounds.*

## About the Video

## 'Parents and Children Growing Together'

The video clip opens with scenes from Rundeli market place, where Sihuan Playgroup was originally conceived, and of the one-room home of a family whose children attend the Playgroup. Two mothers interviewed in the opening shots explain that, as they do not possess city resident permits (meaning that they are not eligible for basic services such as welfare and education) and their wages are low, without Sihuan Playgroup, their children would not have access to pre-school. The video then presents scenes from the Playgroup's 12<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations, attended by children, parents and volunteer teachers. The children are assisted by their parents in making toys and decorations for the celebrations. Grandma Wang, one of the first volunteers at the Playgroup, explains the origins of the playgroup in an interview:

*'I saw these kids (in the market) and thought they should be in school... (It goes both ways, one is train kids, another is educate parents, allowing them to integrate into the city.'*

In this quote, Grandma encapsulates one of the key aspects that makes this 'innovative approach' unique: the playgroup provides a sustainable, enjoyable and productive learning environment for young children through a powerful partnership between the individuals whose ideas established the Playgroup and the parents / families who have made its operation possible. Several interviews with parents highlight the impact that Sihuan Playgroup has had on children and their families.

The video captures classroom-based scenes, where parents and volunteer teachers are all interacting with children. Throughout the video, it is difficult to distinguish the 'teachers' from the 'parents', which provides important insight into the nature of this

innovative approach. As the narrator points out, some of the mothers whose children previously attended the Playgroup have now become 'Mama teachers'. The Playgroup is built upon close collaboration and support with the Sihuan community and parents. One of the parents explains:

*'Not like nowadays everything is about profit. It's not like that here.'*

In one of the classroom scenes, a volunteer teacher discusses 'Di Zi Gui' with the children. Di Zi Gui is an ancient classical work that teaches important Chinese values and practices to children. As well as promoting mainstream Chinese customs, the Playgroup also encourages parents to bring cultural practices from their home counties / villages to share with children. The video presents a courtyard scene where children are learning martial arts. One of the Mama teachers explains in an interview that the Sihuan curriculum makes the most of talents and skills of individuals:

*'Volunteers are good at different things. Some are good at morning exercise or Chinese martial arts or drums. We put their strengths into the curriculum, making the class without textbooks more fun, interesting and enjoyable.'*

The video also captures a grandmother teaching her grandchildren paper-cutting, a well-known Chinese craft tradition. The grandmother points out that this activity teaches important motor skills 'and it's cheap!' Indeed this reflects the philosophy of the Playgroup, as pointed out by one of the mothers:

*'Regarding the Playgroup's parenting philosophy, we don't buy any toys or anything' While there are many playgroups where children play mainly with store-bought toys, 'our preschool isn't like that.'*



## About the Video

*A lot of the toys are self-made...It's all the parents' imagination and creativity!*

The video also follows children and parents on a visit to the local park, reflecting the close connections that have been built within and between families in the Sihuan community.

The video closes with reflections from Ms Nan Ma, one of the founding volunteers at the Playgroup. These reflections are valuable in highlighting the important 'behind the scenes' work that goes into establishing and sustaining community-based approaches like this:

*'The things we went through during that time. Making connections with the Public*

*Security Bureau, meeting with the Market Management Office, networking with the local community, and talking to the media with reporters coming to interview us. All sorts of training...'*

And finally, a Mama teacher provides sum up this pedagogical approach and its underlying philosophy of drawing on parent and community strengths and commitment in achieving positive change for young children and their families:

*'We aren't saying that we are exceptional educators....We aren't saying that we are the best or experts. But we fully understand a family's happiness and bitterness. We all grow together.'*

## Discussion Points

1. This approach was developed gradually, first by University professors, with the day-to-day management now being run by student volunteers and families. Discuss the various ways in which community links have been built during the development of Sihuan Playgroup. In what ways have these links strengthened and sustained the programme?
2. An underlying principle of this approach is parental involvement. Why is this so important for the playgroup and for children in this particular context? What can you learn from this that applies to your own work?
3. What are some of the benefits of involving mothers, grandmothers and extended family members in developing the curriculum and learning materials? How do you currently involve parents and extended family in your setting? Are there ways that you can strengthen their involvement?
4. What is the significance / what are the implications of Nan Ma's comments at the end of the video (9:40)?
5. What have you learned from this approach and how can you make use of this new knowledge in your own context?

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Photos provided courtesy of Sihuan Playgroup, China.

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# Innovative Pedagogies

**Opportunity and Freedom to Learn (India)**



# Innovative Pedagogies

## Opportunity and Freedom to Learn (India)

*What if... I had the opportunity to explore, to express, to experiment, to learn, to know, to enjoy. I would achieve my dreams... our dreams.<sup>9</sup>*

### Introduction

The Education for Children of Migrant Labour (ECML) programme was initiated in 2001 by the Azim Premji Foundation. Situated in the City of Bengaluru (Bangalore) in India's southern state of Karnataka, the programme provides education for children of migrant construction workers who are aged between the ages of 6 months to 14 years. Migration to urban areas has increased in recent years due to an economically-driven shift from rural agricultural to urbanised construction-based employment.

In Bengaluru, the families who migrate for this kind of work are both marginalized and vulnerable. Originating from different states of India, they represent a variety of cultural and language groups, and belong to the lowest of the low socio economic (SES) groups. In these families, where subsistence itself is an issue, education is accorded the lowest priority. Children of these families do not have access to education as neither their villages, nor the places they migrate to are able to fulfil their needs. The transient nature of their employment and their low SES status combine to result in poor educational, health and nutrition outcomes for the children. This problem has a multiplier effect, as a lack of productive activity for these children means that they often take to the streets and get involved in other activities such as begging, theft, drug addiction, loitering and boot-legging.

The programme stems from the Azim Premji Foundation's vision to *facilitate a just, equitable, humane and sustainable society*. It is based on the belief that education provides a means for powerful and sustainable social change. Realizing the importance of catering to this marginalized and vulnerable

<sup>9</sup> ECML Curtain Raiser film clip; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zg7kLAipocl&feature=em-share\\_video\\_user](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zg7kLAipocl&feature=em-share_video_user)

group, the Azim Premji Foundation initiated a programme that is implemented at two centres at two construction sites in Bengaluru. The Education for Children of Migrant Labour (ECML) centres are run in partnership with two construction businesses and the Karnataka State Department of Education. The programme is free of cost for children and the financial responsibility is shared between the Foundation and the builders. The ECML centres aim to provide a stimulating learning environment and access to health and nutrition for the children's physical, mental and emotional well-being. Specifically, they aim to:

- provide an accessible safe and stimulating learning environment to all children between 6 months and 14 years of age
- use multilingual and multi-level teaching-learning processes/resources
- cater for health and nutrition needs
- advocate to and support parents to continue their children's education

## Description of the approach

The ECML centres are situated within two large building sites in Bengaluru. The centres are funded and implemented collaboratively by the Foundation, who implement the programme and the construction employers, who provide basic infrastructure (building, electricity, water, toilets and so on) and financial support.

The approach has been designed by a team of teachers and curriculum experts to suit the educational, health and social needs of the children and their communities. The programme aims to provide an educational foundation which will enable the children to transition into mainstream schools once they have completed the programme. The approach reflects a child-centred, experiential approach based on active learning and discussion designed to foster holistic development. The programme centres around a spirit of 'playful freedom' in which activities are designed to foster individual autonomy and a respect and sensitivity to others' wellbeing. Learning is not forced on the children, but instead, children are encouraged to become curious, active and enthusiastic learners. The teacher adopts the joint roles of friend and facilitator. Fear or threat, (even implicit), are not used to either motivate or discipline children in any way, and there is zero tolerance for corporal punishment at the centres. Also reflecting ideals of democracy and inclusion, the programme provides opportunities for all children, regardless of ability, and all adults – teachers, parents and employers – to construct knowledge through discussion, listening, playing, creating and representing. Inequity on the basis of caste, gender, socio-economic conditions, physical characteristics or performance of children is not tolerated. The programme adopts a developmental curriculum approach with the aim of including all children, regardless of ability. Enrolling children are placed into one of three age groups:

**The infant-toddler programme (6 month–3 years)** focusses first on health screening, illness prevention, hygiene and nutrition. The infant-toddler programme also provides hands-on, stimulating experiences where infants can explore, supported by adults who help them to understand their experiences. Toddlers are encouraged to use their developing physical skills, and are provided with opportunities to develop language, self-care, social and sensory capabilities.

**The preschool group (3 to 6 years)** focusses on developing good health habits, a positive self-concept, emotional maturity and independence. The programme fosters communication skills, sensory and cognitive skills, as well as creativity.

*The elementary group (6 and above)* adopts a modular approach which focusses on language and mathematics, while supporting emotional and social development. In this elementary group, sub-groups are formed according to each child's current educational attainments. The programme includes transition experiences which are woven across each module with the aim of supporting children's transition to a mainstream school when they are prepared and readied to do so.

Children's health is regarded as a primary enabler of the programme, as the Foundation seeks to address any health or growth issues which may impede development and learning. A number of practices are embedded into the educational programme to ensure that children's health is monitored and that children themselves develop habits which will ensure good health and hygiene. These include:

- Monthly maintenance of height and weight records for each child.
- An integration of discussions and activities designed to promote hygiene into the daily curriculum.
- The instilling of responsibility for personal hygiene in the children; for example, older children attend to many of the hygiene needs of the infants and toddlers.
- The provision of nutritious meals at the centre, and the promotion of good nutrition practices to parents.
- Regular physical, eye and dental check-ups by qualified professionals at the centre.

## What makes this approach innovative?

In line with the principles outlined in the conceptual framework for this study, this pedagogical approach is innovative in that it i) adopts a child-centred approach to address a relevant social need; ii) it addresses the need for financial, social and educational sustainability, and iii) it strives to apply principles of equity and inclusion across all features of the programme.

## A Child-centred, socially relevant programme

*'The sense of ownership is very strong among these children. They take care of younger children, serve food and take part in the cleaning process when they are at the Centre. During vacation, these children help teachers in classroom transaction by handling few groups in the classroom'*

(ECML teacher).

The ECML programme reflects a child-centred approach to learning, where children are encouraged to learn through active involvement, collaborative engagement and peer and teacher discussions. The educational experiences are based around principles of play-based learning, allowing children to play and experiment with objects, words, concepts and ideas. As stated in the ECML curriculum document, 'The teacher, in this classroom, becomes more of a facilitator who tries to create an informal atmosphere conducive to learning, rather than being a repository of knowledge who transfers what he or she knows to passive children' (2015, p.5<sup>10</sup>). The curriculum focusses on the development of language, through the various mediums of spoken and written language, art, drama, music, games and discussions. It is founded on the principle that language is the medium through which effective learning can take place. Through the offered experiences, the centres provide opportunities for children, and the adults around them, 'to gain the ability to access knowledge by asking, listening, discussing, playing, creating, reading and writing' (ibid, p.5).

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10 Azim Premji Foundation (2015) Curriculum for Children of Migrant Labour.

A central aspect of this curriculum is that its development was informed as much by the teachers themselves as any particular philosophical basis. When the programme started, there was no curriculum in place. Visits by the Foundation and teaching team to the migrant workers' camp set enabled the team to develop a greater understanding of the social and cultural background of the families, as well as the children's educational needs. The curriculum then emerged from a joint teachers and team effort - from observing and deciding what worked and what did not. Initially, there was little understanding within the team regarding curriculum, pedagogy and subject nature, and the formal curriculum developed two years after the programme had started from limited understanding. The challenges for teachers were therefore great. As one new teacher recalls:

*'The first few days were spent absorbing the environment – dirty running noses of children, no grade-wise teaching, the noise, lack of discipline, and a lot of confusion. And this happened to be my first teaching experience!'*

*Right from the time they joined, the teachers realized that teaching here is going to be an altogether different experience. Most of them joined, having worked in a regular mainstream environment. They had to now teach children who have not had regular schooling. Additionally, there is such uncertainty regarding a child's continuity at the centre.*

*(H K Shubha, Program Coordinator)*

The curriculum was therefore developed in a ground-up process that was responsive to the needs of the families and the experiences and experimentation by the teachers. From the start, the teachers were involved in planning and deciding about other enablers such as nutrition, health and community engagement strategies. At the same time, they were provided with training on how children learn, subject content, the National Curriculum Framework, the Right to Education Act, and so on. New practices were trialled and modelled, and this process built a culture of ownership among the teachers as each teacher had the freedom to choose the activities, pedagogy and resources. Each teacher planned activities and the others in the team provided feedback.

This experience over the years developed a culture of critical reflection which promoted teacher development and brought about the establishment of the formal curriculum. Teachers not only reflected on past experiences, but also on the anticipated future experiences of the children once they transitioned to mainstream schooling. They shared concerns regarding the modules they were working on with the children based on the feedback from teachers of the regular schools into which the children had transitioned. This also resulted in the curriculum being revisited and revised, and bolstered the teachers' ownership of, and confidence in their curriculum and pedagogy.

## Financial, social and educational sustainability

*'For children who have been mainstreamed, it is like a second home. Every day they visit the Centre before going to school and come back in the evening to share how the day went. They also have the evening snack and complete their homework here before going home'*

*(ECML teacher).*

A key feature of the success of this approach is the collaborative involvement that has been established by the Azim Premji Foundation, the builders, the Department of Education and the families. This collaboration developed gradually as there were several hurdles to be overcome along the way. For example, while several of the builders were keen to partner with Azim Premji Foundation they were sceptical about working with the government education department due to their concerns about aspects related to legal compliance. While, the education department agreed to support initially,



internal issues in the department made it difficult to access their support for long time. While families benefited from their children's attendance at the centre, many did not continue their children's involvement in schooling once they moved from Bangalore. As detailed below, several measures were taken to strengthen the collaboration, which has now become a key feature of the sustainability, and social-cultural relevance of the programme.

The partnership with the builders is a financial one, with some contributing up to 50% towards the programme costs and others contributing more. Initially, builders made a 100% financial contribution to meet the expenses of children's schooling, but it was soon realised that the sustainability of the programme was reliant on parents sharing the financial responsibility for their children's education. The Foundation now encourages parents to be part of their child's admission process, share the financial responsibility of schooling their children and understand and become more involved with their health issues. Most parents now take complete responsibility of their children's education, with some willingly bearing the total cost of their children's on-going schooling.

The builders do more than contribute financially. Volunteers from the builders' team teach music and art and craft and help with teaching of English. The builders' involvement helps them understand what is happening at the centre and how children and families are benefiting. They also sponsor educational trips for children. The builders' presence also makes a lot of difference to the families. It has made parents appreciate the builder's involvement, and develops a mutual sense of commitment between the families and the builders. This has had the effect of reducing the frequency of ongoing migration among parents, thus benefitting the children's health and educational outcomes. The builders also experience the benefits of a more effective and stable workforce.

Many parents and community members collaborate with the Foundation in the implementation of the programme, and in doing so, they strengthen the culturally-relevant aspects of the programme. Initially the ECML team visited the camp and talked to parents to come to a greater understanding of the children's cultural and social differences, and to build a rapport with the families. Having only experienced a traditional approach to schooling, parents were initially sceptical about this approach. When asked to explain this scepticism, programme coordinator H K Shubha said that they felt, there was 'no learning' and that children come to the centre 'only to play, sing and listen to stories.' To them schooling meant reading and writing in a classroom. Parents were encouraged to spend time at the centres, observe classes and all the activities. Gradually, as children gained confidence they began asking their parents questions and discussing some of the things they learnt at the centre. Parents began to see the value of this approach and as their trust grew, they became more convinced about the approach to learning taken at the centre. This in turn resulted in sharing within the community about the benefits of our educational approach.

Now, mothers who are breast-feeding the babies come to the centre to help in the care of other toddlers. They serve food, narrate stories and sing songs to children. Community members help the team in day to day operations such as setting up a kitchen garden with children, painting the centre and so on. They are invited to share their experience in agriculture and their profession, materials used in construction, safety precautions, challenges and so on. The collaborative nature of the programme has been further strengthened by the establishment of a new committee, consisting of parents, graduated students and builder representatives. This committee supports the team in their efforts to educate parents and the community about the education, safety and security of the children. It also helps the team to ensure daily attendance, to track children once they have left the programme, and to motivate parents to continue their children's education when they

move to other locations. As a new initiative, the committee members have been oriented to their responsibilities and they have planned to build their capacities through regular training, exposure visits and being more involved in the day to day functioning of the centres.

The sustainability of children's educational gains is enhanced by detailed record keeping and by the close relationships established with families and schools. Detailed profiles of children's health, educational achievements, and their family and community ties are established on enrolment and are maintained across the course of the child's stay at the centre. Children's transition to the neighbouring school is supported through regular visits to the school, and by providing on-going assistance with school- and homework. Children who move to another location are provided with an 'exit certificate' detailing their educational competencies in each curriculum area. This facilitates their transition to a new school or centre. The team's relationship with the parents makes it easier for them to remain in touch, and to track children's educational progress. The team also contacts the head teacher of the new schools to collect information about children's progress and provide support if needed.

*Teachers' efforts go a long way in facilitating the entire process. All the teachers speak at least three languages. They try their best to make new children coming from different parts of India, speaking different languages, comfortable. Often it is children at the centres who serve to bridge any language gap between teachers and the new child, since they speak the same language as the latter. Soon through this interaction, the new child picks up the local language*

*(H K Shubha, Program Coordinator)*

Finally, the educational sustainability of the centres has been bolstered by the gradual involvement of the Department of Education. The centres were started independently, without government support. Initially, the Foundation did not update the government about details of the children at the centres, so these children were listed as dropouts in government records. As the curriculum developed, however, those working with the programme attempted to more closely align their work with the government curriculum and rules. For example, the modules, initially designed to be transacted over a period of 18 to 20 months, were revised to a 12-month delivery so as to be compliant with the 2010 Right to Education Act. The government became more involved once the curriculum developed. Convinced of the merits of

the programme, the Department of Education shared this approach with other organisations working with children of migrant population and requested our team to help these organisations adopt this model. The team now provides support to such organisations at different levels - working with the coordinators, teachers in academic areas, and offering information on building community relationships, monitoring children's progress and so on.

## Inclusion and Equity

The programme is based on strong principles of inclusion and social equity. Every child is accepted into the programme, regardless of abilities and previous experience, and the child-centred focus of the programme means that there is the flexibility to adapt teaching methods and content to suit each individual child. The modules have been developed with varying learning levels in mind, so children are incorporated into a learning group that best suits their capabilities. In response to the diverse language groups, the curriculum is delivered in three languages (Kannada, Hindi and English), with an attempt to use each child's home language to support their inclusion, learning and feelings of self-worth. Kannada is prioritised as this is the language of instruction in mainstream schools in the state of Karnataka. English and Hindi are incorporated into the curriculum as these are widely used across India, and provide educational opportunities to the children that would not be present if the home language alone was used.

The migrant families come from many different social, religious and language backgrounds, and issues such as perceptions of gender differences and social practices such as child marriages and similar rituals are prevalent within the community. Therefore, ongoing efforts are taken to ensure that discrimination of any nature is discouraged at the centre. Children and parents are not asked about their caste while collecting details to fill their profile. Morning assembly is planned as a forum for sharing new ideas and learning and not for rituals like prayers or any religious display. Meal time is another opportunity to reiterate caste equality. Children eat together sharing the same space and food. The centre provides equal opportunities to all the children, irrespective of their gender to express themselves and participate in all activities. Teachers are sensitive while discussing issues around family and neighbours and make sure there they address biases based on gender, caste and religion with the children. Children are consciously encouraged to discuss roles of the various family members. Discussions often revolve around different elements of culture and rituals.

Some issues, like gender, child marriage and superstitions related to child's health are often deep rooted among parents. The team takes up these issues by using examples, through reasoning and through a process of continuous dialogue with the community. However, the team consciously avoids getting involved in parents' livelihood and their personal lives. The team, while keeping informed, focusses more on the safety and security of the children. Teachers are expected to display equal concern and care for every child without personal prejudices or biases. There has also been a conscious effort to keep a gender balance among team members. There are challenges, but there is the hope that such practices, especially with the young children, will bring about some change in the mindset of the next generation.



## Personal Story: Tara's Story

Tara's<sup>11</sup> story is heartening – it speaks of a girl's desire to be educated and her family's support and determination to help her achieve it. Hailing from Rakumpi village in the Devadurga Taluka of Raichur district, Tara lives with her brother and her parents. She studied at the local school there because her parents felt that she would be safer and would get some food to eat. However neither Tara nor her

parents feel that she learnt much at that school. Tara reveals that she got beaten several times for not being able to read. However she did manage to complete 3rd grade in the school enjoying the company of friends. After school, she would complete domestic chores such as cleaning the house and washing dishes before she was able to go out to play.

Soon the family's economic condition forced them to migrate to the city forcing Tara to leave behind her friends and life in the village. The

family owned 12 acres of dry land in the village but was forced to mortgage this. The initial loan of four thousand rupees over time increased to 25 thousand rupees because of interest charges. With meagre wages as agricultural labourers and poor returns from the subsistence crops grown on their dry land, the family decided to migrate to better their prospects.

The pitfalls of migration however became apparent during their first stop in Hoskote<sup>12</sup> where they worked with stones on a construction site. Displaced from the

safe environment of her home, Tara felt uncomfortable in what she perceived as a very hostile environment. The hut where they now lived was precariously close to a railway line and Tara feared for the safety of her brother, an infant at that time. The families in the community around her were mostly Hindi-speaking. Unable to communicate with them only isolated her further. Her family then decided to look for other work with better conditions. The neighbours suggested the Epsilon site (builders in Bangalore) and that is how they landed in Bangalore in 2007.

Tara's mother did cleaning and sweeping work on the Builder's premises while her father first started out as a helper on the construction site. He gradually moved on to become a gardener having picked up skills from a friend. Her mother also does gardening work for the builder now. Living conditions at the site are bad in the absence of toilets and drainage and poor hygiene conditions. During the monsoons, strong winds and water destroy the huts. There is no provision for a stove so they are forced to cook using wood fires. Despite this, the family is happier—they have been able to repay the loan they had taken in the village.

To begin with, Tara's mother was not keen to put her in the centre. Tara was malnourished and her body was covered with rashes. The team at the Centre kept up a constant dialogue with both the parents. Finally the mother joined as a helper at the centre bringing along little Tara and her brother. Initially Tara stayed with the children in the 3 to 6 age group. Once she was comfortable there she began to sit in the classroom for the age group 6+. Her teachers soon discovered that the little girl was very sharp. Says a teacher at the centre, 'She picked up concepts easily and was so interested that she would continue sitting at the centre well after the others had left'. Tara's mother said how relieved she felt that her children were able to be part of the secure environs of the centre. She was also delighted with her daughter's progress which was visible in the latter's ability to speak, read and write; achievements not evident when she was at the government school in the village.

*Tara's story highlights the challenges that are faced by children and families in this community, and the ways in which the holistic focus of the ECML approach addresses these. Children such as Tara benefit greatly from the support and education that they receive at the centre, and this sets the foundation for their future learning in mainstream schools. While they may continue to face challenges, the program instils a resilience and confidence to learn. The Foundation's continued connection with the family provides on-going support and stability.*

<sup>11</sup> name changed to protect identity

<sup>12</sup> Hoskote a small town close to Bangalore



When asked what she liked most of all at the centre, Tara mentions 'the tasty lunch and the snacks' that are provided! She adds that studying at Epsilon was a much more enjoyable experience than in her earlier school. The 'teachers teach well' because of which her communication skills have improved. She has also gained skills in English and Math, while in the village she mainly studied Kannada. Tara likes math and feels it is important to learn English so that she can study further and communicate with various people.

On completion of the modules Tara was mainstreamed with financial support from the builder. At school she coped well. But then suddenly in Grade 7 she became reluctant to go to school saying it was difficult for her to understand Science and Math. The teachers at the Centre intervened by organizing special classes in the evenings for her and two other children, also in Grade 7, for about 2 ½ months. This helped, and Tara was able to move on. While in Grade 9, her friendship with a boy in the neighbourhood incensed her parents so much that they decided to stop her from going to school. Once again the team at the centre intervened.

They explained to the parents about the child's abilities and future. Simultaneously they counselled Tara reiterating the need to focus on her studies. Finally convinced, her parents let her go back to school.

Currently Tara is studying in Grade 10 at a nearby government school. She is confident that she will clear the board examination this year and she plans to continue her education. She dreams of becoming a doctor someday. She says she has been inspired by a lady doctor in her village and is not put off by the fact that she might have to deal with human tragedies. She is sure that her education will help her deal with all of that. Tara's parents are aware of her ambition and now willingly support her. While the father drops her at school, her mother ensures that Tara is not burdened with household work. She feels that education will help her children secure a better future and avoid the hard manual labour that they perform outdoors. When asked about the possibility of getting Tara married, considering social pressure of having girls marry by a certain age, the mother confidently states that she will get her daughter married only after Tara finds a job.

## Conclusion: Achievements and next steps

The prime objective of the programme at its inception in 2007 was to learn what it takes to provide quality education for the children who move from place to place along with their parents. Through this journey, the team evolved the curriculum, created subject modules which catered to children with different learning levels and whose stay at the sites was uncertain. Noted achievements to date include the following:

- Many of the children who attended the Centres are now in schools and continuing their education - many are doing well in school both at academic and other activities (sports, music, elocution etc.). From the first batch of seven children who completed our programme, all have cleared their 10th Grade State Board examinations (sources: Azim Premji trackers and communications from parents). The builders have taken financial responsibility of the education of these children after they complete Class 10
- About 80% of children from the Centres are continuing their education in different parts of the country where they have migrated (sources: Azim Premji trackers and communications from parents)
- The local children who have 'graduated' from the Centres support the teachers after school hours and during vacations (The Centres now also have a programme for these children)



- The ownership of the community has increased - they bring children voluntarily to the Centres, support the Centres through activities like gardening and painting the walls, serve as resource persons in classrooms by narrating stories, sharing their experiences, etc. The wider community around the Centres involve themselves by providing learning materials and volunteering their time to support children's learning

## Next steps

While the successes of this innovation are many, there are continual challenges. The transient nature of the families means that tracking is challenging, and, because children and families come and go, and it can be difficult to integrate children into suitable learning groups. These challenges are compounded by the policies of the Right to Education Act, which requires children to be admitted to grades according to age, rather than ability level. There is still work to be done so that the Foundation and the State Department of Education can collaboratively support these children's transition to mainstream school and their on-going educational achievements.

*For us at the ECML centers, every day brings a new learning about working with children and parents of the migrant community at large. We continue to learn through this experience*

*(H K Shubha, Program Coordinator)*

The Karnataka State Government, realising the challenges of educating migrant children and being convinced of the ECML model of intervention, have sought help from the Azim Premji Foundation to draft a policy for migrant labour children to continue primary education. This process has, in turn, helped the team to understand

the larger picture of interstate and intrastate migration. The team therefore intends to share its experience with other like-minded people and organizations interested in starting centres for migrant labour children. This would involve sharing the curriculum, modules, capacity building of teachers, working with the community, dialoguing with builders to seek their support to initiate setting up of similar centre.



## About the Video

The video about Education for Children of Migrant Labour (ECML) programme commences with footage of infants and toddlers and their teacher chanting a rhyme together. The teacher says the rhyme and uses actions to re-inforce the meaning. The very young children echo her words and gestures, showing clear engagement and enjoyment. While this footage may seem normal to many, it highlights one of the significant outcomes of this innovative programme. These children's participation in early childhood education is unusual. As children of migrant construction workers, they fall outside of the scope of mainstream education, and as a result they often miss out on important educational opportunities.

Programme director, H M Shubha explains that these children move regularly, and therefore they have different educational needs. She describes how the Azim Premji foundation wanted to find out what kind of education suited these children and their families. Therefore, over a period of a year and a half, they began to develop a curriculum that caters for the specific needs of the children and their families; a curriculum that would welcome and address the educational needs of all children, regardless of their social and educational background.

The aim of the programme is to capture children's intrinsic interests and motivation to learn, without placing them under undue pressures to learn or participate. In the video, we see teachers interacting freely with the children - laughing, playing and learning together. This illustrates how a fun and interactive

social-emotional atmosphere underpins their work. As the narration explains, the Foundation aims that school is 'a place that children look forward to come, every day.'

As you watch, you will notice how children are encouraged to use various modes of language and expression, including writing, reading, speaking, drawing and drama. We see footage of lessons being taught through singing, discussion, drama-games, drawing, as well as the written word. The teachers explain how the children help each other with written and spoken language. As not all children speak the same language, different languages are accepted and children help each other to translate.

Instruction usually takes part in small groups, so that teachers can provide individualised instruction which will help the children to develop learning skills and dispositions that they will take with them when they transition to a mainstream classroom. Half way through the video, we see an example of how children are split into small groups to work with their teachers. They are learning mathematics, using concrete resources. While the teachers work towards teaching concepts as required in the National curriculum, hands on experiences such as weighing materials, measuring liquids, and using money aim to facilitate children's understanding of the importance of mathematics in their everyday lives. A holistic approach to education is illustrated across many curriculum areas, and children are always given opportunities to share their ideas and to explore and

## About the Video

investigate, all with the aim of making education meaningful. Finally, the attitudes of the teachers are highlighted when one states 'I think we learn more than the children.' This simple statement highlights the interactive and growing

nature of the programme. The teachers adapt their methods to meet the changing needs and interests of the children, as they have the true interests of these children at heart.

## Discussion Points

1. This programme focusses strongly on encouraging full participation in education for all children of migrant families, supporting children from a range of age groups to successfully join mainstream education. Discuss how this participation is encouraged and what makes it successful with these children. What methods or approaches from this site could work in your own programme?
2. The success of this programme relies on the trusting relationship built between staff working in the programme, children and their families. After watching this video, discuss how the nature of interactions between staff and children depicted might support trust and relationship-building. Consider how you might strengthen the relationships that you have with families using your service
3. The ECML programme provides children with many ways of expressing themselves, through both language and arts. Why do you think that this is an important aspect of this programme? Discuss how you might support children's expression in your own setting.
4. Discuss the importance of the small group, hands-on, interactive lessons in this programme. What are the advantages and challenges related to the use of these techniques in your own programme?
5. What have you learned from this approach and how can you make use of this new knowledge in your own context?

*Photocredit©ARNEC2016/BSAdappa/India*

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# Innovative Pedagogies

Play Makes Us Human (Japan)



# Innovative Pedagogies

## Play Makes Us Human (Japan)

*“Promoting joy, frustration, happiness and collaboration through play”*

### Introduction

Kaede Kindergarten is a private early childhood education centre located in Hiroshima, Japan. Like many early childhood settings in Japan, Kaede’s teaching and philosophy reflect a deep commitment to child-centred approaches, encouraging active, child-led learning, peer interaction and collaboration. Based on the firm conviction that children develop through play, this kindergarten promotes spontaneous child-initiated play and encourages children to freely explore its environment. At Kaede Kindergarten, play is a purpose in itself rather than a means to acquire certain skills (Nakatsubo, 2016). Children are also expected and encouraged to fully engage with, and draw upon, a range of emotions, negative and positive, through their play-based experiences.

Previous research (Tobin, Karasawa and Hsueh, 2004) has highlighted the importance, attached to giving young children opportunities to ‘problem solve’ independently of adult intervention in Japanese kindergartens. Teachers involved in Tobin and colleagues’ research, as well as teachers in Kaede Kindergarten described here, all referred to the importance of teachers stepping back and allowing children to learn for themselves, in solving both social challenges (such as conflict) and cognitive challenges (such as problem solving). Teachers need to carefully observe children’s interests, abilities and relationships with others in order to extend child-initiated ideas and actions and to determine when it is necessary to intervene. Underpinning this approach of giving children ‘freedom’ to navigate their social and cultural worlds independently is a belief that, through their explorations, children will gain not only cognitive skills but also deep understanding of the benefits of cooperation and collaboration with classmates. This belief is reflected in the title of this innovative pedagogical approach, ‘Play makes us human,’ which reflects Kaede Kindergarten’s vision.

*‘As teachers, the question we always get asked is “how do we bring out the most in [children] to help them reach their full potential”?’*

*(Kaede Kindergarten Principal)*





The innovative pedagogical approach reported here is depicted through a unique episode from the documentary programme produced by a local television station in Japan. With support from a team of researchers based at Hiroshima University, the video documentation has since been used nationally and internationally to provide an illustration of ways in which diverse play activities, including competitive games, can promote motivation to engage in a process of collective problem solving that results in achievement of the lifelong learning goals outlined above.

## Description of the approach

As indicated, teachers in Japanese kindergartens believe in and respect children's capacity to think and act autonomously, which in turn is deeply rooted in their expectations of children in classroom settings. In developing autonomous thinking and action, children naturally interact and communicate with other children and adults, which fosters creativity and cooperation. At the Kaede Kindergarten, children are expected to think and act on their own in making choices about their own play preferences and solving problems.

As children's characteristics and interests are diverse, their environment, too, needs to offer diverse entry points for children to explore freely their interests and build learning experiences. This approach can be observed in the wide range of play areas, facilities and materials that have been carefully selected and installed at Kaede Kindergarten, as well as the long periods of free play available to children. The daily schedule is flexible: children play freely apart from one session of formal classroom-based teaching in the morning (approximately 45 minutes), followed by another in the afternoon (approximately 1 hour) after lunch. Roughly three-fifths of a typical day at the Kindergarten is dedicated to free play.

During free play time, children are free to spend time anywhere on the premises, including the outdoor playground, a wooded area that leads to the adjacent forest, classrooms (including those that are not their own) and the indoor hall. The entire space surrounding the kindergarten building – however small or narrow – is accessible to children. Children are aware of areas where they are not supposed to go on their own: they know that they should not step within the rope that acts as a barrier to a small pond, because fish live there; they can enter the 'big forest' beyond a rope barrier only with a teacher and as a whole class. Many of the play facilities are natural, such as a big tree with a swing rope, a vegetable garden, fruit trees for children to climb, and a grassed corner in the playground where children can observe plants and insects. Books about plants and insects are also made available to the children, to support their explorations and learning.



As children engage in play, they naturally communicate with other children and collaborate. While close classmates often continue to collaborate or play together during free time (Hokii 2015), it is also common that children from different classes and age groups play together or next to each other. The play equipment at Kaede Kindergarten is intentionally designed or placed to foster children's communication and collaboration. For example, a steep climbing roof, reflecting pre-historic architectural designs in Japan, is very popular and challenging. Children try out different strategies by running up as fast as they can to grab a hanging rope, pulling themselves up by clinging to gaps between the wooden boards or grabbing the edge of the roof. Some children need several attempts, and as they try, others who have already made it to the top wait or call out encouraging words to them. A tricycle designed to allow 3 or 4 children to sit together promotes cooperation; as the tricycle becomes too heavy for one child to pedal, others help and participate by pushing from the back.

Using these play-based approaches, teachers aim to support children's holistic development, including cognitive, social-emotional and physical domains, by providing opportunities for individual children to experiment with different skills and strengths in a diverse and supportive environment. The role of the teachers is not to direct children's development and learning by teaching them pre-determined skills, but rather to facilitate and extend their development and learning by supporting child-initiated activities.

#### ***Tower Building Competition: A sustained learning experience***

The approaches outlined above are reflected in children's involvement in a unique competitive game, as documented in the video episode. This episode documents the learning experiences of the oldest children in the kindergarten, split across two classes, as they practise competing with each other to build the tallest tower using recycled cardboard boxes, in preparation for a competition held at the kindergarten's annual sports day event. At Kaede Kindergarten, every year the principal and teachers come up with a different inter-class game for a sports day, as part of which children must work as a team and exercise not only their motor skills, but also their creative minds and hands. In planning for the games, teachers share ideas, sometimes discussed between the entire staff, based on their observations of children's interests. During the year when this episode took place, teachers had observed that the children were particularly interested in building blocks, sometimes creating high towers, as the completion of the 634-meter 'Tokyo Skytree' tower had been a hot topic of the year in Japan.

As the video clip demonstrates, as part of preparing for the competition, children share their ideas about how best to build the towers and discuss their class's strategies, facilitated by, but with minimum direction from, the teachers. In this way, children are encouraged to take full, shared responsibility for making decisions about how to stack boxes on top of each other to form a solid structure; how to ensure that the tower is strong enough to stand on the playground; and how to build the towers in the most timely and efficient way possible.

While teachers do not direct children's learning, at the heart of the deep engagement, collaboration and enthusiasm that can be seen in these classrooms are careful design of the activity and timely, thoughtful facilitation by the teachers. The collaborative approach requires children to exchange ideas and test them through a process of trial and error over a period of time; they also have the opportunity to try out their strategies through 'practice matches': because this project is sustained over a period of one month in the run up to the annual sports day, during this time the teachers are able to encourage deep engagement in the goals of the game. They hold practice matches, in which the classes try out the strategies that they have developed, and are encouraged afterwards to think about how to improve them in preparation for the 'big event' at the sports day.

***Our brains are great!  
Because we think with our brains!***

*(A five-year-old boy commenting during a session in which children were exploring ways to build their box towers higher without the risk of them being blown over by the wind outside)*

Through their interactions, children experience creating something together as they work towards a common goal. The children negotiate with each other and progress together by listening to others, expressing their own ideas, and sharing the enjoyment, disappointment and a team spirit formed in tackling a common goal. Through collective problem solving, the children are also gaining a range of cognitive and social skills, including enhanced spatial awareness, planning, patterning and matching skills, articulating ideas and responding to feedback.

To achieve such a high level of engagement, teachers need to find ways to bring out and sustain children's intrinsic motivation. In this sense, the practice matches between the two classes are used effectively to create a momentum and motivate children's further efforts. Moreover, teachers not only facilitate discussion and collaborative work among children as a whole group but also devise ways to engage children according to their individual learning characteristics. For example, in the video, a teacher speaks personally with a child who does not dare to speak in the whole class, shares this child's idea with the other children on her behalf and encourages the class to build on it. Another teacher, seeing her students uninterested in the activity initially, comes up with an idea to divide the class into small groups to compete with each other, which helps to motivate children's interest and team spirit. As children's interests and strengths are diverse, teachers need to observe them and find different ways to interest and encourage them to participate in the collaborative work, so that all children have an opportunity to contribute and participate.

As well as providing valuable cognitive learning opportunities, this activity also allows children to experience a variety of feelings and emotions, both positive and negative, from the excitement and anticipation of suggesting and trying out ideas, the joy of winning in a practice match to disappointment of losing. Following the practice matches, teacher carefully respond to children's emotional states, particularly when they lose, so as to transform the disappointment into motivation to analyse what went wrong and what they can do to improve. Some might question the appropriateness of encouraging young children to compete in activities for which there are clear 'winners' and 'losers.' Others might fear that losing in a game might hurt children's self-esteem. The teachers in Kaede Kindergarten, however, consider such a view to be rather over-protective, preferring to emphasise children's capacity and resilience. In preparation for the sports day, children in both classes are seriously engaged for an entire month and work together to create a 'winning' design. Therefore, from Kaede teachers' point of view, not identifying a winner takes away the opportunity for the children to see the result of their efforts and may leave them feeling that their efforts are undervalued. Moreover, this approach also supports children in developing the resilience and skills to accept a loss and make a more concerted effort to win next time. As they are competing as class groups, not as individuals, the experience of losing motivates them to become even more creative, cooperative and collaborative in their designs. Therefore, Kaede teachers consider important for children to experience losing.

## What makes this approach innovative?

In line with the philosophical framework outlined in the introductory paragraphs, Kaede's approach is innovative in that it combines elements of autonomy, creativity, cooperation and collaboration, in this particular case through a competitive game. The innovation is driven by the teachers' belief that, 'play makes children human', and that the core values and skills outlined above are cultivated through play. The teachers believe strongly that quality play (reflected in activities that are initiated by children and engaged with high levels of interest and motivation) is necessary for children to develop holistically.

Another important aspect of the innovation is that teachers are engaged in continuous reflection on their role as facilitators to promote and support children's engagement and learning in play and to foster high levels of interactions among children. Such child-initiated, interactive approaches can be challenging to implement because they require patient observation, flexibility and responsiveness as well as a level of trust in children's capacity to be constantly engaged in a process of learning that does not have concrete, pre-determined learning outcomes. However, children's interaction with the people surrounding them is considered to be key to their holistic development. Therefore, it is important for teachers to persist in practicing and reflecting on this challenging approach to gain confidence in implementing it.

This approach is also regarded as innovative because it may be applied to various contexts without using particular materials or facilities. This approach is based on the premise that children's holistic development is best promoted through play. In this approach, teachers' aim is simply to provide diverse opportunities for children to explore their interests and strengths through play. Therefore, as long as teachers are sufficiently confident and competent to implement this approach, it can be applicable to a range of both low- and high-resource early childhood settings.

According to Mr Nakamaru, the principal of Kaede Kindergarten, some parents in the past were worried that children graduating from Kaede Kindergarten might face difficulties in adjusting to primary school where children are expected to sit longer in the classroom and spend less time playing. However, Kaede Kindergarten graduates are reported by primary school teachers to show a high level of concentration, assertiveness, listening skills and leadership in group work. Moreover, Kaede Kindergarten has a surprisingly low turnover of teachers, some of whom have enrolled their own children in Kaede Kindergarten, reflecting both their own job satisfaction and their commitment to the kindergarten's approach.



## Personal Story

The conversation below is an excerpt from a focus group discussion among teachers and the principal, Mr Nakamaru, of Kaede Kindergarten facilitated by a Hiroshima University researcher (Nakatsubo, 2014). The discussion focussed on Mr Nakamaru's decision to declare a winner in a very close final match between the Aozora (blue sky) and Taiyo (sun) classes:

**Taiyo Teacher (T):** When the two tapes were put together to compare, they were almost equal in length...and we wondered how Mr Nakamaru would act.

**Interviewer:** Who?

**T:** The Principal, Mr Nakamaru. It's only 3cm on the final match on the Sports Day. I wondered, [would he] call it a draw?

**Aozora Teacher (A):** Right, right.

**T:** You know, normally, in a kindergarten like this, we would rather leave it as a draw to put a nice end to it. But, I and maybe also [Aozora teacher] were very thankful for his judgement.

**A:** It was really heart-warming.

**T:** Yes, it was good!

**Interviewer:** Black or white, to end?

**T:** It didn't matter whether we win or lose.

**A:** It didn't matter, but both classes' efforts should be recognized.

**T:** Right, we wanted him to decide.

**A:** It was a moment in which by not making [the result] ambiguous, we felt cathartic.

**T:** Probably the children wouldn't have felt happy with a draw. If they win, they would be simply happy, but a draw is not a win. Like, after all this time, we are back to the starting line... that's how they would have felt.

**A:** There is no closure.

[...]

**Principal:** Right, at that moment, I really asked myself what to say ... A 3cm is, as you said, within a margin of a measurement error...and [the tapes] were shaky. So, I indeed thought it was a draw in terms of measurement. But for young children, a draw seems difficult to understand, and their faces go blank. They are not happy at all. So I thought, after all, it's better to make it clear either winning or losing; in that way, [the whole experience] means more for the children. [...]

**Teacher B:** My daughter happened to be in the [Taiyo] class and I was there as a parent. Throughout the process, she was seriously engaged. Every day she would say, 'Teacher told us this, what should we do next? Don't you

have any good ideas, Mum?'. They were surely disappointed at the team's loss by 3cm, but after that, Taiyo won in the tug of war. So, she was like, 'we tried our best for the box stacking competition, but we won in the tug of war'. Also, when



the Principal saw the very small difference, the children saw him shed a drop of tears. And [my daughter] told me, 'when the principal said [Aozora] won with the difference of 3cm, he was crying a little bit.'

**Principal:** Oh, really?

**Teacher B:** My child was saying that. Even now she says, 'that was fun'. I think the process was really fun, beyond winning or losing, and the whole thing is now transformed into a fond memory.

[...]

**Principal:** Adults tend to feel sorry for children losing a game, so some may try to avoid anyone losing. But perhaps, it might be on the contrary underestimating children's capacity. When children are learning a lot [from experiences], it might be an unnecessary concern for adults to feel sorry about it.



## Conclusion: Achievements and where to from here?

A study conducted by Hiroshima University researchers (Nakatsubo, 2014b) describes the following outcomes for children and teachers arising from implementation of this innovative pedagogical approach, using the example of the box stacking competition:

- Young children's creativity was stimulated by the *joy* of participating in a collaborative activity. Ideas shared by individual children were discussed and extended by the whole class through a process of sharing, collaboration and experimentation. High levels of creative thinking and problem solving were observed throughout the month-long activity.
- The *frustration* that young children in one of the classes felt from losing the first practice match motivated them to think more deeply. Through the shared experiences of losing a game, collaboration between children was strengthened as children were stimulated to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their designs.
- The *'happiness'* that young children gained from completing the task by themselves and being able to build the tallest tower also further prompted problem solving and creative thinking among them. Children felt satisfied when different ideas were put together to form and support the design of towers.

It is important to note the connection between these *emotions* felt by the children and their thinking/learning processes. This connection, fostered through play (including competitive games), reflects the unique aspects of this innovation: a strong emphasis on promoting children's feeling and expression of emotions to stimulate learning. In many educational contexts, emotional regulation is considered to be important in enhancing learning processes. In this context, however, emotions are actively drawn upon to stimulate thinking and learning.





Principal Nakamaru, who has been leading and guiding this unique kindergarten for three decades, says that Kaede Kindergarten is ‘a totally ordinary kindergarten’ (Nakamaru, 2013). Nonetheless, the Kaede Kindergarten’s pedagogical approaches have attracted many researchers, practitioners, teacher trainers and service providers. A set of 15 video clips from this documentary programme, including the box stacking competition introduced here, and a guidebook has just been published as an educational material for teachers and teacher trainers (Oomameuda and Nakatsubo, 2016). It is expected that these materials will inspire and promote reflections among researchers, practitioners and policy-makers alike.



## About the Video

This video is part of a documentary programme 'Asonde Bokurawa Ningenni Naru (Play makes us human)' produced by Television Shin-Hiroshima System (TSS), a local TV station, which followed children and teachers at the Kaede Kindergarten throughout a school year. The documentary was an initiative of a TSS photographer-editor, whose child was attending Kaede Kindergarten.

This September episode centres on a month-long project in which the two eldest classes, Aozora (blue sky) and Taiyo (sun), were each engaged in designing a 'box tower' (a tower built out of cardboard boxes), leading to the Sports Day competition game between the two classes. This game has the following rules:

- Teachers cannot give directions or assistance.
- Each box or group of boxes should not be higher than the height of a building block (22cm), but there is no limit to its width;
- Each class will build 3 towers in the outdoor playground;
- Time limit for building the towers is 3 minutes.

The children in Aozora are very skilled block builders and immediately become interested and engaged in discussing ideas and strategies among themselves. On the other hand, the Taiyo children tend to enjoy active outdoor play and show little interest in this activity, giving the teacher a hard time. The Taiyo teacher divides the class into three small groups and lets them each come up with ideas and try them out; this strategy to motivate children works well.

During practice matches, children enthusiastically work together to build towers. Just when the time for first practice ends, wind blows and knocks down all three towers Taiyo has built. One of Aozora's three towers, however, remains standing and the Principal announces Aozora as the

winner. Taiyo children hold a meeting to discuss what went wrong. Many children immediately respond 'The wind!'; but the teacher encourages them to think about why some of the towers built by the Aozora were able to remain standing. Children express their opinions about what Aozora did differently and how they can build stronger towers; and they test these ideas. Some ideas are not as practical as others, but children try them anyway and when they realize they don't work, they re-assess and move to the next idea.

During the second practice match, having learned from the first practice match and developed new strategies, the Taiyo children show up with bigger blocks of boxes and they skilfully build from bigger blocks to smaller blocks. Aozora's blocks have different sizes and fall down as they are stacked higher. By this time, teachers have invented a special measuring tool to make measuring the total height of three towers built by each class easier and more visible. This time Taiyo wins and the Aozora children proceed immediately to improve their strategies. One student prefers to share her idea with the Aozora teacher in private, and the teacher relays the idea to the other children and invites them to build on her idea.

On the sports day, both teams are fully prepared. When the maximum three minutes of building time has passed, all box towers stand very high, all doubling the height of the five-year-olds. While teachers are measuring the height, the atmosphere is very tense. When the two tapes, each representing the total height of three towers built by a class, are put together, the Principal hesitates and whispers, 'the difference is within a margin of measurement error'.

The difference between the two is a mere 3cm! Finally, the Principal declares, 'The winner is Aozora!'

## Discussion Points

1. Discuss the significance of the rule that teachers cannot give directions or assistance. What other roles do teachers play? Discuss the various teaching strategies that you use to support children's play in your centre. How do you decide whether to get directly involved or whether to allow the children to take the lead?
2. Discuss the relationships between 'play', 'collaboration' and 'creativity' represented in this video. Which aspects of this programme might you be able to apply in your own setting?
3. Discuss why it was important for the Principal (and for the children and teachers of Aozora and Taiyo) to determine the winner even though the difference was so small and potentially due to a measurement error.
4. The approach sees strong links between children's emotional involvement and their problem-solving skills. Do these two aspects of children's learning impact on each other in your own setting. Are there any ways that you can make these connections stronger?
5. What have you learned from this approach and how can you make use of this new knowledge in your own context?

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*Photos courtesy of Television Shin-Hiroshima System (TSS), Japan*

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# Innovative Pedagogies

Educate the Future (Nepal)



# Innovative Pedagogies

## Educate the Future (Nepal)

Bringing early childhood education to the forefront in community life:

*'Even the guardians tell us that they put off their household chores to drop their children (to ECD centres) first...'*

### Introduction

'Educate the Future' (EtF) is a programme initiated by Save the Children, Nepal and KOICA in remote areas of Baglung and Rolpa districts. The programme was initiated with the intention of raising the profile of early childhood education and development (ECED) in remote communities, through a focus on 'quality' in provision of ECED Centres. Children and families living in remote areas of these two districts are likely to experience high levels of poverty, with male members of the family often leaving villages to seek employment in Kathmandu or overseas. For mothers and other relatives left behind, a busy life that revolves around looking after crops, collecting water and preparing food leaves little time for interacting with and supporting the growth and development of young children (Niroula, n.d.). While opportunities for attending early childhood education settings have expanded in Nepal in recent years, these have tended to be exclusive, restricted to children who live in urban areas and whose parents can afford to send them to private kindergartens.

*"The children were in very difficult situation in a congested and combined room with grade 1 which (made it) hard to do the learning activities. But now the children are getting child friendly learning environment in new building. Parents pay lot of money in (private) Montessori centers for their children's learning in cities, but we have managed such environment in ECEDs free of cost for our children"*

*(Chairperson of one of the ECED Centres' new building construction committees)*

This pedagogical approach is innovative in that it is enhancing quality in ECED Centres through a 'customised' approach that responds directly to a unique set of community-based concerns about provision and quality of ECED Centres. Prior to implementation of 'EtF', parents in many remote communities were reluctant to send their children to community-based ECED centres because they could not clearly see any impact on their children's learning and / or development. Many parents believed that the only way to access 'quality' early childhood education was to enrol





children in private kindergartens, where there is a more established curriculum and a focus on teaching formalised academic skills that prepare children for entry into primary school (in particular, English language skills). Many of these private kindergartens claim to have adopted a 'Montessori approach', which has resulted in what Niroula (n.d.) refers to as a 'mushrooming culture' of 'quality' being associated with Montessori approaches. Because parents do not always realise the importance of mother tongue literacy for young children's learning and development, they perceived the highly structured, academic environments in private kindergartens, where there is a strong focus on learning English language, as reflecting higher 'quality' than that of community-based ECED Centres.

Exacerbating this situation was the lack of structure and infrastructure in existing community-based ECED Centres. Many of the ECED centres that had been established were not functioning well, with little management / organisation, few resources and no learning materials. Centres were operated by people who had no knowledge of early childhood education and, as a result, staff felt disempowered and unmotivated. All these factors resulted in low enrolment rates and no involvement of community members in ECED. In response, Save the Children sought to demonstrate that it is possible to establish productive models for early childhood education in low-resourced environments, by (i) developing a curriculum to support ECED Facilitators that provides clear direction on goals for learning informed by constructivist learning and teaching approaches, (ii) providing training opportunities / support for ECED Facilitators to support them in delivering the curriculum, (iii) emphasising the importance of participation and commitment from communities in improving resources and facilities provided by ECED Centres in order to ensure sustainability, and (iv) working with associated stakeholders such as District Officers of Education; Village Development Committees, and parents, to promote the importance of providing minimum standard ECED programme in remote communities.

As a result of all these inputs, the quality of teaching and learning in ECED centres has improved. A key factor in these results is related to Facilitators' greater confidence and parents' active engagement in their children's learning, as they can see the impact of attendance on their children's literacy and numeracy skills (skills which are valued by parents). This has changed both Facilitators' and parents' perceptions as they can now appreciate the positive impact that ECED can have on children. Attendance rates at ECED centres have improved and these programmes are now recognised by policy makers / politicians as providing a model for ECED learning centres. The centres are now working with government offices, including district authorities and Village Development Committees, to expand access for children to ECED centres and scale up implementation of the new curriculum.

## Description of the approach

In identifying reasons for low enrolment rates in community-based ECED Centres, Save the Children noted the low status of ECED Facilitators, who are often poorly paid, particularly in relation to other teachers and teaching assistants. As many ECED Centres were not operating around a structured programme of learning experiences, parents assumed that their children were not learning anything during their time at the Centres and began to withdraw them. In response, Save the Children sought



to demonstrate that ECED Facilitators can be highly effective in supporting early learning if they are provided with adequate tools, methods and facilities, and, through this focus, raise the profile of both ECED and ECED Facilitators within communities.

The new approach trialled by Save the Children has involved incorporating a stronger focus on supporting children's development in early literacy and mathematics skills, in order to ensure that constructive learning is occurring when children attend community-based ECED Centres. While open-ended, play-based approaches are generally preferred in early childhood settings, it is important to acknowledge the parallel importance of a clear, structured curriculum of learning for young children, particularly in relation to ECED settings located in low-resourced environments: first, ECED teaching and learning in low-resourced environments is supported by Facilitators who are likely to have limited formal training in pedagogy and / or early childhood. While this in itself should not be seen necessarily as a disadvantage, implementing very open-ended (play-based) approaches in ways that also promote and support the development of formal learning skills needed for transitioning into formal learning requires a level of training and experience, as well as clear guidance and support in the form of curriculum documents / learning materials.

In order to support ECED Facilitators, a programme of learning experiences, adapted to suit the local language and context of children attending the Centres, has been developed. Teaching and learning resources to support facilitation of these learning experiences have been developed. Training for Facilitators on how to implement and make effective use of materials has also been provided as part of this approach.



ECED Facilitators who have attended training and have incorporated the new approach in their ECED Centres have noted that parents, community members and teachers can now see the direct benefits for children of attending ECED Centres. Aspects of the focus on early literacy and numeracy have also been incorporated into a Parent Education module that was previously designed by Government. As a result of this pedagogical innovation, the government module has been customised to meet the emerging needs of parent and caregivers, and the new approach has led to increased awareness among parents and caregivers regarding their important role in supporting children in their home environment. This is a new concept in the context of Nepal.

## What makes this approach innovative?

The new teaching and learning approaches, resources and facilities that have been developed as part of 'EtF' are designed specifically to (i) respond to the unique strengths and needs of communities living in remote parts of Nepal; (ii) support ECED Facilitators in delivering effective early childhood education and (iii) promote the importance of early childhood education within communities, by ensuring that parents and key stakeholders are able to see the impact of, and are therefore 'invested in,' early childhood learning experiences.

The 'EtF' approach is innovative in that it acknowledges the importance of addressing multiple contextually-bound facets in enhancing quality. By combining strategies to enhance teaching and learning contexts with a focus on empowering ECED Facilitators and engaging parents and communities, the EtF approach has resulted in changes in perceptions of and attitudes towards ECED, as parents and teachers have come to see more clearly the positive impact of attendance at ECED Centres on their children. This supports the idea of innovation in pedagogy described by Westbrook et al (2013, p. 2), who point out that '*pedagogic practice is developed through interaction between teachers' thinking or attitudes, what they do in the classroom, and what they see as the outcome of their practice*'. According to this idea, positive attitudes towards training and students are likely to support teachers in establishing interactive, constructive learning environments.

This approach is also important as it challenges the idea that replicating a standardised 'ideal' model, (i.e. in the case, the so-called 'Montessori' approach) necessarily results in 'high quality'. A key aspect of the 'EtF' initiative is customised training and on-going support provided for ECED Facilitators, specifically designed to support delivery of the EtF early childhood curriculum, as follows:

The training package is based on the content of training for early childhood workers provided by the government and is conducted over a period of 12 days. Importantly, the training is residential, meaning that ECED Facilitators have opportunities to spend time with each other and share ideas during the 12 days of training. During this time, they can share challenges as well as solutions. The training covers three main areas: i) principle and theory; ii) micro teaching, and iii) materials development. ECED Facilitators also receive on-going support following the training sessions.

- Teaching and learning materials are developed during workshops for and by ECED Facilitators, as part of their training. These directly support the teaching and learning objectives outlined in the new curriculum and include the development of letter cards; word cards; a revised time table for children; local stories; number games; rhymes; a practice workbook for children. Training also incorporates guidance for Facilitators on how to create effective learning environments, including how to use learning corners to support early literacy and numeracy skills.





- Facilitators (who receive the minimum required, standardised training provided by Government) have also been provided with additional training from Save the Children on Early Literacy and Math skills and the use of tools and methods that form part of the new curriculum.
- Facilitators receive regular Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and meet on a periodic basis to discuss their teaching. Save the Children now provides *focused*, aligned input that responds directly to the new teaching and learning approach / curriculum.
- ‘Thematic meetings’ involving ECED Facilitators on a periodic basis that focus on key issues so that they can share ‘best practice’ and identify solutions for any problems they encounter. These meetings are conducted on a rotational basis and attendees can also get to see classroom teaching practice of ‘good’ ECED centres. These visits serve the purpose of exposure visits.
- As part of the new curriculum, a parent education package has been introduced into ECED settings. This is an integrated package which complements the existing government parent education package but also adds a focus on skills related to supporting children’s learning through every day activities in the home. The training is designed to promote awareness of early literacy and numeracy skills and includes provision of books for use in the home. Parents also receive support in how to introduce print materials to young children, particularly parents who may not be literate themselves. Whereas the original Government package focused largely on health and nutrition of young children, this new parent education package includes a strong focus on the importance of engaged participation of parents in children’s learning.



As a result of the training and support package, Facilitators have gained confidence in applying the teaching techniques taught directly following their training. They have started to develop and collect learning materials at their local level and are also developing skills in setting up learning centres within their classrooms. The following quotes, taken from practicing Facilitators and their supervisors from Baglung and Rolpa, reflect the impact of the training package:

*(Before 'Educate the Future')... We did not have any idea about ECED and we ran ECED classes in narrow rooms with (only) some plastic mats but after... organized a joint meeting with parents, the ECED Management Committee and teachers about issues of ECED and ways to improve, now our ECED Centres have been used as a model ECED of the ...Village Development Committee.*

*We see the changes in our Facilitator's teaching approach: it is quite different than before. These days our Facilitator uses teaching materials while teaching. She loves to teach children and no longer disciplines them through physical punishment...it used to be too structured like the Montessori of Kathmandu.*

Quotes from Head Teachers

As well as introducing a new, structured learning approach (including provision of a programme of learning experiences, along with appropriate materials and resources) and involving key stakeholders in the process of developing it, the 'EtF' approach incorporates a set of initiatives designed to enhance community engagement in ECED. For example, communities are involved in updating ECED buildings and facilities via district-level 'ECED Committees' and community-level 'ECED Building Development Committees'. In addition, in some communities where there are high numbers of children and families at risk of poverty and marginalisation, incentives for income generation to support development and sustainability of ECED Centres have been introduced. These include providing funds for community members to purchase goats, with income generated being used to support purchase of materials for the Centres and to invest for children's future education.



## Personal Stories – Mandip

At the time of writing this case narrative, Mandip (pictured here with his grandparents) is four years old. He lives with his mother and grandparents in a village located in Baglung district. His father is currently working overseas. Since he was a baby, Mandip has experienced difficulties with mobility. According to his parents, Mandip was not able to walk until

he was two and a half years old, and this impacted on his social development. Mandip's worried parents had at one point considered sending him to boarding school, but a member of the ECED Management Committee advised the otherwise: 'I am

a teacher in a private boarding school. Mandip's parents wanted to enrol him in a boarding school. I am their neighbour too. But I suggested that they enrol him in the ECED Centre as I knew the environment of the ECED Centre....'

When he first came to the ECED Centre 18 months ago, Mandip found settling in very difficult and was not able to make friends with other children. However, during his time at the Centre, Mandip's life has improved considerably and he now participates fully in daily activities. As his teacher, the ECED Facilitator at the Centre explains:

*'(When he came to the Centre, Mandip)... could neither walk nor speak. He used to eat with two hands. He did not like to sit with friends. He now plays and interacts with friends and me. He names objects and materials, uses one hand to eat and shares learning materials with friends. He tells me when he needs to use the toilet, and washes his hands after he uses it. He tries to sing rhymes too. I also give extra time to interact with him. This has helped his holistic development.'*

Mandip's mother also notes the benefits that Mandip has gained from attending the Centre:

*He did not speak or walk at home. We used to carry him on our back to leave him at the Centre. Nowadays he walks home. He carries his bag to the*



*ECED Centre. He shares whatever he learns in the ECED Centre. He washes his hands and mouth himself and is able to identify numbers. He makes sounds imitating dogs and cats. He has not met his father for a year, because his father is abroad. He talks to his father on the 'phone and tells him to bring home sweets! He likes to help me with my work. He brushes*

*his teeth himself. I have made a ball of cloth at home and he plays with it. When he was first taken to the ECED Centre, he could not even stand properly. But now he walks to the Centre and plays games. This is possible only because of the child-friendly and motivational environment of the ECED Centre.'*

Mandip's story is extremely important.

Very often, children with developmental delay or disabilities in Nepal are excluded from mainstream settings. Due to stigma, they are often kept at home or sent away to boarding school (as Mandip's case indicates). The role of ECED Centres in (i) breaking down stigma and (ii) illustrating to parents how powerful ECED can be in supporting learning and development needs of all children, particularly in places where disability continues to result in exclusion, is invaluable.

The 'EtF' initiative has been supporting the ECED Centre that Mandip attends, in partnership with Seto Gurans (a local non-government organisation that supports early childhood initiatives throughout Nepal), since 2014. During that time, the Centre has grown as an important part of the community, with on-going efforts to ensure that it provides a child-friendly, supportive place for children and parents to meet and learn. These have included provision of training for ECED Facilitators and development of learning materials; construction of a fence around the Centre to ensure safety; establishment and development of an ECED Management Committee; orientation session for parents, and distribution of tiffin boxes to encourage parents to send their children to the Centre with healthy food.



## Conclusion: Achievements and where to from here?

The 'innovative pedagogical approach' described here sought primarily to support ECED Facilitators through introduction of an enhanced programme of learning experiences for children, with provision of appropriate learning materials and resources to support effective implementation. Save the Children sought to support children from very remote, low-resourced areas of Nepal to achieve the skills that are required of them when they enter into formal learning settings. Many children in Nepal enter school with a learning disadvantage in that when they enter Grade One, they have not been supported in developing adequate basic literacy and numeracy skills. As the Government of Nepal is introducing

a nationwide reading programme (National Early Grade Reading Programme), Save the Children sought to ensure that all children are provided with opportunities to gain these basic skills before they start formal schooling.

*I hope for my child to get proper education and hope he becomes a doctor someday. I hope for him to return to the village and serve its people ...'*

*(Mother of child who attends an ECED Centre)*

ECED Facilitators involved in the programme have reported that now they feel more confident to explain to parents and other teachers the purpose of ECED and how it benefits children. They also feel more confident about explaining and justifying the methods they use to teach. They can link each

of the activities conducted in ECED Centres to building foundational skills in children and report that through games, rhymes and songs and books, oral conversation, playing with sticks and stones, children are learning basic skills in early literacy and mathematics. Furthermore, Facilitators also have expressed that they feel their status as early childhood educators within the community has changed. Whereas before they were considered primarily as helpers, or carers, now they are recognized having an important role in supporting and facilitating the development of early learning skills in young children. Facilitators have come to realise that language is the key foundation for early learning skills, and parents have understood that they can play a crucial role in supporting their children at home, whether or not they are literate themselves. Primary school teachers have shared their perception that children who have come from ECED Centres are doing better in grades one and two.

In terms of broader impacts on children and communities, the various complementary initiatives that have accompanied this innovative pedagogical approach have achieved the following:

- A large number of children aged 3 & 4 years in these remotely located communities have had the opportunity to learn in a child friendly ECED classroom with sufficient space and light. A total of 100 ECED buildings with toilet and water facilities have been constructed.
- The number of children enrolling in the newly constructed ECED Centres is increasing rapidly.
- The ECED Centres are contributing significantly to improved inclusion: of the total enrolled children this year, almost half were from families at risk of marginalisation (Dalits and Janajatis). Similarly, a large number of children with disabilities have also enrolled in the ECED Centres.
- 20 new ECED centres (Baglung-10, Rolpa-10) have become operational after completion of construction work. These new centres have been providing safe and stimulating learning environment to the children.
- Compared to non-ECED background children, ECED graduates are seen as more disciplined, interactive, neat and tidy, and more responsible and caring. They are also attending primary school classes more regularly.

- All ECED Centres in Etf project areas now have established codes of conduct. These codes of conduct have made ECED Management Committee Members, Facilitators, parents and children more aware of their roles and responsibilities.
- Since 2015, all the ECED Centres have begun to maintain individual files on children, noting development and health information, in Baglung and Rolpa. Each child's file includes records such as personal information, thematic evaluation, and developmental progress updated on a six monthly basis.
- Almost all children attending the ECED Centres have also received basic health services (Deworming, Vitamin-A, Immunization).
- ALL ECED Centre Facilitators have started to develop learning materials by using local materials.
- A total of 97 mobile meetings were organized during 2015, where Facilitators from all the ECED Centres had opportunities to share knowledge, best practices and skills on preparing teaching materials. These mobile meetings took place on a rotation basis for each ECED within the Village Development Committees (VDC), and usually all the Facilitators working in the same VDC came together. During the meetings, Facilitators developed learning materials, and prepared action plans for future meetings, after review of their previous action plans. These meetings have served as an important learning and sharing forum for the Facilitators.
- 15 ECEDs have been promoted as model ECEDs in Rolpa. Therefore, in addition to cater ECED service in the community, these model centres have been hub of learning for people from other villages and districts.
- During 2015, 4 CEDs in Baglung and Rolpa were awarded by District Education Office (DEO) for their role as model ECED centre and model ECED Facilitator.





- Parent participation in different activities has increased i.e. parents are managing Tiffin (snacks) or day meals for children; they are participating in meetings, and developing learning materials at local level etc.
- DEO (District Education Office) released funds for ECED on time after a series of coordination meetings and joint visits to ECED centres.

## Next Steps

### ***Building on the success of these programmes, future plans and next steps include:***

- Replication of learning and good practice in other districts
- Scaling up of the approach in the district in collaboration with the District Education Office by incorporating the same approach in the District Education Plan
- Documentation of the results to share with the internal and external stakeholders for advocacy



## About the Video

This video begins with a scene that sets the context, the mountainous regions of Nepal, providing a view of the remoteness of communities where the pedagogical innovations documented here are taking place.

There are scenes of a brightly painted ECED Centre, where children are playing outside on play equipment that has been built using locally-sourced materials, by community members. There is also a clip of children learning inside a classroom. Their 'teacher' is teaching them songs and games. The classroom looks well-resourced, with toys, paper, pens and a book corner.

An ECED Facilitator shares her thoughts in an interview about how ECED Centres in her community have improved as a result of this innovation, explaining that whereas children did not like attending the Centre before, now they hurry their caregivers to bring them early.

The video narration mentions the use of 'curriculum-based', 'learning by doing' approaches, highlighting important aspects of the innovation, which has involved development and implementation of a customised early childhood curriculum. She also mentions 'literacy development' and mathematics skills' as important aspects of the teaching and learning approach.

There is a clip of children learning through the use of a combination of locally-sourced / made and 'imported' learning materials. An ECED Facilitator who is interviewed explains the importance of incorporating 'local'



materials in children's learning, specifically in terms of supporting development of writing skills, as it helps their understanding if they can engage with materials that they are familiar with.

There is a clip of children at an ECED Centre eating snacks out of 'tiffin' boxes (a snack box widely used in Nepal) and the narrator explains that parents whose children attend

are encouraged to send their children to school with healthy food.

One of the ECED Facilitators who has attended training explains how her practice has changed: since attending training, she has started to use more 'play-based' approaches in her teaching, reflecting an earlier comment by another teacher: 'instead of going straight to the alphabet, we use toys...children get to learn contextually by listening to stories, songs and poems'.

The video includes an interview with a parent who explains that communities have been encouraged to set up 'investment funds' to support their children's education, for both now and into the future.

The video ends with photographs of ECED Facilitators attending a 'sharing session', where they are making learning materials together. This is followed by an interview with one of the Programme Leaders associated with the innovation, who describes the positive impact of the enhanced curriculum, ECED Facilitator confidence and competence and community engagement on children and their learning.



## Discussion Points

1. Discuss your understanding of 'curriculum-based' and 'learning by doing', based on the video clip and narrative.
2. The ECED Facilitator interviewed mentions that it is important to provide opportunities for children to have access to locally-made materials that they are familiar with to support their learning. Why do you think this is important?
3. In what ways does this 'case' illustrate the importance of pedagogical approaches that emphasise close community involvement in efforts to enhance early childhood education provision and practice (i.e. what factors supported the international agency in making sure that the ECED programme was accepted by parents and the community)? Why is this integration of community and ECED settings important in contexts like the ones depicted in this video? How might this apply to your own setting?
4. The key feature of this innovative pedagogical approach has been the development of a 'structured' curriculum that guides ECED Facilitators, along with resources and training to support its implementation. Why do you think these are important for (i) building ECED Facilitator confidence and (ii) enabling parents to see the value of ECED for their children?
5. What have you learned from this approach and how can you make use of this new knowledge in your own context?

## References

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*Photos courtesy of G21 Production, Nepal*

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# Innovative Pedagogies

Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano (New Zealand)



# Innovative Pedagogies

## Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano (New Zealand)

*'Our hopes are for children to leave Te Puna Reo confident to stand strong in both Maori and Pakeha (non-Maori) worlds'*

### Introduction

Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano is an urban early childhood centre, based in Wellington, New Zealand. The centre, whose names translates as the *fountain/spring of the language of the young seeds*, offers early childhood education and care for children aged zero to school age with an overriding focus of *kaupapa Māori*: the purpose of putting things into a culturally Māori perspective. To meet this aim, the centre delivers a 'place-based' education that pays attention to the interweaving of culture, location and sustainability. Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano aims to teach and live the traditional ways of the Māori indigenous culture while using the Māori language to contribute to the revitalization of the Māori culture and language.

Te reo Māori (the Māori language) is one of the two official languages of New Zealand (Māori and NZ sign) but English is the predominant language. Although there was an obligation through The Treaty of Waitangi (1840) that would ensure the Maori language and culture would be maintained, this was not upheld. Strong actions were taken to stop children speaking Māori in schools resulting in a critical loss of language. While Māori was only made an official language in 1987, in 2016, with rising immigration from diverse ethnic groups and a continuing dependence on English as the main language of daily communication, it is a struggle to sustain support for Māori culture

*Our vision at Te Puna Reo is to review and clarify what a sense of Maori identity means for our teachers and our families and measure how well we are delivering to their aspirations.*

*How can we sustain the connection to iwi and the past for each whānau while fostering the connection to natural life in this urban based centre? The outcome of this is to broaden our reach to the parents as well as our children and to foster the Māori community network so that it may continue to fulfil the families even well after they leave Te Puna Reo.*

*(Erin, Centre manager of Te Puna Reo)*



and the Māori language within the wider community. Immersion Māori schools such as Te Puna Reo therefore have a key role in sustaining Māori language and NZ's commitment to indigenous Māori.

The development of the pedagogical approach was driven by the vision of a small group of families and teachers who imagined a new approach to Māori-language early childhood education for their children. The families had been attending a *language nest/Māori-language immersion* early childhood programme, but wanted the opportunity to integrate the language aspect with elements of high quality early education derived from a range of perspectives, but used with a Māori cultural focus. Many families who were living and growing up in urban Wellington were away from the iwi/clan from which they descended. Therefore, it was important for them to have a link to their Māori-ness and to sustain the type of cultural relationships vital to Māori culture. While Māori-language early childhood 'nests' played an important role in Wellington, some families felt excluded from these early childhood options because they didn't speak Māori themselves. Others believed that the focus on language needed to be balanced with other vital elements of Māori culture and history or these may be lost.

For these families, of central importance was that their children grow up strong in themselves as Māori, or able to stand strong as non-Māori, in a Māori world. The vision meant taking the best out of both worlds - Māori and Pakeha/non-Māori - and to be able to benefit from opportunities from mainstream education such as professional development. The families and teachers wanted to create a centre of learning for parents, teachers and tamariki/children but also for others to come and see what they do and take something away that they might share with Māori children in their centre or other indigenous cultures.





The staff and families of Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano regard their centre as a Māori community of learning that has been created for not only the children but, over time, has become a Māori cultural hub for families and staff as well. Many adults who have lost the reo/language in their family are beginning to bring it back with their child, as they are able to use Te Puna Reo as a place of learning and support for themselves. Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano strives to be a safe, community space for people to learn, share, practise their language and elements of protocol such as the formal act of speaking (as on a marae) or karanga (the traditional call onto a marae).

## Description of the approach

The Te Puna Reo pedagogical approach is based on an integration of contemporary early childhood practice with traditional (pre-colonization) Māori belief systems and practices. This integration relies heavily on building a connection with nature and local landmarks, demonstrating respect for the environment and using old practices that ensure it is kept clean and well so it can be used as a resource in a reciprocal relationship between people, spiritual beings and the earth. The educational programme is child-driven, meaning children are empowered to pursue their own interests and learning desires at their own rate, and according to their own capabilities. This approach, which reflects the principles of the New Zealand National Early Childhood Curriculum, Te Whariki, is interwoven through a view of Māori guardians/spiritual beings combining the old traditional with modern, urban living. The approach has the following defining features:

**Te Reo Māori** is used in daily conversations with the children and between the staff. While the adults involved in the programme have different levels of proficiency in the Māori language, efforts are made to use Te Reo Māori as the primary language in the centre.

**Place and relationship-based education:** The centre provides experiences to children, families and staff which are aimed at developing their sense of identity. A sense of identity for Māori is very closely linked to the iwi/clan you come from and the relationship to the land where they were born and from which they came. This connection to the land includes important landmarks such as rivers, mountains and sea and is called their turangawaewae; the place they stand strong. The families at Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano are rarely born and raised on their whenua/land these days and may identify closely with the landmarks of where they live and grow up, referring to this as their turangawaewae. Despite this, it is vital for Māori to be familiar with their iwi connections as part of their identity and to look back into the past to be able to move into the future, carrying important ancestral knowledge and connections with us for future generations.

To this aim, the centre weaves cultural ways of being throughout their day-to-day programme. Many experiences for children and families reflect traditional and contemporary Māori celebrations, stories, rituals and rules. There is also a focus on experiencing Pakeha/non-Māori celebrations, practices and traditions through a Māori perspective, so that the children and families come to develop a strong sense of identity within the contemporary New Zealand and global society.

**Nature Education:** An integral part of the pedagogical approach is its focus on the connections with nature. The centre participates regularly in experiences that aim at developing a connection to nature and the land, and traditional Māori knowledge is integrated with a contemporary focus on

*Fostering a healthy sense of self with a confident identity for our children who are Māori is about weaving their past; the place and the people they descend from (their whakapapa/ genealogy, their tipuna/ ancestors, their iwi/ clan, their whānau/ family) with their present; where they are now, important landmarks and stories, important people they are growing up and learning with in this community in today's world.*

*Erin. Manager, Te Puna Reo*

*In our traditional belief system of creation, humans are born of the spirit beings that guard and protect the natural world. Paptuanuku is our Earth Mother and the matriarch of all things, Ranginui our sky Father is the balancing patriarch. So it is vital for us to have nature in our centre and go out into natural settings as much as possible for children to develop strong relationships and take part in looking after the environment, such as 'National Seaweed' and 'Keep NZ Beautiful' cleanup days. These are annual events but we rarely go out into the bush without collecting rubbish spontaneously. When we take these trips out we will mihi/greet or do a karakia/prayer like chant, to our atua/gods.*

*Erin, Director, Te Puna Reo*

environmental sustainability to promote a deep, respectful and caring appreciation of the land. Experiences include weekly walks around the community's predominantly natural settings such as forest areas, people-made parks and also the local shops and school; Regular trips further afield to the local stream, mountain, sea and local meeting house; regular gardening for beauty, health and food; and sustainability practices such as composting, worm farming, harvesting and preparing food. Through these experiences, the centre aims to instil in children, families and staff a respect for the environment; drawing on old practices that ensure it is kept clean and well so it can be used as a resource in a reciprocal relationship between people, spiritual beings and the earth.

## What makes this approach innovative?

### **Cultural sustainability**

Over time, the centre has developed many tikanga or 'protocol /ways of doing things' in the everyday. This is not always easy, as staff come from different cultural backgrounds, have different knowledge about Māori ways, and different proficiencies with the reo/language. Cultural practices have also changed over time, so it is often difficult to reach consensus about the origins of particular practices. However, as a team, the centre has always provided opportunities for reflective discussions about the way in which practices should be included into the curriculum. The staff discuss and decide how and why we might do things in a certain way as different iwi will have different ways. As a centre with people from many iwi all across Aotearoa the staff must decide on the tikanga for Te

Puna Reo that fits us best and is still representative of a Māori reason for how we do things. The centre has created some formal rituals and celebrations, holding events for families and powhiri (formal welcome) for visitors to be able to live and learn Māori tradition, in order that tamariki can practise what they might have in old times when they were more likely to spend time daily at their marae.



### Environmental Sustainability

From a Māori view, environmental sustainability is central to a traditional way of living. Caring for the environment, its ocean, land and natural resources, is seen as a cultural and spiritual obligation to the atua/gods and to our tipuna/ancestors. An example is, when taking harakeke/flax from a plant to use for weaving, there are strict protocols to follow to ensure respect for the plant, for the atua/gods and to ensure good health of the plant. To do this there must be a good understanding of the plant and what each part represents. In the Māori world, nature helps people to understand themselves as humans and their relationships with other people, places and things. Every part of this plant represents a part of a family tree and so when leaves are cut for use, a karakia/ prayer-like chant is said, the babies are kept protected and any of the remains that cannot be used for weaving are carefully returned to lie under the plant to decompose and add its nutrients to the plant and the family members on the plant who are still living.

Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano is a member of the Enviroschools programme funded through the Ministry of Education. This provides the centre with resources, networking, people and goal setting support to become more sustainable and to find more ways to share this so our children will know the current issues and how to live harmoniously with the natural world.

### Fostering holistic relationships through nature education

The Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano approach centres around the principle that connections are made through relationships and this involves teaching children the traditional way of standing and speaking about their whakapapa / geneological meaning; where they come from and who they are related to. This will ensure that now and in the future they can make important connections with other people and places, thus creating a relationship to people. In an urban context with families from all over the country the children are supported to learn their identity as Māori but also their iwi identity, their whānau identity and where they, as individuals, fit into this picture.

As an example, when families start at Te Puna Reo, they are asked to provide details of their pepeha; their mountain, river, boat, iwi, and family connections. A folder is kept of each child's details so that each morning a teacher can support children to stand and say their pepeha in front of their





group (a traditional practise when meeting new people). They gradually begin to remember it without prompts, everyone gets to know more about them and sometimes they play games that help them to see who may share the same iwi or mountain. The centre has also developed a centre pepeha making reference to our local river, mountain, sea and a traditional old story from this area. Children can choose to use this to add to their own to make the links to this place in which they are growing up. This can be used as a tool/means of fostering and providing a wāhi tūrangawaewae / 'place to stand' for non-Māori students because without it they may not otherwise be able to 'place themselves' to a geological landmark/geographical place in the same way as can our Māori students.

The relationship aspect also resonates strongly through the Environmental Sustainability thread as Te Puna Reo believes deeply that if people develop a strong relationship with nature (and hence, the spiritual beings or atua/gods), then a love for and desire to protect nature and the environment will follow.





## Personal Stories – An Interview with Mahea

**Mahea Tomoana** is a fulltime teacher at Te Puna Reo, recently qualified in teaching Early Childhood. He is a father of two children who are 2 ½ years and 7mths of age, and has worked at Te Puna Reo for four years.

**Tell me a bit about yourself and where you have come from:**

From a very young age I grew up as Māori, comfortable in both worlds. My mother is pakeha and father is Māori. I grew up on the marae and saw my Grandfather, my father and uncles speaking (whaikorero). My cousins and I always had jobs to do like helping prepare hangi/food for manuhiri (guests/visitors), making beds in the whare nui, entertaining guests with kapahaka, mowing lawns/gardening etc. It was a real whānau affair and everybody had a role to play, from the very oldest down to the youngest and we learnt this from a very young age. There wasn't much Māori spoken in my home although my father speaks it and has tutored adults so the main reo I heard was on the marae and most often in formal occasions in formal speak.

I went to a mainstream primary and then to Rudolph Steiner until high school so had a firm stand in the pakeha world as well. I took it upon myself to join a reo Māori class and kapahaka at the age of 15 and this was my first formal learning of the language as it was during this time that I started to think about expectations of me and my role on the marae. In the final year of high school I was honoured with the role of Head Boy, the first Māori head boy so I had a real sense of responsibility, I was a role model and mentor for other young Māori students. After completing high school I left home and moved to Queenstown to work in the ski industry which opened many doors and allowed me to travel and work overseas. It was at this time, as I experienced and lived among different cultures that I really began to appreciate, find comfort and feel proud in my identity as Māori.

After many years working in Pakeha organisations, I decided to become an early childhood teacher and approached Te Puna Reo for work as I applied to study. I felt confident in who I was and where I was from but had been living away from my whānau and marae for quite some time so I felt out of touch.

**What have been some life changes in your journey since you joined the whānau at Te Puna Reo?**

Going back to school, the day I started as a teacher in ECE was the day I started study as well. It was all new. In the first semester of my degree we spent a lot of time looking at who we are and where we come from and what kind of teacher we want to be. The children I worked with at Te Puna Reo were the vehicles for understanding more, how significant this type of centre is to maintaining identity for Māori. It was re-establishing those connections to identity and culture. It put me in a better place for helping others- understanding why we do what we do, as adults in this environment simulating a traditional Māori community.

**How would you describe your sense of identity now?**

It has definitely been a lifelong journey and I now feel very proud and comfortable in my skin. There's a lot of strength that comes from this 'knowing', once you gain an understanding of all those ancestors and stories that have come before you, and make up who you are- it's very empowering. That has helped me really know the journey that I am on with my tamariki and their whānau and the experiences I am sharing because I have lived it, and I am sure that it is a good thing, a good way to be. Even if their turangawaewae is at the other end of the country I know they can feel it is a part of them. It feels awesome for me as an individual, but also because my daughter is here in this centre on this same journey. When I was a teenager there was a time that I didn't want to be on the marae and I turned my back on it. I know now that it is so important to build the foundation for our tamariki under five so that if later they choose to pursue other things then they have a foundation and the knowledge they need to continue on their cultural journey.

**Mahea's pepeha**

*Ko Kahuranaki te maunga  
Ko Ngaruroro te awa  
Ko Takitimu te waka  
Ko Tamatea Ariki Nui te tangata  
Ko Ngati Kahungunu te iwi  
Ko Ngati Hori me Ngati  
Hawea nga hapu  
Ko Waipatu te Marae*

### Personal Stories – An Interview with Mahea

**How do you sustain your connection to your turangawaewae, to your iwitanga, how do you sustain your reo?**

It's made easier because my whānau still live on my turangawaewae, on the pa/ village and we make regular trips back otherwise it is for more formal occasions like tangi/funerals and birthdays. My marae is really active with events and hosting other groups. It is humming with activity. It has a huge dining hall and kitchen, a kohanga Reo, a Church, a rugby club and Bar and also a huge food garden that my aunty runs and teaches others to grow organically. It is free for anyone to pick food to use.

For me and my daughter, I am telling her stories and songs from our own whakapapa to help maintain that connection. Through the stories and songs, our reo is being sustained, but first and foremost it is being here (Te Puna Reo) speaking and listening to others.

I have been developing my reo in my role as kaikorero/ formal speaker at Te Puna Reo which helps me connect not only with my reo but with my whānau; I watched so many of them speaking on the marae as a child. My father is super pleased for me to be learning reo and to have studied to become a teacher, to be learning to korero formally at powhiri.

### Conclusion: Achievements and next steps?

*How can we sustain the connection to iwi and the past for each whānau while fostering the connection to natural life in this urban based centre? The outcome of this is to broaden our reach to the parents as well as our children and to foster the Māori community network so that it may continue to fulfil the families even well after they leave Te Puna Reo.*

The programme achievements can be seen through the connections that are made within and between the centre and the community. The programme is also seeing great gains in regards to community connections and the adoption of the Te Reo Māori by the families and children. Many children, once they finish school, continue their education in Māori immersion settings, and the Te Puna Reo community maintains in contact once the children are at school. A thorough transition to school process has impacted on how local schools receive new children with an enhanced awareness of children's cultural backgrounds.

The centre uses multiple modes of face-to-face and online communication to let families know about their children's experiences and learning at the centre. This has resulted in changes in home practices related to environmental sustainability, including waste reduction, buying Fair Trade goods and participation in community consideration activities. Through their programme, Te Puna Reo is developing ever stronger connections with the local community. The children are known and welcomed into local businesses, and community members donate resources and time to the centre.

### Next steps

Te Puna Reo's broad visions for the future are to:

- continue to improve the environmental sustainability aspect of their programme so that they no longer need to use the Enviroschool programme to foster the ability for all to live and teach a sustainable life.
- continue to review and clarify what a sense of Māori identity means for the families and teachers, and to measure how well they are delivering to their aspirations.
- develop stronger connections to the particular landmarks and pockets of natural space nearby. They would like to have one day a week to travel to the local glade for longer periods as part of the weekly curriculum, no matter the weather and to learn more about the history of the area, from a Māori perspective.

## About the Video

The video about Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano commences with footage of a small group of children and their teacher, Mahea Tomoana, counting apples. They are speaking Te Reo Māori, the official indigenous language of New Zealand. Introductions follow from Erin Robertson, Te Puna Reo's centre manager, and teacher, Mahea. They introduce themselves in two languages – Te Reo Māori and English – and by doing so, emphasise one of the key elements of the centre programme – the promotion of Māori language and culture within contemporary New Zealand society. The programme is identified as 'place-based' in that it seeks to promote in children, families and staff, a strong and proud sense of identity through connections to both community and the land. Mahea explains how the Māori cultural identity is firmly interwoven with connections to community and land – to one's family, tribe and environmental landmarks such as rivers, mountains and the sea. He explains how maintaining these connections provides Māori families with a means to establish and maintain Māori identity in their children. In this way, the Māori culture will be strengthened and sustained.

The video is interspersed with footage of children, from toddlers to pre-schoolers, engaging in cultural songs, prayers and rituals. We see children chanting and singing traditional songs, watching their teachers intently as they imitate the traditional movements. In this way, cultural practices are passed down from older to younger generations. The video also demonstrates how the programme establishes connections

to the local community. One of the regular walks is featured, during which children visit both urban and natural areas near to their centre. During this walk, the children perform traditional greetings and prayer, learn traditional rope weaving skills and explore their environment. Environmental activities feature strongly, as the traditional Māori value of caring for and sustaining the land is woven through all elements of the programme. You may notice a balance between children's engagement in cultural practices and child-led experiences, during which children pursue their own interests and curiosities. There is evidence of children's deep engagement as they participate in the rituals and learn from their teachers. This segment concludes with Mahea and a young child emerging from the bushes, pulling each other with a rope that they have used to climb the bank. The previous serious involvement in rope-making has turned into boisterous fun!

Mahea describes how these experiences are a central link to the traditional Māori belief system – their story of creation:

*Caring for the ocean, the land, the natural resources is seen as a cultural and spiritual obligation to the Atua, or Gods, and to our Te Puna – our ancestors.'*

We see the children acknowledging and greeting the traditional Gods during their regular walk. The importance of establishing links to the environment is illustrated in footage of the children gardening, composing, recycling and preparing fruit to eat. Centre manager, Erin, explains how the aim is to support and understanding of the cycle of life.

## About the Video

In this programme, Māori is used as the primary language. However, Erin explains that the Māori language proficiency of the children and staff varies, so English is used as a support language. The video shows how teachers and children switch seamlessly between the two languages. Also

featured is the ritual of introductions, in which children are taught the traditional ways of talking about their genealogy – where they come from and who they are related to. In this way, the programme promotes children's connection to their families and communities, as well as connections to the land.

## Discussion Points

1. A major aim of Te Puna Reo o Nga Kakano is to promote and preserve the Māori language and customs as a means of cultural identity. How applicable are these aims and methods to your own setting?
2. This approach seeks to use traditional Māori knowledge and practices to address contemporary social and environmental issues in New Zealand society. What might be the benefit of blending traditional with contemporary practices in your own setting, and how could you go about doing this?
3. Discuss why a connection with the environment, and promotion of environmental sustainability, are central to the aims of this pedagogical approach? How might this apply to your own programme?
4. The programme balances child-lead experiences with adult-lead cultural practices and rituals. Thinking specifically about your own setting, discuss (i) the importance of adult-directed and child-directed learning and (ii) challenges that are related to implementing these different approaches.
5. What have you learned from this approach and how can you make use of this new knowledge in your own context?

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# Innovative Pedagogies

Broadclass Listen to Learn (Pakistan)



# Innovative Pedagogies

## Broadclass Listen to Learn (Pakistan)

*'None of them want to miss a single lesson. They wait for Broad Class lesson very anxiously. I feel good when I help them. I must say that Broad Class is doing a great service. It is spreading light of learning in every corner.'*

Local school teacher in Haripur

### Introduction

The 'Broadclass – Listen to Learn' Programme is an interactive, pedagogical approach for improving literacy, numeracy and healthy habits among young school-aged children (KG-Grade II) of marginalized communities. The programme is implemented in the public schools of Islamabad, Abbottabad and District Haripur (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province) and District Vehari (Southern Punjab). The programme uses daily radio broadcasts to bring student-centred instruction covering the basic skills in the National Curriculum (including literacy, numeracy, English and life skills) into the classroom.

In Pakistan, there are widespread concerns about poor academic achievement and school attendance, particularly that of girls and children living in rural areas. The education sector has weak governance and budget constraints, schools lack resources, and teachers are ill-trained and often lack accountability. These constraints are compounded by the entrenched use of pedagogical practices not suited to very young children: classes are teacher-led, have limited teacher-child interaction, and lessons focus on skill transfer, often through rote learning, with little space for children to explore ideas outside the realm of the text book. Gender inequities occur because parents of girls often do not favour sending their girls to schools because of accessibility and cultural barriers.

'Broadclass – Listen to Learn' was designed as an outreach programme to improve the quality, equity and inclusiveness of education. With the ultimate goal of improving school achievements, the approach aims to:

*The key to pulling Pakistan out of this critical situation lies in the equitable provision of quality education to all people, irrespective of gender and sector-wise discrepancies.*

Fakhira Najib, Chief Executive,  
POWER99 Foundation

- improve attendance, especially among girls and those children in ‘hard to reach’ rural areas
- improve quality of teachers through several capacity building measures
- promote child centred practices at primary level in the target areas and reduce dropout
- Improve the classroom learning environment and provision of learning materials
- Sensitize parents, community and teachers to the importance of girls’ education and health.

## Description of the approach

The Power99 Foundation developed the ‘Broadclass – Listen to Learn’ Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) approach, which delivers daily 45-minutes radio broadcasts promoting active learning and are designed to improve educational quality and teaching practices in schools. Radio lessons guide the teacher and students through activities, games, and exercises that teach carefully organized knowledge and skills. During short pauses built into the radio scripts, teachers and students participate in the radio programme, reacting verbally and physically to questions and exercises posed by the radio characters. In this way, IRI exposes learners to regular, curriculum-based content and models effective teaching and activities for teachers.

With geographical, environmental and energy-resource constraints in mind, special wooden radios with rechargeable dry batteries, built-in sound systems, and USB/memory card options were designed and provided to classrooms. With the approval of the Federal, Provincial and District Education Departments, and the cooperation of individual school leadership bodies, this allows FM radio to broadcast 152 days across the academic year, providing 2 introductory lessons and 75 lessons for each grade level. The programme is also publically broadcasted and thus benefits out-of-school children, teachers of non-formal/private schools, parents and members of school councils/communities and the general population.

POWER99 Foundation through its partner Radio broadcasts 45 minute lessons daily on a timetable agreed with school management. The content of the programme is mapped out on the basis of Pakistan’s national curriculum, and the broadcast’s scope, sequencing and master plan has been developed by curriculum experts, IRI specialists, professional scriptwriters and primary school teachers who collaboratively develop the content and generate activities and story ideas for programmes. The sequence and content of each broadcast is presented below:

Segment	Duration (minutes)	Description
1. Prayer (dua)	Prayer (dua)	Prayer on Love, Peace and Harmony written by National Poet (Allama Iqbal).
2. Aaj ki Achi Baat (Tip of the day )	Aaj ki Achi Baat (Tip of the day )	Doctor/Expert interactive message on health / hygiene and social/moral values.
3. Thematic Lesson	Thematic Lesson	The lesson starts first with review of previous lesson and then the selected themes of content starts through verbal activity, physical activity, performing/singing rhyme based on the specific theme of programme.
4. Teacher Guide	Teacher Guide	Guide includes preamble of next day lesson and required teaching aids.
5. National song	National song	The lesson ends with playing of national song for smooth transition from broadcast-based to teacher-lead learning.



The curriculum content is delivered through a series of structured learning lessons/ episodes in which students are prompted to respond, do individual and group work, and perform a learning task. The programmes have been designed to promote high interactivity amongst teachers, children and radio characters. Every lesson has rhyme segments that reinforce math and literacy or health concepts taught in the programme



for the day. The application of student-centred strategies such as cooperative learning is strongly encouraged. 'Broadclass- Listen to Learn' also emphasises links between educational domains and content areas. Scientific knowledge (dependent upon vocabulary building), cultural practices and arts are taught through the performance of rhymes about letters/numbers in traditional styles. Inquiry, curiosity/ excitement about learning are communicated in each programme. The Broadcast is facilitated by the provision of resource materials and a teacher guide which supports the teacher in supporting the smooth delivery of the content.

## What makes this approach innovative?

### A child-centred, holistic, culturally relevant approach

*The radio programme supports teaching by making learning more fun for the children. This is something totally new in Pakistan's classrooms.*

(Video narration from Global 3000 (2015): <http://www.dailymotion.com/power99fm>)

Broadclass – Listen to Learn' is based on the principle that effective education for young children needs to be active, interactive and relevant to children and their families. In many areas in Pakistan, education methods are didactic and there is little adaptation to the learning styles of young learners. In the 'Broadclass – Listen to Learn' programme, the learner is regarded as the principle driving force, with the teacher and radio characters as facilitators of the learning process. Many active learning approaches are employed, including cooperative learning activities, listening exercises, speaking activities, riddles, sound games and role playing. The pedagogical techniques have been devised in such a way that they incorporate social, linguistic, cognitive, and emotional contexts.

The content of the programme has also been developed to ensure social and cultural relevance. As well as its academic goals, 'Broadclass – Listen to Learn' aims to facilitate the social, moral, health and hygiene related values which will support cultural socialisation as well as development and learning. Lessons include content on health, hygiene and safety (including nutrition, sanitation, self-care; traffic rules) and moral issues (for example, respecting elders, politeness, refraining from abusive language, punctuality). All of these local and cultural character traits are taught in the form of rhymes and games with the aim of making them as tangible and relevant as possible to the learners.

*"I like Broadclass very much. The characters are so lively they have taught me how to learn names of animals/vegetables and identify sounds.*

*Emaan, Student in Grade II*



## Inclusive educational practices

Due to the public broadcast, wide accessibility and community acceptability, 'Broad Class – Listen to Learn' makes educational input accessible to remote and highly mobile populations on a sustained basis. The use of low-cost technology has resulted in widespread uptake by schools which experience difficulties with school attendance and teacher engagement in new teaching practices. The use of radio broadcasts as the primary medium of instructions has the following benefits:

- As the broadcasts are available to the whole population, they reach children and families who are not currently attending formal schooling as well as teachers. While television and other forms of broadcast may not be culturally acceptable or geographically accessible, radio is widely acceptable and accessible by all. This exposure helps to capture children's and their family's attention, thus promoting interactive, fun learning techniques and ultimately supporting increased school attendance.
- Family and community participation fosters increased awareness which supports growth and educational sustainability. Through the medium of radio, the approach reaches a shadow audience of community members, whose understanding of their children's education is enhanced, enabling them to better support their children and engage in a dialogue around improving Early Childhood Education. Due to the public broadcasts, many parents listen to lessons, for example, while shining shoes in the market, selling fruit and driving taxis. Parents listen at home, at work, or even attend school with their children. Parents have thus become more aware of educational content, and the ways that this content is taught in school. Not only are they more inclined to send their children to school, but they have become more involved themselves. Many parents now support the school through provision of resources and facilities. For instance, when one school had no water, the community arranged water supply to the school from a nearby *Madrassah* (religious school).

Radio-waves can broadcast in remote areas that are otherwise inaccessible to other broadcast mediums. Furthermore, the radios are designed using low-cost, self-powered technology, so are able to be cheaply installed and maintained in schools that are poorly resourced and in remote locations. This brings educational instruction to children and teachers who may not otherwise have the educational or learning environment resources to deliver this approach.

The programme has been designed in such a way that it responds to all the diverse needs of the learners. The programme is working on the agenda of providing equal quality education opportunities to the early grade children of marginalized communities, especially girls. More than 60% of the programme beneficiaries (heads of schools and teachers, students, members of school council and communities) are female. As well as focussing on gender equity, the programme focuses on social and regional equity (urban/rural areas; marginalized communities). Currently, more than 75% of the beneficiaries are from marginalised communities in rural areas.

## Sustainable pedagogies

The educational benefits, delivered by the low-cost, technological aspects of the programme, would not have been possible without the on-going support of the educational bodies, school leadership and the teachers. If the programme is to be sustainable, it is important to ensure the approach is introduced into an environment that is responsive to change and that there is a plan for shared ownership. Enabling policies, strong and active community participation, and local champions are elements in such an environment. The programme has been designed to ensure the involvement of government officials and local communities at every step of implementation. The following measures are adopted when introducing the programme into a new school or area:

- Power99 Foundation works in close coordination with the education department officials in order to develop a better understanding of the actual requirements of project implementation. The programme team guides heads/school administrators about proper maintenance of radios, and motivates them to include funds from the budget to support the programme into the future.
- Full-day orientation sessions/ meetings are held with members of School Councils, parents and communities where they are informed of the goals and methods of the programme. These meetings often take an advocacy role, and focus on the importance of attendance and girls' education. They also encourage parent involvement in the classroom.
- Power99 Foundation recognizes that teachers need ongoing support in order to be able to develop their teaching capacities. A cohort of 'Master Trainers', led by the programme director provide training and work with the local teachers. These teachers have been trained on long-life, low-cost teaching techniques with the stress on indigenous material usage such as recycled bottles, newspaper, boxes, buttons, beads etc. These trainers also model and role-play lessons so that the teachers themselves experience the more interactive teaching techniques first hand. The local teachers' response toward this teaching approach is very positive, and leads to teacher-led initiatives to develop learning aids and to adopt more child-centred teaching techniques.



- The daily broadcast radio lessons include a teachers’ guide and complete lesson plans to help teachers in planning activities and arranging the required resources.
- Master Trainers and Education Officers pay regular visits to target classrooms to provide technical assistance to teachers in programme activities and provide feedback on their teaching practice.

As a result of this broad involvement, Government officials, schools and communities take ownership of the programme, and show interest in its replication. POWER99 Foundation also approaches local CBOs/NGOs and administrators of private schools to take ownership of the programme for continuation, replication and contribution towards the airing cost. In this way, the effectiveness of the approach can be maximised, benefitting as many children and families as possible.

### Personal Story: **An Interview with Ms Farzana Tabbasum**

Ms. Farzana Tabbasum is Principal at Islamabad Model School for Girls. She has been directly involved with Broadclass and found it to be very effective. In this interview; she tells us how Broadclass helped her to achieve what she has been looking for.

#### **What challenges have you been facing and how has Broadclass helped you to overcome them?**

My school fulfils the educational needs of daughters of poor farmers and low-paid workers. So, it has always been a challenge for me to engage parents in school activities. However, I invited parents, briefed them about the Broadclass programme and requested them to visit the school and observe the responses of the young children to the radio lesson. I told them that through this way they can learn with their young kids.

I was surprised to see the parents’ response. They came to attend the programme and were so involved in it that they said, ‘Learning has become fun, not just for young children but for us too’. Now, the parents never miss Parent Teacher Meetings (PTMs). It is, of course, the quality of education at the same time as parents know their responsibilities even better.

#### **Do you feel that Broadclass is doing more than improving the learning of young children in the schools?**

Yes, it is not just improving learning but, I believe, it is helping us to bring up more peaceful and forward-looking generations.



The programme is also helping inclusion for children and community involvement. In my opinion, with the help of this programme, parents too are developing their communication skills, which are necessary for conflict resolution and peace building. They are, for example, learning the art of active-listening which would surely make a difference. A mother, who often visits our school, said, *‘I see several signs of growth in my girl!’*

Mostly, the parents are not educated, so it is a very useful programme for them too. Now, there are a few parents who regularly visit the class. Kids remain so impatient for the programme that they are energized and active as soon as the Broadclass starts. They feel so happy. There is a physically challenged young girl in this class whose active response really encourages me. She becomes active as the class starts. After the implementation of this programme, I am seeing that students no longer react but respond.

#### **Do you see any promising signs of improvement in students?**

Initially young children were not as confident as they are now. Teachers also wait for the programme as they have also learnt many new things like phonics. Teachers have got new and interactive ideas for teaching their courses. Broadclass has infused new life into classrooms. I am really glad that my students are learning through advanced methods.



## Conclusion: Achievements and next steps

*This programme should have started decades ago so that I should have made best of my time too. Whatever they (students) learn here, they share their learning with their parents and other family members. I feel really happy as they are learning new things. Radio has become a delightful learning tool. My young daughter comes from school happily; because she feels that learning is no more dry drudgery but fun.*

Father of a young daughter who attends Islamabad Model School for Girls

A number of formal and informal programme evaluations have demonstrated the success of the 'Broadclass- Listen to Learn' programme. Formal evaluations<sup>13</sup> of the programme have demonstrated that:

- The academic outcomes for children who are participating in the 'Broadclass – Listen to Learn' programme are better than those in control schools who are not using programme.
- The programme is well placed to address some of the issues surrounding quality in teacher preparation and pedagogy. The teacher-training aspect of the programme is highly successful. Most teachers report that they have increased their confidence and competence in the delivery of child-focused instruction methods, and external assessment confirms the increase in interactive, child-centred pedagogies.
- Parent satisfaction with the programme is high, with parents expressing appreciation for the way in which the programme fosters physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.

Outcomes of the Broadclass – Listen to Learn programme are also evident in the qualitative responses of parents and community members. Maimona, mother of a Grade I student of GGPS Qalandarabad (Abbottabad) shared:

*'Clear difference can be seen in attitudes, etiquettes of our children. They are now more concerned about respecting elders, keeping themselves clean, rhyming lessons all day long to relate them with rest of day activities at school or home. After school in home my daughter teaches me and her siblings about the health and hygiene tips, fruits/vegetables names, how to greet and modes of transportation.'*



Another mother, Mrs. Shamim from a village community shared:

*'My husband is a labourer and he works very hard to earn livelihood. We like all other parents want our children to learn and educate themselves so that they can acquire better opportunities than us. This new intervention at school has given us hope that our children can learn. I and my little son listen to the programme daily. We as parents both feel happy to see our son who is only 4 years of age, loves listening programme and responding to questions asked by radio teacher. His interest and like towards programme has motivated us to send him and his sister to the school.'*

## Next steps

As a result, there is a demand from federal, provincial and district governments for scale-up/expansion of the programme. Power99 Foundation plans a two pronged strategy (both horizontal and vertical) for the scale-up of the programme.

<sup>13</sup> The Communicators (Pvt) Limited (2013). Independent evaluation report: Broadclass – Listen to Learn. Ideas: Advocacy and Innovation Funds for Education in Pakistan. Retrieved 26th February 2016 from [http://www.educationinnovations.org/sites/default/files/program/m\\_e/Impact%20Assessment%20-%20Islamabad%20%281%29.pdf](http://www.educationinnovations.org/sites/default/files/program/m_e/Impact%20Assessment%20-%20Islamabad%20%281%29.pdf)



- **Horizontal** scale up will focus on tailoring programmes for specific geographical and regional contexts in other geographic areas i.e. districts and provinces across Pakistan where there is a need for quality education for young children.
- **Vertical** scale up will focus on the enrichment and development of lesson content based on National Curriculum for upper grades, with an immediate goal of developing Grade 3 content.

In addition to this expansion, Power99 Foundation is taking measures to increase content to build ‘sustainable peace’ into the curriculum. Through its broadcasts, the programme aims to promote active listening skills, respect for diversity and human rights, democratic values, anger management skills, critical and scientific thinking skills, and innate creativity in children. Environmental sustainability is also a focus of current development, with Power99 Foundation working in coordination with educational experts to develop an extensive radio-based course which would help children to think critically, scientifically and take responsibility for protecting the fragile environment. Finally, Power99 Foundation would like to take the approach to Pakistan’s religious schools, which are renowned for didactic, teacher-controlled practices. These future ventures aim to transform education practices in Pakistan and will equip students and teachers with higher-order thinking skills as well as a strong civic sense of responsibility as members of the greater human family.



## About the Video

The 'Broadclass - Listen to Learn' programme executive director, Fakhira Najib, sets the context for the approach featured in this video, when she states that *'2.5 million children were out of school. And if we want to bring them inside the school we have to work on the quality, and we have to make learning fun.'* The video provides an overview of the interactive radio-based programme, and shows how various techniques have been used to address poor school attendance and how these techniques are transforming the teaching methods in the classroom.

We see the children and their teacher, Jamshaid Khan, following part of a broadcast, mimicking the radio character's words, and using gestures and movements that reinforce the concepts. Jamshaid tells us that interactive methods such as playing games and singing rhymes were not used before Broadclass was introduced to the school. The children are featured moving, laughing and interacting, and there appears to be a more relaxed relationship developing between the children and their teacher. Programme manager, Mohammad Zibair describes how this improved relationship sees a boost in confidence in the children, who are more willing to participate in lessons and to ask questions. He describes how children, especially in rural areas were *'sitting in the classroom, scared like statues.'* Now, he explains, that has changed.

In the next section of the video, Fakhira Najib explains how the programme aims to work collaboratively with the teachers, supporting them in their role. The video then features an example

of the English-teaching segment of the broadcast, illustrating not only the involvement of the children, but also, how it provides guidance for the teachers.

*'Teacher: Draw two eyes on the board'* instructs the broadcaster

*'Two eyes, two eyes'* repeat the children

Phrases are reinforced in both English and the local language, with children and teachers using gestures to participate in the lesson. We are then told about how the radio programmes involve different content areas and activities, covering the regular curriculum areas as well as promoting social skills.

The video then draws attention to another important aspect of this programme. With low school attendance of girls, the programme pro-actively challenges traditional views by changing the script of traditional text books and by providing gender-balanced teaching examples. *'In our content,'* explains script-writer Jamshed Eqbal, *'we will show the opposite. The boy is helping his mother. The girl is playing.'* Another essential feature is the support provided to teachers, as the programme challenges them to adopt new, interactive teaching methods. The teachers are seen trying out these new teaching methods – how to work within the framework of the radio programme, but also how to present content interactively and visually. All of these features are new to teachers who, previously, used inflexible teaching methods based largely on teacher instruction.

The challenges of implementing the Broadclass: Listen to Learn programme

### About the Video

is highlighted by the footage of the radios being made. While some may regard radio as an 'out-of-date' technology, we learn how frequent powercuts, low-resourced schools and the remoteness of many communities makes radio an idea technology for this region. Communities can be reached through radio, so the radio programme's learning content and social messages are available

to everyone in the community. The inclusion of moral and religious content enhances the acceptability of radio by conservative communities. In order to make educational gains, a balance is found between modern and traditional methods and values.

*'The programme hits the right tone. As modern as possible. As traditional as necessary'*

### Discussion Points

1. Discuss the various ways that the Broadclass programme supports teachers in (i) developing more child-centred relationships with their students and (ii) developing confidence to engage in more child-centred, active approaches to teaching and learning?
2. The programme creates a balance between traditional and modern teaching methods and content. Discuss how this balance is important when making changes, both for teachers and communities where children are living. Would this balance need to be established in your own centre? If so, which elements will be easier and more difficult to change?
3. Discuss the various ways in which the Broadclass programme has supported enhanced inclusion in education. To which potentially excluded groups of children has it been effective in reaching?
4. What lessons can be learned from the Broadclass approach about steps that need to be taken in order to ensure that a 'new' pedagogical approach can be implemented effectively?
5. What have you learned from this approach and how can you make use of this new knowledge in your own context?

*Photos courtesy of POWER99 Foundation, Pakistan*

Users are encouraged to add their own ideas and notes here

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# Innovative Pedagogies

A Play-based School Approach (Solomon Islands)





# Innovative Pedagogies

## A Play-based School Approach (Solomon Islands)

*'Empowering local people to support ECD in the Solomon Islands'*

### Introduction

The Solomon Islands form the third largest archipelago in the South Pacific, consisting of six main islands spread over almost 2,000 kilometres. Many communities in the Solomon Islands are remote and have little access to facilities located on the more developed islands. Over a third of the nation's relatively small population (515,870) is aged between 0-15 years and the majority of the population in the Solomon Islands depends on agriculture and fishing for livelihood (Solomon Islands Government, 2009).

The Solomon Islands has struggled to support positive health and education outcomes for young children, although, as this programme indicates, community-based acknowledgement of and support for, early childhood programmes has grown in recent years. Due to government budget constraints, while primary education in the Solomon Islands is free, it is not compulsory (UNESCO, 2008). Building on community commitment and capacity is especially crucial for younger children because recently the Solomon Islands Government has decided not to further invest funds in the area of early childhood education, due to the need to focus on addressing low school attendance and poor learning outcomes in primary and lower secondary levels. In light of this, it has been critical for community, together with local Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), to collaborate and find low cost solutions that address the educational and developmental needs of children aged below 6 years.

As part of the drive to establish community-based support for and investment in early childhood development, Save the Children has established 21 Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres in remote villages across four provinces in the Solomon Islands. The Centres have drawn strongly on

community strengths and capacity, with village chiefs being central to the process of introducing and establishing the centres. An underpinning goal of the initiative has been to encourage parents to take ownership and access low cost training opportunities in order to be able to provide enjoyable and constructive learning experiences for young children attending the Centres, despite resource constraints.

Key to success of these Centres has been the role of ECD Facilitators, male and female members of the communities where ECD Centres are established, who self-nominate or are nominated by the community. ECD Facilitators are provided with training in early childhood education and guidance on how to create early learning resources and experiences for children that build on localised cultural knowledge and make use of locally-sourced, natural materials. ECD Facilitators then work with their communities to build ECD centres and offer daily early childhood education sessions for children aged 3-6 years.

Engagement with parents and caregiver support groups facilitated through ECD facilitators have also been crucial in building a shared understanding of the importance of ECD in communities. This approach moves away from the didactic, inactive, passive and disconnected pedagogical approaches that characterise school-based, formal education, towards a more participatory, community-informed model that meets the needs and builds on strengths of both communities and children. This 'innovative pedagogical approach' fits neatly with aspects of innovation defined by Christensen, Baumann, Ruggles and Sadtler (2006, p.101):

*'First, they create social change through scaling and replication. Second, they meet a need that is either overserved (that is, the existing solution is more complex than necessary for many people) or not served at all. Third, the products and services they offer are simpler and cheaper than alternatives, but recipients view them as good enough.'*

(Extracted from Conceptual Framework)

## Description of the approach

The ECD Centres operate across 21 communities in low resourced settings spread across the length and breadth of the Solomon Islands. Many of these communities are located on remote islands and access is limited due to weather and/or road conditions. Children who live in these villages have little opportunity to participate in any formal educative process, apart from those provided by their parents and caregivers. There is little access in these villages to print materials, and no access to technology. Resources in these villages are primarily found in the natural environment.

- As mentioned above, the Centres have been established by Save the Children in collaboration with communities. The process of establishing centres involves:
- Identification of a useable space in the village, in collaboration with community members;
- Nomination (or self-nomination) of community members who wish to become trained ECD Facilitators;
- Training packages delivered to ECD Facilitators (the training package includes an introduction to monitoring tools and procedures to ensure minimum standards. These tools include documentation of precise attendance records outlining days attended, gender of children attending Centres, and identification of children with a disability attending Centres);
- Identification of appropriate on-going supports for ECD Facilitators;
- Introduction of guidelines, planning tools and communication proformas to ensure accountability/transparency of programme delivery;

- Integration of child protection and hygiene promotion in ECD programming;
- Development of a Monitoring and Evaluation tool administered every three months;
- Site visits conducted by Save the Children Project officers and the early childhood education trainer, with other Facilitators also attending to gain insights.

Key to the successful implementation of ECD Centres is the role of community chiefs and the trained ECD facilitators, who 'drive' the Centres to (i) ensure that they are providing a safe, child friendly and relevant environment in which children are provided access to early learning opportunities, as well as (ii) building community commitment to sustaining the centres. One of the ECD Facilitators describes a daily session in one of the ECD Centres:

*In the morning we have a bible story and the morning story. Then I call the roll. Then we sing songs, tell some stories. Then we will do some colouring. Then the break time will happen and we will eat. After playing outside we then come back inside and we do some activities: craft, play games, read a story. The stories help build the character of the children.*

The ECD sessions are centred around a Facilitators' workbook, which provides Facilitators with a series of ideas for interactive learning experiences that can be tailored to different contexts, depending on availability of resources, local stories / materials and parent involvement. The workbook provides planned sessions over a 40 week period and, in some communities, Centres also provide a regular newsletter ('kindy klippings') with ideas for interactive learning that is used by ECD Facilitators. During their training, ECD Facilitators are encouraged to adapt these materials / learning ideas to suit their own communities.

The ECD programme adopts a holistic approach to supporting young children's development and learning, and the ECD Facilitators are provided with specific training in interacting with and providing guidance to parents and caregivers about enhancing the life experiences for children in their local community. This innovation, which involves members of the community (now trained as ECD Facilitators), rather than outside 'experts' passing on important information to parents, has raised awareness in local communities of the importance of ECD. This aspect of the programme is crucial in providing 'entry points' for working with parents to promote child protection and wellbeing issues.

*"In my village, I sent all the six and seven year olds off to primary school this year. We had 42 parents want to enrol their children (in ECD Centres) for 2016. We only had 30 enrolment forms but we have enrolled 38 children this year. ..."*

*(ECD Facilitator)*

In terms of equity, the programme supports equitable access to early childhood learning opportunities for children living in remote regions. Through the open access enrolment processes, the Centres are ensuring that equity of access to ECD is open to all children of suitable ages in areas where no other facility exists. The programme ensures equity of gender access and monitoring techniques are in place to ensure transparency of practices. In addition, ECD Facilitators are trained in principles of equity and are taught how to embed these in their practice.

### What makes this approach innovative?

As mentioned above, these community-based ECD Centres are addressing a critical need for children living in hard-to-access and low-resourced communities throughout the Solomon Islands. In the face of government cutbacks in expenditure on early childhood education, communities are being encouraged to take ownership of young children's early learning through the promotion of low-cost, practicable approaches that enable them to provide positive early learning and development experiences of their young children without heavy reliance on external investment.



Prior to introduction of this programme, local village elders in many communities had been establishing unregistered centres, due to community awareness of the importance of early learning and, hence, a demand for facilities. This innovation meets these demands and needs, building on community interest in ECD to introduce ECD Centres that depend upon community collaboration but are also guided by a minimum set of standards, as well as a concern about making sure that children enjoy attending ECD Centres. ECD Facilitators are provided with on-going support as part of the monitoring and evaluation aspect of ECD Centres. They are also required to participate in on-going monitoring activities, which enhance ownership and accountability. The long-term intention of this approach is to attract government attention to the benefits of early childhood education, and support in the form of training for ECD Facilitators.





At the time of writing, the Solomon Islands' curriculum for children under the age of 5 years is still under development. This programme of established ECD Centres therefore fills a gap in the system, by providing a workbook that outlines appropriate learning experiences for children aged 3-6 years old, but also emphasises flexibility and the importance of adapting these experiences to the needs and capabilities of children living in different communities. High priority is attached to the use of culturally significant stories, rhymes and crafts in the Centre activities. ECD Facilitators are trained in working with members of their own community to draw on local skills in producing learning materials made from locally-sourced, natural materials.

The training for ECD Facilitators strongly emphasises interactive approaches in the provision of early learning experiences in the Centres, which is significant in that the existing Preparatory curriculum for 5-6 year olds is underpinned by a didactic, teacher-centred approach that puts little emphasis on interactions and relationship-building between teachers and children. This programme is therefore introducing more appropriate and relevant approaches to teaching and learning for young children. ECD Facilitators are encouraged to design learning experiences which draw on the interests and existing 'knowledges' of children, to add depth and relevance to their learning. They are also encouraged to develop identities as advocates for young children's learning and development.

The ECD Centres are used as 'entry points' for providing parents with information about early childhood learning and development, as well as health, hygiene and child protection issues. Because the ECD Centres are run by Facilitators from local communities, strongly supported by village chiefs and community members, these messages are more effectively delivered and received by parents.

Importantly, the process of establishing these ECD Centres is strongly underpinned by a commitment to ensuring that communities will be ready at some stage to take over management and operation of the Centres. This has already been successful in some provinces, where Community Education Committees (CEC) have been established to govern the ECD Centres in the province. Some villages are funding the provision of an additional paid ECD Facilitator, to accommodate the increasing numbers of young children in Centres. Provision of on-going training is also being reviewed through accessing other long term training establishments currently operating in the Solomon Islands. Additionally, there are instances where trainee facilitators are being identified and mentoring is occurring in Centres for these people on a daily basis.

*The ECD spaces were particularly child-friendly in their decoration... for those that were permanent, children had been involved in decorating the room. All ECD Centres (observed) were decorated in a child-friendly way and made use of local materials as well as resources which had been brought in.*

*ECD Facilitators were extremely positive about the training they had received and caregivers reported positive outcomes for their children's learning. The training materials viewed were clear and practical and accessible to those who have had less educational opportunities...*

Excerpts taken from an evaluation of the ECD Centres.

*The training was very good and being a Facilitator has been good too. I am also a mum. Beforehand I had no real understanding of children but now I am able to be at the child's level and as a teacher I can match activities to each age group. I have also been able to understand the behaviour of children in each age group.*

*My understanding and knowledge concerning ECD has increased in areas like Monitoring tools for facilitators and increased my creative skills and capacity.*



*They (the children) are all learning more. The children are improving in their behaviour. They are learning their colours and skills. They are able to communicate better. Their gluing and cutting with scissors skills are much better and they are listening and paying more attention.*

*At the end of 2015 the parents were very appreciative of the work I had been doing and many parents came to express this.*

ECD Facilitators describe the impact of the programme on themselves, children and parents

*He comes to help me and makes observations of the children. He helps out with the children in the program too.*

*I go to the centre and then we have monthly meetings with the facilitators when we find the action points we need to work on to help each facilitator. I also collect the attendance and monitoring forms.*

An ECD Facilitator and a Save the Children Project Officer describe monitoring procedures

## Conclusion: Achievements and where to from here?

In terms of impact on children and community members, this innovative pedagogical approach has achieved significant outcomes, as well as offering opportunities for replicability:

- Young children who attend the ECD Centres are being provided with access to enjoyable, enriching early educational experiences. As a result, enrolment numbers for local primary schools are increasing, and children are entering formal education better equipped to learn than previously.
- Community members have been empowered to play a key role in supporting establishment of the ECD Centres, enhancing community capacity and resulting in programmes that have a strong likelihood of sustainability.
- ECD Facilitators have motivated and inspired communities to support young children's learning and development. They are also taking a pivotal role in promoting the importance of child protection, health, hygiene and general overall child wellbeing.
- The ECD Centres are providing a low-cost, effective solution to previously unanswered community demand for early childhood education facilities.
- In some provinces where ECD Centres have been established, Community Education Committees (CEC's) are taking an active role in 'scaling-up' the programme, with communities contributing funds to enhancement of Centres.

## Next Steps

***Building on the success of these programmes, future plans and next steps include:***

- Accreditation of some Centres and their adoption into the mainstream services offered by the Ministry of Education, thus opening up opportunities for further training and accreditation for ECD Facilitators to become fully qualified teachers.
- Ensuring that the identified needs of Facilitators are responded to appropriately and in a timely manner. This can be achieved through communication and monitoring of programmes already established.
- Provision of additional training in fields encompassing child development, classroom management, literacy, art and craft and child protection, and ensuring that knowledge and capacity is retained in the ECD Centres and passed on to future facilitators when Save the Children leaves.
- Planning for the recruitment and training of replacement ECD Facilitators.
- Planning to facilitate increased ownership and management of the ECD Centres by the local village community with the support and training of village chiefs and elders leading to a self- sustaining village model of operation.
- Establishing possible links with Education Ministries and local churches to support the maintenance and provision of this service in the local community.



**‘Words of Wisdom’ for others who wish to create a similar innovative pedagogical approach**

**PASSION**

*Identify people with passion for the endeavour*

**AIM FOR SUSTAINABILITY**

*Train and support with ideas, models of leadership and governance and resources for the establishment period continuing until the village can sustain the programme...  
Longer term endeavour*

**MONITOR AND SUPPORT**

*Monitor in situ regularly and support at all levels*





## About the Video

This video opens with a scene of Solomon Islands hills, moving to a clip of young children attending the local ECD Centre, having great fun playing a game of catch outside with their teacher. This is followed by a clip of dancing and singing inside the 'classroom'.

Alongside clips of children walking long distances to school, a member of staff from Save the Children then explains that the ECD Centre depicted is part of a programme that seeks to overcome challenges around

access to early learning opportunities for children who live far away from state-based schools. As he explains, some children must walk 8 kilometres to get to the nearest school, sometimes crossing dangerous terrain. A parent who is interviewed also talks about access difficulties.

A clip of children at the local ECD Centre, accompanied by their parents, is followed by an interview with the ECD Facilitator who works at the Centre.

She describes the learning programme as 'play-based' and explains that the types of resources she uses to teach children depend on materials and resources that are available locally. A clip of children engaged in counting activities using stones and sticks helps to illustrate her point. Another Facilitator who is interviewed talks about her interactions with children in her class as they play with blocks at the Centre.



The video includes a scene where children are washing their hands in buckets at their ECD Centre. This clip accompanies an interview with Save the Children staff member, who explains that the ECD Centres provide an important 'entry point' for promoting positive hygiene and health. Alongside clips of children engaged in a numeracy

activity, a Project Officer explain that children's early learning and development are tracked using the IDELA (International Development and Early Learning Assessment) tool.

A Community Elder is interviewed about the ECD Centre in his community. He explains that establishing the ECD Centre in the community has meant that parents do not need to spend several hours per day getting their young children to school, so they are free to engage in other tasks. He explains, therefore, that community support for the ECD Centres is strong and community activities related to the Centre are well-attended.

The video also includes interview with teachers from the local primary school. Both teachers talk about the benefits of attendance at ECD Centres for children before they transition to primary school. The ECD Facilitator who is interviewed also talks about how happy she is to see her children transition smoothly and successfully into formal schooling. The video closes with a final shot of children, again, enjoying fun and games in their classroom.

## Discussion Points

1. Why, in this context, do you think that it is important for community to 'take ownership' of ECD Centres? How does this link with the sustainability of the approach?
2. Based on what you have read and viewed about community life in the Solomon Islands, why do you think it is so important in this context for ECD Facilitators to be able to make use of natural resources and materials?
3. Based on the video clip, how would you describe the interactions between the ECD Facilitator and children in the ECD Centre? How do these interactions seem to change when children enter the more formal kindergarten setting? Do you see similar differences in teaching styles in your own community? What might the implications of these differences be for children's learning and how might you address any associated challenges?
4. Based on this case and the video, discuss the role of the following factors in supporting these ECD Centres: (i) relationships between children and the ECD Facilitator (ii) relationships between community members and the ECD Facilitator; (iii) access to learning resources; (iv) access to professional development / training opportunities for ECD Facilitators.
5. What have you learned from this approach and how can you make use of this new knowledge in your own context?

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# Innovative Pedagogies

**Our Language and Way of Life: How Young Children Learn  
at the Mae Tien ECD Centre (Thailand)**



# Innovative Pedagogies

## Our Language and Way of Life: How Young Children Learn at the Mae Tien ECD Centre (Thailand)

**Transforming peoples' understanding of their own language identity through mother-tongue-based early childhood care and education (MTB-ECCE):**

*'I had never thought my language can be written, I thought it was only for speaking.'*

### Introduction

The importance for children of early learning in their mother tongue is well-known (Ball, 2013). Children who are given opportunities to obtain early literacy skills in their own, home language have been found to be better adjusted when they start primary school and more able to transition smoothly to learning in a second language. Children from minority groups, in particular, are likely to benefit from early mother-tongue-based (MTB) learning (Hovens, 2002), as learning in the same language as they speak at home with parents and families promotes a positive sense of identity and more straightforward mastery of early literacy skills.

The Foundation for Applied Linguistics (FAL) in Thailand has been working since 2009 to establish Community Child Development Centres (CCC's) in remote communities of northern Thailand, where there has been little access to pre-school learning. Currently, FAL works mainly with Pwo Karen communities. The Karen are a culturally and linguistically diverse group of approximately 3.4 million people. Most live in Myanmar, but around 11% live in Thailand's border regions. Pwo Karen communities form the second largest ethnic minority group in Thailand. The 75 Pwo Karen farming villages in Chiang Mai province, nestled in the mountains of Hod, Omkoi, DoiTao and Chom Thong districts, were settled between 200 -500 years ago. Traditional Pwo Karen houses are built of wood or bamboo, and rest on stilts about 4-5 feet off the ground. The area under the house is used to store firewood and tools, and

*I thought that the written language is only used in the Bible and only to communicate with God because we have never had a written book except the Bible. When I read storybooks developed in the project, I realized that written language was not only used for communication with God. Reading stories in my language also help me read the Bible better.*

*(parent of child who attends the MTB-ECCE programme)*



to provide shelter for pigs and other livestock. In Pwo Karen villages many people continue to live in traditional houses, and dress in traditional Karen clothes. Weaving is a skill Karen mothers pass on to their daughters, and brightly coloured shirts, skirts and bags are all woven at home.

In Thailand, Pwo Karen is written using a Thai-based script, but literacy is not widespread. The literacy rate for Pwo Karen is below 1%. In Pwo Karen communities, the literacy rate for Standard Thai is 25%-50%, well below the national average (94%). A traditional Karen story tells of a special book, given to the Karen by the god Y'wa. In time, the book was lost or stolen. According to the legend, one day a white man would come and return the lost book to the Karen. When Christian missionaries arrived in Burma during the 19th Century, the Karen believed that the Bible these white people brought was their lost book.

As a result of FAL's work in developing and implementing MTB learning, not only have young children obtained important literacy skills to enable them to enter primary school successfully; they enjoy learning and look forward to progressing into the formal education system. In addition, as they have begun to notice the development of mother-tongue literacy skills in their children, adult members of the community have shown greater interest in learning to read and write, and have begun to attend adult literacy classes also provided by FAL. As the quote cited above illustrates, the MTB-ECCE approach to promoting children's language learning provides a clear example of the transformative power of ECCD in promoting equitable development. The outcomes presented here also support the view of pedagogy as referring to more than simply the 'act' of teaching:

*'Pedagogy is not simply the 'act of teaching' but instead is the act of teaching as informed by the ideas, values and beliefs which sustain and motivate it. Pedagogy is also praxical – in that it aims to produce skills, knowledge structures or ways of thinking which will enable people to participate in, and transform their current and future lives.'*

(Extracted from Conceptual Framework)



childhood care and education (MTB-ECCE) programmes is underpinned by a concern for protecting and preserving cultural heritage in ethnic minority communities and engaging community members in formal learning. Its other major goal is to enhance children's enjoyment of learning, promoting inclusion of children from minority backgrounds into the mainstream education system.

From the beginning of implementation, FAL agreed with the community members that this programme should be grounded strongly in community values and practices, based on close links with children's homes, so that children would feel comfortable enough to come to the centre and stay for the whole day. Thus the community felt that the language used in the CCC should be their mother tongue. With this purpose, together with the community, FAL has developed a community based curriculum and innovative pedagogical approach using children's mother tongue as a means of instruction, as well as developing culturally- and linguistically-relevant instructional materials used in the centre.

### What makes this approach innovative?

In line with the approach defined in the conceptual framework for this study, this pedagogical approach is innovative in that it (i) responds directly to a unique 'problem' faced by children from minority backgrounds living in remote areas, (ii) it is underpinned by a commitment to building capacity and a strong sense of cultural-linguistic identity among community members, and (iii) it achieves this through a child- and community-centred pedagogical approach.

*Representatives of the community participate with FAL in developing curriculum materials* by sharing traditional stories and songs with linguistic experts, who then create written forms of these stories and songs through children's books. Young children learn and develop their own mother tongue in a systematic and fun way, with access to resources and materials that reflect their ways and culture, in order to motivate their interest and participation. Community values and beliefs are included in the curriculum and lesson plans. Culture and local wisdom are reflected in teaching materials and learning activities such as local games and songs. For some of the weekly themes, the students take a field trip to observe and learn from activities taking place in their village. Sometimes older people, or community members who have particular knowledge related to weekly themes are invited to teach in the centre. This promotes generation-to-generation passage of language and culture.

*Community members are trained as Teaching Assistants/Carers (TA)* to teach the children using their own Pwo Karen language as a medium of learning. Pre-service and in-service training workshops are provided to build and strengthen the capacity of local TAs in teaching. In the first 4-5 years of the Mae Tien programme, pre-service training was held 4 times a year to ensure that TAs were well prepared to teach and engage young children, as well as managing the centre well. FAL was concerned that local TAs who only have secondary education need strong encouragement, moral support, and time to build their confidence to teach and explain to community members about the benefit of using the children's mother

*"At the beginning I thought that I could not do it or I could not be a good teacher because I had never studied to be a teacher.*

*I did not have teaching experience ... In fact, I am a farmer. The first time I attended teacher-training workshop, I was nervous because it was so hard for me to follow the lesson plans even though it was going step by step. When I first taught at the village, many parents doubted whether I could teach their children. I myself wondered whether mother tongue could really help their children have better future or learn Thai better. As time passed by, I realized that I could do better. To be with children helped me understand them better, be patient with them and love them. At the first year we attended teacher training four times and these help me understand better and more confident in teaching. After I teach better and manage class room well, we only have teacher training twice a year. I also apply the way I teach children to teach adults and now some of them can read and write."*

(teacher who teaches in the MTB-ECCE programme)



tongue as the language of instruction. During each quarter, FAL visited them to provide monitoring and follow up, to ensure that they were teaching appropriately and using the methods in which they had been trained. In addition, through on-going training and development, further topics were also covered with TAs, such as positive discipline and child rights.

*TAs have also been trained to develop and produce teaching materials and toys and games. The teachers are trained in the use of mother-tongue activities and resources, and provided with teaching materials and activities relevant to children's contexts and lives. Oral Thai is also introduced to children as a*

second language, prior to the transition into mainstream schools. This ensures these ethno-linguistic minority children are provided with a positive learning experience in the centre that prepares them for a smoother and less intimidating transition to school. A playground has also been created at the site, appropriately designed by the community to suit the centre landscape and made of recycled materials and materials found in the community.

## Conclusion: Achievements and where to from here?

In terms of impact on children and community members, this pedagogical innovation has achieved significant outcomes:

- Young children now attend the early childhood centre regularly and enjoy their early learning experiences. As a result, they enter primary school with confidence and anticipation.
- Community members also have been empowered through recognition of the value of their own language. They have seen their children reading and writing and have been inspired to gain literacy skills themselves. FAL is therefore intending to use this approach in future programmes to motivate members of older generations to become literate.
- Older members of the community are heartened to see their younger members ensuring the continued 'life' of their language and culture.
- As the numbers of children enrolling in these centres increases, local governments will take over operation of the centres to ensure sustainability. This transfer has already taken place in the case of two early childhood centres.

*I was told from the people in the older generation whose children had experience of being students at the Community Learning Center (CLC), which belonged to the non-formal education system (NFE), that their children were afraid to pursue their study to grade 1 in the formal school located in the nearby village. Having negative experience at the village CLC for the preschool level made these children stop thinking of going to the school for the higher level. They found learning very difficult*



*and they were afraid of the Thai teachers because they did not understand what the teachers said. The Thai teacher became a stranger for them. However, now when the children have opportunity to use their language in studying, they have the active learning and participate well in class. They are confident to express themselves and share their thoughts and feeling freely in their mother tongue. They do not have the language barrier like the older generation used to have. So with these experience, they are now inspired to study in the higher level. Nowadays every student in my village goes to study grade 1 at the nearby village school, which also has implemented Mother tongue based Multi-Lingual Education (MLE).*

A Teacher at the centre

*I noticed before that when my children stayed with me at home she did not obey me, but after she has gone to ECCE for a while she seemed to listen more to me. She is now cleaner and she loves to sing songs. Moreover, I have more time to work in the fields without worrying about my children. In the past, parents had to take turns to go to the field and to take care of the children.*

*We built the ECCE center together in the beginning, when it was getting old we also renovated together. We took part in teaching material development and production. For example, we wrote songs for children, developed Big Books, Small Books, Big Cultural Scene picture, Picture books and toys for our children.*







*What we have learned is what we have misunderstood about learning Thai. In the past, we used to think that the earlier children learn Thai the better they can speak, read and write Thai. We know that this is not true. We have not known that until we implemented MTB-ECCE project. We found out our children who have a chance to study first in their mother tongue can speak, read and write Thai better than those who have not had the chance to learn in their mother-tongue.*

A group of Mae Tien villagers

## Next Steps

### **Building on the success of these programmes, FAL would like to see:**

- Awareness raising and mobilization to communities and local government agencies so that they understand the importance of using mother tongue first to help children develop their identity and their critical thinking. As demonstrated through these programmes, this pedagogical approach can help to build children's self-esteem and pride in their language heritage and identity, as well as helping them to learn a second language (Thai) more easily.
- Continuation and sustainability of this current work, as well as sharing experiences and lessons learnt with other communities and organisations.
- Extension of work with other organisations, so that FAL can offer technical support to other organisations and communities that would like to implement MTB-ECCE approaches.

### **Further plans for development of MTB-ECCE include:**

- Adjusting the current curriculum to include younger children aged 2-4 years old more effectively.
- Develop listening stories for mothers and train / encourage them to read to their children
- Work on developing understanding of positive child-rearing methods based on a combination of both traditional knowledge/wisdom and modern ways.
- Apply this approach to the adults who want to learn to read and write.

## About the Video

## Our language and way of life: how young children learn at the Mae Tien ECD Centre'

The video clip about this case is titled 'Our language and way of life', reflecting the key feature that makes this approach innovative. The video begins with images of women in Mae Tien village, dressed in the colourful woven clothes that form part of Pwo Karen traditional life. Clips are shown of women from different generations weaving cloth, and of children from the village playing with traditional toys, and these set the scene for this approach, which is underpinned by a strong commitment to protecting children's cultural and linguistic heritage.

The video then moves to short clip of children learning with their teacher at the Community Child Development Centre (CCC). The children are learning to read and write in their mother tongue, through the use of materials that have been developed for this programme. They are learning about rice and paddy fields – topics that they are very familiar with in their daily lives. The TA interviewed for the video clip talks about how much she enjoys seeing the children that she teaches starting to learn to read and write in their mother tongue.

Programme Director, Assistant Professor Wanna Tienmee, explains in an interview, why beginning to read and write in the mother tongue is so important for young children:

*'...in teaching, you need to start with what children know. Then to something new. You need to connect new things to old ones. Otherwise it's too difficult for children.'*

Professor Wanna then highlights a key contribution that this approach has made to the community. She explains that Pwo Karen communities have rich traditions and a wealth of knowledge (for example, traditional recipes for cooking food and folk stories). Before this programme was implemented, these were not recorded in written form, so there was a risk that they would disappear.

As part of this programme, traditional stories and knowledge have been recorded in story books and teaching resources. These resources, as the video suggest, serve two purposes: they support children's learning because they make use of their mother tongue and community traditions with which children are familiar, and they provide written documentation of cultural heritage. Some of the resources produced are presented by the TA. They include Big Book traditional Pwo Karen stories, written in Pwo Karen. The TA also shows viewers a large, canvas illustration that depicts Pwo Karen customs, such as farming and working in the mountains. As the TA points out, some of the customs that are reflected in the story books and pictures may soon no longer exist.

The video includes an interview with a family from the village. The father explains that learning both the Pwo Karen and Thai languages is important for his daughters. He talks about how the programme is helping his daughters to learn, 'They come back home and read to us. We can't read it ourselves

## About the Video

but we know it's Pwo Karen... Since they learn in Pwo Karen now, if they learn in Thai later, they will remember Pwo Karen and our culture.'

The video returns to the interview with Professor Wanna, who provides three important features that underpin this innovative approach:

1. 'A foreign language makes children feel they don't want to

come to school because they don't understand', and

2. If we want children to do well at school, we must provide an environment where there is 'love, warmth and familiarity...Not a strange place where they don't understand anything', and

3. 'a child's language should make them proud of themselves.'

## Discussion Points

1. Based on the video footage, what do you think are the benefits of mother-tongue based education for (i) children; (ii) communities and (iii) teachers?
2. In what ways has the programme built on community knowledge and traditions to support children's learning? What ideas or practices can you take from this aspect of the programme to apply to your own centre?
3. How does learning in the mother tongue during the early childhood years support a smooth transition in formal schooling for children from minority language groups?
4. What can you learn from the way in which materials and resources have been developed for this programme?
5. What have you learned from this approach and how can you make use of this new knowledge in your own context?

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## Synthesis of Insights and Findings

Each of the cases presented in this resource pack has been developed and brought to life directly in response to unique contextual needs and priorities, underpinned by concerns about enhancing children's early learning opportunities through sustainable, equitable approaches connecting learning with 'real life'. Our overarching 'finding', based on this rich and varied set of examples of 'innovative pedagogical approaches', is therefore that meaningful, productive engagement with the concept of 'innovation' in ECCE requires an understanding of pedagogy that is not only informed by existing 'models', but instead, by principles associated with the concepts of 'praxis' and 'becoming'. These were outlined in the Conceptual Framework and are well encapsulated by Alexander (2005, p.2) who, based on rigorous studies of pedagogy across cultures, argued that:

*'Pedagogy is not a mere matter of teaching technique. It is a purposive cultural intervention in individual human development which is deeply saturated with the values and history of the society and community in which it is located. Pedagogy is best defined, then, as the act of teaching together with the ideas, values and collective histories which inform, shape and explain that act.'*

Osberg, Biesta and Cilliers (2008) argue that education can be viewed from two key perspectives: the first reflects dominant 'Western' approaches to education (which reflects what they call a 'representational' perspective); the second is often referred to as a 'situated' learning approach (which sees learners as intimately connected to their surroundings and context). The dominant, representational approach views children as being educated in institutions that are separate, removed from 'real life' situations (despite the purpose of these institutions being to prepare children for 'real life'). Therefore, forms of life and knowledge that are assumed to be 'representative' of 'real life' create the basis of what children learn (the curriculum).

Given the diversity of contexts in which children learn around the world, clearly an effective, universalised 'one size fits all' model based on a single concept of knowledge that is believed to reflect, or represent 'real life' for all children, is impossible. The alternative way of thinking about learning is to see education and learning as 'situated' (Osberg, Biesta & Cilliers, 2008). According to this way of thinking, children learn best when they can participate in the 'real world'; when their educational / learning contexts are closely connected to everyday life and to the communities in which they live.

### Key Features reflected across the nine cases

To highlight the above points, we present below an overview of key features that can be found threaded across and within each of the cases documented. Collectively, the cases include innovative pedagogical approaches that *Empower; Challenge; Transform; Build and Sustain*. These four areas may be seen to encapsulate broad 'learnings' that are particularly informative in terms of developing understandings of 'innovation' in pedagogy of specific relevance to ECCE programmes in the Asia Pacific region. While aspects of all four key features can be found in every one of the nine cases, here we draw attention to major aspects of each case, weaving these across the four areas outlined.

## Empowerment

One consequence of the strong focus on child outcomes as a measure of ‘effectiveness’ of early childhood programmes in recent years has been the absence of early childhood educator / facilitator ‘voices’ in accounts of programme delivery. Early childhood workers are often asked / expected to deliver enjoyable, productive learning experiences for young children with limited access to learning materials, little in the way of curriculum guidance, and for very low wages (indeed, in many cases voluntarily or with the promise of ‘in-kind’ recompense such as rice and other foods). As these cases indicate, simple and affordable interventions to empower ECCE Facilitators can go a long way in terms of enhancing young children’s early learning experiences. When ECCE practitioners (facilitators; teachers) are given the tools to (i) know what is expected and (ii) be able to see the impact that they are making on young children’s well-being and development, their potential impact on early childhood settings and children is enhanced. Examples taken from the nine cases, which serve to highlight this, are provided below.

For ECCE Facilitators in the Solomon Islands, hearing the teachers at the local primary school can see the positive impact attendance at ECCE Centres is having on children as they transition into primary school, provides an important source of motivation and confidence-building. Facilitators also report seeing for themselves the impact that they are having on children’s growth and development, referring to this as a key motivator for them.

Teachers from the *Indian Education for Children of Migrant Labour* programme track the progress of children who have transitioned into mainstream education. Teachers’ connections with children and their families provide an on-going source of support, which ultimately encourages these children to remain in education and reap the long-term benefits.

Importantly, the Nepal innovation focuses on building confidence among ECCE Facilitators by providing the basic foundations required of teaching: a curriculum, training, and guidance on how to locate teaching resources. This combination has resulted in changing attitudes towards early childhood education: in communities where once children did not want to attend, now they rush to leave home on days they attend the ECCE programmes. Parents have also gained confidence in their capacity to shape their children’s lives by actively participating not only in their children’s learning, but also in supporting the establishment of the Centres their children attend.

Similarly, the professional support provided to teachers in Pakistan by the *Broadclass – Listen to learn* programme has empowered teachers to improve their teaching, giving them confidence to try new methods and further develop their skills. Despite the challenges related to remote location and low-resourced schools, teachers are motivated to continue these changes because they see children’s enjoyment of the lessons and their increased participation in school.

Within the nine cases there are examples of empowering not only young children, but also their communities and elders. The *On-Country Learning* programme in Australia provides Indigenous children with opportunities to connect to, and develop pride in, their cultural identity. Empowerment has come from the collaborative development of the programme – drawing on the knowledge of Indigenous Elders and community workers, school teachers and university researchers. As a result of this collaborative work, local children’s confidence and participation has increased, and they take pride in their role as On-Country rangers who can impart their new knowledge to their peers and community. In New Zealand, *Te Puna Reo*, through its embedded use of cultural practices and language, is encouraging Māori children and their families to reclaim and develop pride in their rich cultural heritage. By drawing on cultural practices to establish deep connections with location and the land, the centre is empowering others to revitalize Māori tradition and culture within the context of contemporary New Zealand society.



In Japan, children at Kaede Kindergarten are supported in developing a unique combination of independence, autonomy, cooperation and collaboration through competitive play. At this early childhood centre, children's learning experiences are shaped by the belief that it is through deep engagement with the learning environment and peers children gain a sense of themselves as social, or human. Children's emotional responses, ranging from happiness and pleasure to vexation and disappointment, are viewed as critical aspects of their learning and form an important part of the learning curriculum. By experiencing and coming to terms with this range of emotions, children are empowered in their learning and their relationships with others are strengthened.

For parents and families from migrant populations living in Beijing, the grass roots *Sihuan Playgroup* has played a critical role in enabling them not only to support their children's access to, and experiences of, early childhood education; the Playgroup has provided a means for them to share and feel proud of the cultural traditions and practices they bring with them to the city from their rural communities. Traditional art forms, such as paper cutting, are being promoted as an important aspect of children's learning, supporting formal learning skills such as hand-eye coordination and social skills such as identity strengthening.

Each of the nine innovations, in different ways, is empowering the children, early childhood settings and / or wider communities in which they are situated. 'Empowerment' is supported when people are given opportunities to develop confidence and a sense of their own value / agency by focusing on, and building upon, existing unique strengths or skills. Empowerment, as these examples indicate, results in individuals and/or organisations taking ownership of, and contributing to, both the development of programmes and / or their own learning.

For children, as in the case of Japan, this can involve taking ownership of their own development, learning relationships and learning environments. For adults and communities, as well as children, this can result in an enhanced sense of identity and realisation of the role that they can play in supporting education; equally, the role that education can play in strengthening whole communities.

### **Overcoming Challenges**

A very important aspect of the 'innovations' documented in this set of nine cases is that most have been developed and implemented in the face of significant challenges, largely related to availability of resources, but also in response to social prejudices and marginalization. These examples are crucial in terms of providing insight into ways in which difficulties associated with restricted availability of resources, unsupportive attitudes and / or policies and other obstacles can be overcome through persistence and imagination.

Nepal provides an innovative example of efforts to raise the profile and quality of early childhood education in resource-constrained contexts through provision of an appropriate curriculum for learning, accompanied by training and support to Facilitators in locating teaching and learning resources. In response to concerns regarding a perceived lack of impact of early childhood centres on children's development, Save the Children in Nepal developed a customised curriculum to support ECED Facilitators in creating learning environments that are both structured and child-friendly, as well as practicable given resource limitations. This example, developed in order to provide access to early childhood learning opportunities for children from remote and economically disadvantaged communities, provides a worthwhile illustration of how innovative approaches involving communities and providing ECCE Facilitators with appropriate tools and skills, can be used in resource-constrained environments to promote quality and access for children living in hard-to-reach or remote parts of the world.

As mentioned in the narrative, communities in the Solomon Islands also face significant resource restraints in providing early childhood supports for their young children, due to a lack of government funding. This has not deterred them from establishing ECCE Centres where children can enjoy meaningful learning experiences. ECCE Facilitators are developing skills in identifying low-cost, natural materials that can be adapted as learning resources. The process through which ECCE Centres are established builds on and strengthens support from Community Elders / leaders, who are pivotal in ensuring systems are in place to ensure sustainability through, for example, garnering community support for / participation in the ECCE Centres.

In Pakistan, significant challenges related to poor attendance and didactic teaching methods, especially in rural areas, have been addressed through the *Broadclass: Listen to learn* Programme, implemented by the Power99 organisation. The daily radio broadcasted lessons are integral to this approach, as radio is both accessible to remote communities and, in communities with strongly conservative traditions, is also a culturally acceptable means of mass communication. The broadcasts promote interactive learning experiences which are embraced by the children. By working closely with partner schools, Power99 provides culturally appropriate teacher development sessions which are then supported through the radio broadcasts. In this way, children's attendance and learning outcomes are improved through the enhanced teaching practices.

The Asia Pacific region is unique in its rich diversity of cultures, ethnicities, religions and languages. This wealth of diversity is a crucial feature of the region and should be both embraced and protected. However, in terms of early childhood education provision, catering for this diversity equitably in the provision of formal education poses challenges. Mainstream education systems are by nature exclusive: they require children to assimilate and adapt, measuring children's performance and ability against universalised targets that tend to assume uniformity in life experience, beliefs and practices across highly diverse contexts.

Thailand's FAL (Foundation for Applied Linguistics) provides one example of an approach that focuses on achieving equitable access to formal schooling for children from diverse linguistic backgrounds. FAL is enabling children from ethnic minority backgrounds to discover written forms of their indigenous mother tongue, supporting them in gaining access to formal school and the mainstream language of Thai without having to sacrifice their ethnic and linguistic identity.

In India, the Education for Children of Migrant Labour centres were founded to address the challenge of providing education for otherwise overlooked, transient families. The programme developers and teachers work collaboratively and organically to find out the kind of educational practices that work for these children and their families. In doing so, a curriculum has been developed which effectively overcomes educational and health challenges while providing much needed social support for whole families and communities.

Beijing's Sihuan Playgroup plays an important role in promoting social cohesion by bringing together children, parents and volunteers in Beijing from migrant backgrounds (with limited access to social services due to city-wide restrictions placed on migrants from rural area) and 'Beijingers' from the university and local community. The programme challenges prejudice against, and exclusion of, migrant groups by working not only to give children access to early childhood education, but also to engage parents and extended families, university students and professors in two-way learning about shared and varied heritage and culture, in order to bridge gaps between migrant and non-migrant communities.

## Transforming

These innovative approaches are also transforming communities and children's lives, resulting in powerful changes in both perceptions and practices.

In Australia, the *On-Country Learning* programme has seen improvements in the school attendance of Indigenous children, with flow-on effects to these children's learning and general participation in school. Children's cultural capacity is the focus of this programme, which recognises the richness and potential of Australian Aboriginal knowledge, traditions and practices. The programme promotes stronger cultural identity in the children, who are then able to share this confidence and knowledge with their families. The involvement of the school teachers has led to enhanced cultural awareness in these teachers, who are then able to harness the children's strengths within the regular classroom.

In Pakistan, the *Broadclass: Listen to Learn* programme is also instrumental in increasing the attendance of children in remote areas, in particular girls, who are often prevented from attending schools because of deep seated cultural practices. Because the radio broadcasts are freely available to everyone, communities are reached, and messages about the importance of education for all children are imparted. The radio broadcasts strike a balance between adhering to traditional values and practices and promoting new, interactive teaching and learning methods. As a result, parents' willingness to send their children to school has increased, and they have become more supportive of education in general.

Thailand's FAL programme is also transforming peoples' lives through education. In addition to the important benefits for children of learning in their mother-tongue as a result of FAL's programmes, adult members of these communities are now inspired to learn to read and write, as they have witnessed the birth of the written form of Pwo Karen, their mother tongue, for the first time in their communities. Multiple generations, from very young children, to secondary school students and elderly members of the community are involved in sharing literacy practices including documenting traditional stories, songs and customs.

Parents and extended family members in Beijing report meaningful changes in their perceptions of children and parent-child relationships, as well as in their experiences as migrant families in Beijing. Through participation in their children's playgroup, parents' sense of community has significantly strengthened, with regular family day trips and contributions to the playgroup (reading stories to children, teaching traditional crafts and practices such as martial arts) forming a central part of children's learning experiences at the playgroup. As a result, parents' relationships with their children, their involvement in children's education, and connections between community members have been transformed.

## Building and Sustaining

As well as empowering, overcoming and transforming, these pedagogical innovations are also building on existing capacity within early childhood settings and communities to maximise sustainability.

Japan's unique approach to play-based learning, which incorporates an element of competition amongst young children as they compete across classes to achieve a specific learning goal, builds on and sustains important cultural value systems. For teachers in Japan, facilitation of children's emotional development, particularly in terms of supporting children to become emotionally aware and mature is of critical importance. Through a process of cooperating within a group to achieve a collective goal that involves classes competing against each other, children learn to work together, as well as to empathise with others.

In the Solomon Islands, ECCE Facilitators' ability to draw on and utilise widely available natural materials in planning and preparing for children's learning has been crucial in enabling them to develop adequate learning resources. The Solomon Islands is blessed with rich, unspoiled natural resources, as depicted in the video documentation of ECCE Centres. ECCE Centres are designed and built to enable children to connect with these natural resources. The ECCE Centres depend on and strengthen community involvement and support as they are located in spaces donated and prepared by the community.

In India's *Education for Children of Migrant Labour*, the Azim Premji Foundation, the builders and the parents form a collaborative partnership to build and resource the education centre. The builders benefit from a more stable workforce, and the parents and children benefit from the relationships that they build with the whole community. The Foundation has discovered when parents see the value of this collaboration, they are willing to invest time and effort into the running of the centre, and are more supportive of their child's education.

Thailand's mother-tongue-based early childhood education programmes are underpinned by a commitment to ensuring that cultural and linguistic traditions are preserved and utilized in order to provide young children with opportunities to develop a positive sense of their own ethnic identity and cultural heritage. The FAL's mother-tongue-based early childhood education programmes have very literally 'given voice' to people by promoting local indigenous languages and creating a written form of Pwo Karen, which was previously only an oral language. Through implementation of this innovative pedagogical approach, community members have also gained opportunities to develop and share skills. Older members of the community are encouraged to contribute to children's early learning by demonstrating traditional practices such as weaving; members of the community have also received training as teaching assistants, learning how to develop resources that capture and preserve important cultural customs in their teaching of young children.

New Zealand's Te Puna Reo early childhood centre seeks to establish and strengthen children's and families connections to the land and the Māori culture. Sustaining the Māori language is central to this approach, as is the teaching of Māori ways to acknowledge and sustain the environment. Through the experiences provided at the centre, children, families and educators are encouraged to construct their own cultural identity taking into consideration both Māori and Pākehā (white) ways of knowing and being.

In Nepal, communities that are severely resource-constrained have been supported in drawing on the practical skills of community members in constructing early childhood centres and helping to build outdoor play equipment for their children. This approach enables parents and communities to see the value (and nature) of play for their children. ECCE Facilitators are strongly encouraged to be creative in developing learning resources that draw on locally-available materials. Sustainability of children's access to education is also supported in the Nepal approach, through the establishment of community-based investment possibilities that enable parents to begin to save for their children's future education.



## Bridging Theory and Practice

As is expected in the scholarship of education, bridging theory and practice is crucial. This section therefore seeks to discuss the features outlined above in the context of a theoretical frame that illustrates their relevance and significance.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century, so far, has provided exciting times for the field of ECCE. A strong, evidence-based focus on the benefits of ECCE has resulted in unprecedented progress in recognising the role of ECCE in changing the lives of children, families and communities, and this change has been supported by various global initiatives including Education for All. However, in attempting to understand outcomes associated with this progress, too often we have focused narrowly on child outcomes as an indicator of effectiveness and impact, missing out on important opportunities to understand in greater depth the lives of children around the world; their families, communities, physical and socio-political environments and early experiences. As many have argued (see, for example, Alexander, 2005), without this understanding, the relevance and applicability that is necessary for effective and sustainable learning (see Tawil, 2013, for example) is not achievable.

For many years, Western contexts have dominated agendas for early learning and development. Indeed, as Fenech (2011, p. 106) found in a meta-analysis of ways in which quality in early childhood education settings has been perceived (conducted through scrutiny of 338 published peer-reviewed journal articles), research on this topic:

*'over the three decades has overwhelmingly been conducted in the USA (70.4% of all articles reviewed). Following well behind were studies from Europe (12.4%), the Asia-Pacific (7.7%), the United Kingdom and Ireland (4.7%), Canada (2.1%), and other countries (0.01%), with remaining studies being conducted over multiple continents.'*

Over the past 10 years, many early childhood practitioners and experts operating in Western contexts have grappled with ways to conceptualise quality, while balancing demands from government agendas that increasingly seek to limit young children's early learning experiences to formal outcomes that can be easily quantified (Grieshaber, 2000; Wood, 2004), reflecting the 'representational' model of education described earlier in this section. At the same time, practitioners, communities, early childhood organisations and policy makers across the Asia Pacific region have been working with a very different set of challenges; seeking to increase access, protect social, cultural, spiritual and indigenous traditions, and to build broader community capacity through implementation of holistic early childhood programmes, as the evidence provided by the nine cases documented in this set of resources demonstrates.

This project is important and unique, in that it aims to better understand the diverse contexts and challenges shaping young children's learning experiences and opportunities specifically within the Asia Pacific context. It attempts to document innovations in pedagogical approaches taking place within the region, focusing on both process-level and broader outcomes. Indeed, some of the most promising, yet unexplored, opportunities offered by the recent, rapid proliferation of early childhood programmes globally are the lessons that can be learned from examples of innovation developed as part of efforts to ensure that children anywhere and everywhere are provided with opportunities to enhance their learning and developmental potential. The nine innovative pedagogical approaches documented here have all been developed in the context of a range of challenges and obstacles, and therefore provide valuable opportunities to examine:

- The highly contextual nature of innovation in early childhood settings – each of these cases is unique in that it is particularly effective in responding to a particular need in a particular context.
- The crucial contributions that creative, innovative approaches can make in supporting sustainability, cultural and ethnic identities, inclusiveness and equity – across the cases, important insights are provided into the role of culture and context in shaping effective pedagogical approaches.
- The crucial role that innovative pedagogical approaches in early childhood settings can play in bringing communities together around the common cause of providing positive experiences for their young children.

The important role of multiple stakeholders (including children, teachers / facilitators; parents; community leaders; NGO staff; volunteers) in supporting the development and on-going success of innovations.

As this set of cases demonstrates, practices across the Asia Pacific region provide a rich source of valuable insights into the various creative ways in which communities, early childhood practitioners and policy makers are working and / or can work to enhance children's access to, and outcomes from, early learning and development opportunities across contexts that are unique to, and yet diverse within, this extraordinary region. The cases documented are not intended to provide models of best practice. They are by no means perfect or complete: all are works in progress, most face on-going challenges related to cultural relevance; inclusion; equity; sustainability, and a range of other difficulties. However, each individual case provides important insights into ways in which these challenges are being addressed and resolved to enhance educational practice and young children's opportunities for meaningful learning. Taken together, the cases provide a useful set of resources that should engage, and be relevant for, early childhood practitioners working across diverse socio-cultural, physical and resource contexts.

### Implications for Pedagogy Across Diverse Findings

The four key features outlined above draw out aspects of the nine 'cases' documented that are particularly important in terms of broadening our understanding of what is meant by 'innovation', related specifically to 'praxis' of teaching and learning across diverse contexts. As these cases highlight, innovative pedagogical approaches applied to early childhood reach far beyond the settings in which young children most commonly experience formalised care and education, transforming communities and attitudes.

Important also to highlight are implications that can inform the practice of teaching and learning. It is important to acknowledge (i) the role of the 'innovators' in supporting implementation of these nine novel approaches and (ii) the impact that the approaches have had on practitioners working within the programmes documented.

Here, the reader's attention is drawn to the text boxes inserted throughout the nine narrative reports, designed to highlight points of interest and / or uniqueness that characterise each approach (for example, a copy of one of these is presented here). Many of the quotes or anecdotes presented in the small boxes portray a deep level of commitment among early childhood teachers / facilitators to their work. Important to note here, therefore, is the way in which teachers and facilitators have been strongly supported in implementing the pedagogical innovations documented.

*While teachers do not direct children's learning, at the heart of the collaborative engagement and enthusiasm that can be seen in these classrooms are careful design of the activity and timely, thoughtful facilitation by the teachers.*

In each of these nine cases, ECCE practitioners have not only received specific, targeted training to support their implementation of a new curriculum or teaching technique, they have also been supported in developing important professional skills. These include: reflective practice – in terms of thinking actively about which approaches / techniques / materials are most suitable for children and / or the contexts in which they are teaching; planning and preparation – both autonomous and involving peer practitioners / communities / other experts; building linkages with communities and families, and developing resilience in the face of challenges related to teaching and learning.

A second important, pragmatic point to note about these innovations is that they are characterised by their focus on a specific target unique to the context/s in which they are each situated. In each of the nine cases, children’s daily realities are closely aligned with the design and purpose of the innovative pedagogical approach. This alignment results in an approach that is realistic in its goals and meaningful to those involved in their implementation. It also results, therefore, in facilitators / teachers, children, parents and communities being able to see and gain confidence from the impact of their implementation.

In terms of informing future innovations in pedagogy, therefore, two important ‘learnings’ can be drawn from the nine cases documented here (in addition to the four key features outlined above):

1. Teachers and facilitators (even those whose access to professional learning is restricted to short-term training opportunities) can and should be supported in developing skills such as reflective practice, building professional networks, and engaging in autonomous planning. With careful, targeted and on-going training, early childhood teachers and facilitators can be supported in developing important professional skills to support successful innovations.
2. Clear and targeted approaches that are relevant, meaningful and realistic are most likely to succeed in achieving transformative outcomes.



## Conclusion

This collection of innovative pedagogical approaches very effectively demonstrates the incredibly wide range of priorities and needs regarding quality ECCE that exist across the Asia Pacific region. The variation evident in these cases supports Fenech's (2011) argument that the current evidence base on which many ECCE programmes are built does not adequately reflect global needs, priorities and agendas. Conceptualisations of quality, Fenech argues, are largely based on research conducted in contexts where early childhood education is conceived primarily as preparation for school facilitated by private providers who are largely disconnected from community structures or relationships. In contrast, the cases presented here incorporate (for example):

- mobilisation of local communities to participate in supporting children's learning environments;
- adaptation of well-established systems and curricula to make space for localised learning and identity development;
- expression of unique cultural values and experiences in the planning and implementation of children's learning experiences;
- introduction of child-centred learning approaches through free play, child-initiated activities and the use of open-ended questions in engaging children;
- innovative use of radio to engage practitioners / facilitators in active learning with their children;
- provision of professional development opportunities to ECCE facilitators (including the skills of reflective practice and contributing to practitioner networks referred to earlier), even in the most resource-constrained environments, and
- use of culturally-responsive teaching and learning strategies, such as mother tongue learning and engagement with the natural environment, to value children's cultural heritage and identity.

The nine cases documented closely reflect the concepts of 'innovation' and 'pedagogy' adopted for the purposes of this initiative (outlined earlier in the conceptual framework). They beautifully illustrate and support the interpretation of 'pedagogy' as a form of 'praxis', in which peoples' lives are changed. They also highlight the crucial role of context in shaping ECCE. We would argue that this approach to understanding pedagogy applies particularly well to the current situation of ECCE in the region, where creative innovations are designed not only to benefit children, but to transform whole communities.

The recently-published Harvard University Briefs (2016) referred to earlier make the point that asking the simple question of whether or not a program or intervention works is not sufficient for understanding what aspects of it are replicable. By focusing on what works, for whom and why (as suggested for this region in Pearson & Tan, 2014), studies of targeted approaches responding to specific, contextually-based needs can inform policy makers about which active ingredients of a particular intervention are most likely to result in impact if replicated or taken to scale.

As outlined in the Introduction section of this resource, the benefit of small-scale, qualitative studies such as those presented here is that they have the potential to address this need, by highlight the importance and greater likelihood of success among targeted, focused strategies to overcome



specific pedagogical and / or programmatic challenges. The nine cases documented here provide a rich source of information and potential inspiration for practitioners working across this region, supporting these calls for qualitative approaches to understanding what works, for whom, how and why in relation to innovations for early childhood education.

Future efforts are needed to support more rigorous documentation of innovations in early childhood education across the region. Such documentation should provide adequate time and resources for in-depth study of the role of key stakeholders; drivers; linkages and supports that result in successful early learning and development outcomes for young children. Such efforts would enable policy makers, programme planners and early childhood practitioners to better understand the active ingredients found in innovative approaches that can then inform efforts to take these approaches to scale. As the Centre on the Developing Child urges:

The time has come to build a dynamic (research and development) platform to catalyze a new era in early childhood policy and practice – driven by a new way of thinking. And a new way of working that embraces the culture of innovation (Center on the Developing Child, 2016, p.5)



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## Annex

# Final Call for Expressions of Interest and accompanying Application Form

**UNESCO, UNICEF, ARNEC and OMEP launch a call for applications from programmes / practitioners who are interested in collaborating on documentation of innovative pedagogical approaches in ECCE**

**Are you or your organization implementing interesting, unique approaches in teaching and learning among young children? Or do you know of such programmes or sites? Are you committed to advancing the important principles of inclusion and equity in your work with young children and families? Then we would like to hear from you!**

## Background Information

The UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok), with financial support from the Government of Japan, launched in January 2015 the project 'innovations for improving the equity and quality of early childhood care and education in Asia and the Pacific.' As part of this project, UNESCO Bangkok, the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) and Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA), the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) and the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) will collaborate on the initiative to document various innovative and effective pedagogical approaches used in diverse ECCE settings in Asia and the Pacific region in the forms of reports and videos.

The project aims to contribute to enhancing equity and quality of ECCE programmes in Asia and the Pacific that cater for children from birth to 8 years of age, by collecting evidence that (i) showcases examples of innovation that are unique to the region and, hence, (ii) provides early childhood educators or practitioners working with communities and parents with inspiration, ideas and guidance to implement innovative approaches in their own work with children and families.

## Expected Project Outputs

- A set of written reports and videos that document approximately 10 innovative and effective pedagogical approaches and tools used in diverse ECCE settings in countries of Asia and the Pacific.
- A regional synthesis report analysing what constructs 'innovativeness' and 'effectiveness' in pedagogical approaches in early childhood, the regional innovation trends, and further effort areas in the Asia-Pacific region.
- An online guidebook based on the reports and videos documented, which will be an independent webportal accessible from the collaborators' websites and managed by ARNEC, to serve capacity building and clearing house purposes.

## What is an Innovative Pedagogical Approach?

**For the purpose of this Call an 'innovative pedagogical approach' could include, but is not limited to, the following:**

- iv. An interactive approach to facilitating and extending children's learning in a specific social, cultural or physical context;
- v. An approach whose implementation can strengthen the capacity of teachers, practitioners or caregivers;
- vi. An approach whose process of implementation can be documented in order to inform others about how to incorporate/adapt such innovative approaches in their own contexts.

## Additional Selection Criteria

**This project is underpinned by the following principles and applicants will need to demonstrate one or more of these principles in the innovation that will be documented:**

- **Child-centred** (child as a competent, active learner): Learning involves culturally-relevant, negotiated, respectful interactions between children and teachers / practitioners / caregivers;
- **Holistic development:** Learning incorporates a focus on linkages between socio-emotional; physical; cognitive; linguistic; spiritual development;
- **Equity:** Quality learning opportunities are available to all children without discrimination, especially those from marginalized groups;
- **Inclusiveness:** Learning responds to the diversity of needs among all learners;
- **Sustainability:** (i) The innovation presented is coherent with other activities of the programme and has potential for continued utilisation, and (ii) builds children's skills to affect social change for now and in the future;
- **Cultural reflection/relevance:** Learning is rooted in the learners' socio-cultural context and reflects traditional/indigenous knowledge that supports children's development and learning.

## Areas of Innovation

**Cases may include innovations in (but are not limited to) the following areas:**

- Incorporating children's interests and voices, engagement or participation in their own learning;
- Teacher professionalism (including professional development, implementing curriculum innovations, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, individual teacher commitment and passion);
- Parental / caregiver / family participation in supporting positive early learning experiences for children;

- Community participation in young children's learning;
- Management and support system that facilitates/encourages innovation in pedagogical approaches;
- Creative use of learning environments and technologies (information and communication technologies; local, indigenous technologies and resources);
- Innovative use of standards and metrics;
- Mobile services and flexible schedules adapted to specific learning contexts (e.g. emergencies, conflict zones, remote areas);
- Others.

### Settings Where Innovation Takes Place

**We would like to capture diverse contexts in which such innovations occur within the region, including policy-level; programme-level and classroom / community-level innovations:**

- Formalized early childhood education centres
- Informal or home-based settings
- Low-resourced settings
- Large scale and/or policy-driven innovations
- Community-based settings
- Remote, hard-to-access, emergency or conflict settings

### Who is Eligible to Apply?

Any individual, organisation or institution (including government ministries, local and international NGOs and the private sector) implementing an innovative pedagogical approach in ECCE in the Asia-Pacific region that fits the selection criteria outlined above is encouraged to apply. We especially seek applicants with a strong commitment to ECCE for young children, whose work has not been widely known in the past, in order to showcase new and innovative approaches.

### What are the benefits for you as a collaborator/participant to this initiative?

**If your proposed case/approach is chosen as part of this initiative, you will have the opportunity to:**

- Highlight your work on the project collaborators' website managed by ARNEC and in the ARNEC newsletter Connections and other publications;
- Highlight your work at the international level, through presentations in regional and international events (e.g. forum, conferences, workshops) and publication in international journals;
- Contribute to the body of knowledge on innovative pedagogical approaches in the region.

## What is my role as a collaborator / applicant once selected?

### You will need to be prepared to:

- Participate (or find a member of the programme / site to participate) in the collection of all information required for documentation;
- Share detailed information, data, reports and other readings as needed to help the documentation process;
- Support identification of local video documenters and provide them access to day-to-day activities / relevant aspects of the innovations;
- Host visits and support data collection by the video documentation team during the period of November 2015 – January 2016;
- Follow ethical procedures in gathering information (obtain written consent from parents or guardians and children, to ensure understanding and agreement to be included in photographs and video footage once practitioners have explained/disclosed why the photographs and footage are being taken);
- Grant or obtain permission for the use of reports, images and audio/video recordings, in line with UNESCO's Open Access Policy and its adoption of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 IGO (CC BY 3.0 IGO) license;
- Collaborate with the documentation review team through finalization of the documentation, providing feedback or comments as necessary;
- Take part in the dissemination of the innovations; this may involve presenting your programmes at regional and international ECCD events.

## How Do I Apply?

Applications must be submitted in English using the standard **Innovative Pedagogical Approaches Application Form**, attached separately. Applications should be emailed to the ARNEC Secretariat at: [secretariat@arnec.net](mailto:secretariat@arnec.net) by **10 October 2015**.

## Selection Process

Applications will be assessed by a panel of experts, composed of the co-convenors (UNESCO, UNICEF, ARNEC and OMEP) and external advisors, according to the criteria above. Selected initiatives will be notified before 31 October 2015.



# Documentation of Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

## Application Form

**Please send completed form to: [secretariat@arnec.net](mailto:secretariat@arnec.net) by 10 October 2015**

Note: this form is designed to seek information for the purpose of shortlisting innovative pedagogical approaches. Please note that this is not the documentation of the approach itself, and only includes key information.

### PART I: APPLICANT INFORMATION

Name of Applicant:

.....

Street Address:

.....

Postal Code:

.....

City:

.....

Country:

.....

Name and title of responsible person:

.....

Telephone (Including country code):

.....

Email:

.....

Website (if applicable):

.....

Please provide your or your organization's (if relevant) relationship with the case/site recommended for documentation:

If your nominated case/site is selected, would you be available or have a representative to liaise with the ARNEC Secretariat for further information, by providing a more detailed description of the case/approach nominated, conducting interviews with key informants and helping coordinate the on-site video recording?

YES / NO

Comments if any:

.....

.....

## PART II: INFORMATION ON THE PROPOSED PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

1. Name of the case/site/programme nominated:

Location:

.....

Representative / Manager:

.....

2. What is the nature of the innovative pedagogical approach being proposed here?  
Please describe the innovation, referring to the definition of 'innovative pedagogical approaches' outlined in the Call for Proposals (please see below).

For the purposes of this project an 'innovative pedagogical approach' would incorporate aspects of the following:

- An interactive approach to facilitating and extending children's development and learning in any given social, cultural or physical context;
- An approach whose implementation can strengthen capacity of teachers, practitioners or caregivers;
- An approach whose process of implementation can be documented in order to inform others about how to incorporate/adapt such innovative approaches in their own contexts.

3. In which setting does the innovation take place? Please check the appropriate box(es).

- Formalized early childhood education centres
- Informal or home-based settings
- Low-resourced settings
- Large scale and/or policy-driven innovations
- Community-based settings
- Remote, hard-to-access, emergency settings

Others (Please specify):

.....

4. Which of the following principle(s) are demonstrated in the innovative approach? Please check the appropriate box(es) and elaborate on how the case/approach demonstrates these principle(s). For definitions of these principles, please refer to the call for proposal.

- Child-centredness
- Holistic development
- Equity
- Inclusiveness
- Sustainability
- Cultural reflection/relevance

How does the case/approach demonstrate the selected principle(s)?

.....

.....

.....

.....

5. Describe briefly the innovative pedagogical approach being nominated. Please elaborate on how this approach is considered innovative. (Max 500 words for each question (a) to (c))

- a. What are the innovative elements of the approach? What is the area(s) of innovation as mentioned in the call for proposal (e.g., children’s engagement or participation in their own learning; curriculum innovations, creative use of learning environments and technologies, etc.)?
- b. What was the driving force behind the innovation (describe the specific need that the innovation is responding to)?
- c. What are the specific factors that contributed to the conception of the innovative approach?
- d. What or who has played a role in supporting and facilitating the implementation of the innovation? Who is the innovator?
- e. How is the innovation taking place?

6. What results to date can you share with us on this innovative pedagogical approach? Considering the situation before the implementation of the innovative approach, what benefits are you seeing from the approach? Please include sources of information regarding these benefits (e.g., parents, teachers, other caregivers, etc.) (Maximum 300 words).

7. Has this case/site been evaluated or researched to assess the impact of the nominated innovative approach on young children and/or their families? If yes, please briefly describe the evaluation/research methods used and results; and if possible, please share the evaluation/research reports. (Maximum 300 words)

In submitting your application, please include existing photos, PowerPoint presentation, videos, other visuals, and/or any existing video footage which can provide a better understanding of the innovative pedagogical approach being proposed.

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From  
the people  
of Japan



**ARNEC**  
Asia-Pacific Regional Network  
for Early Childhood

In collaboration with:

