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From the Editor

When you think of a preschool leader, what do you think about? Leadership qualities, attributes, qualifications? Being a preschool leader is just a job or is there more to it? Can one be trained and groomed for leadership roles? Marchant writes about the experiences of the pioneer batch in the first Principal Matters programme, its vision is to develop effective leaders in early childhood in Singapore. Nurturing leaders is very important. It is no longer just about running and operating a preschool or a chain of it. Being successful as a leader means more than that. For this issue, we have put together very thoughtful pieces - for you to reflect on your practice (if you are already a preschool leader and manager), and for those who aspire to leadership, the direction Singapore ECE is heading towards.

Beyond this definition of leadership, I want you to look at it from a different perspective – a teacher or an ECE practitioner who innovates and leads, especially when you have in mind what is best for your preschoolers under your charge. The articles here show you just how much our writers are tuned in. They reflect on what is going on in their centre, in their classroom, or about a particular child Alex, or the girl Hannah. They strive to build an environment that caters to the needs of children. On AECES' study trips, the writers wrote about the learning experiences and the possible useful applications back home.

AECES is also leading the way, in our various projects; for example, our progressive work in FLAiR, Project Hand in Hand and up and coming new ones like 'A Garden in Every Preschool' where we encourage and support centres to grow a garden in their centres. FLAiR celebrated its tenth year, this is a feat and so many success stories abound, contributed by various participants. Likewise, we want Hand in Hand and the Garden project to flourish and be good projects for keeps.

Marchant began her article with a quote from the famous anthropologist, Margaret Mead

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.'

Indeed, each of you is a leader in your own sphere of influence.

Ruth Wong
Chief Editor

Learning To Lead From Within

Personal Insights from the 'Principal Matters' Preschool Leadership Programme

Shaireen Marchant
Seed Institute

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.' - Margaret Mead

The Singapore early childhood context

The early childhood industry in Singapore has witnessed a multitude of initiatives in the last decade. In its effort to improve the regulation, accessibility and the affordability of early childhood services, the government has pledged to invest more than \$3 billion over 5 years from 2013 to 2018 to improve the quality of its services (Almenoar, 2013). Since then, the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) was established to streamline regulatory control, 15 MOE kindergartens have been set up to increase the availability of early childhood places and the Anchor Operator Scheme and Partner Operator Scheme have been rolled out to ensure childcare continues to remain affordable.

A range of initiatives have also been implemented to enhance the quality of early childhood professionals. Efforts have focused on the upgrading of qualifications and continued training of early childhood educators. To support this move, an increased number of scholarships and training grants have been made available and a sector wide Professional Development Plan was launched in 2016.

The changes to the structure and process of the support system signal the singlemindedness of the Singapore government to improve the sector. This reflects the critical place early childhood education now occupies in the national agenda.

The importance of leadership

The success of these initiatives rely on the commitment of a range of stakeholders within the industry. Among them is the early childhood leader, an individual with a critical but understated role as a purveyor between policy and practice. Current research show that school leadership is the second most important influence on student learning after classroom teaching (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). Early childhood studies also show that leadership can affect the quality of the workplace, education and developmental outcomes of children (Waniganayake et al., 2012). This is further supported by a British study on preschool education which identified strong leadership as an important characteristic of effective centres (Sylva et al., 2004).

In practice, much is expected of leaders in terms of their personal and professional competencies. Effective leaders often demonstrate 'a core vision, collegial ways of working and a climate of trust and openness' (Aubrey et al., 2013). This study also highlights that although pragmatic approaches are often used by leaders, such leadership knowledge is not explicitly taught. Leadership requires a diverse range of skills and competencies usually gained through experience and this can prove to be challenging for initial leaders. In the case of Singapore, the lack of support in leadership preparation has resulted in the reluctance among early childhood educators to take on leadership positions (Ebbeck et al., 2014). The lack of research on leadership training implies that the development of leadership skills will continue to be a critical challenge for early childhood practitioners around the world (Rodd, 2006).

Review of early childhood leadership development in Singapore

Preschool professionals in Singapore would need at least 2 years of preschool teaching experience in addition to a Diploma or Specialist Diploma in Early Childhood Leadership to be an early childhood leader. From 2016, educators who would like to pursue a leadership qualification need to undertake a new Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Leadership (ADECL) offered by Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Temasek Polytechnic. ECDA also introduced a 5 course module as part of its 'Leadership Courses Series' with a focus on skill development in curriculum

leadership, professional and organisational capacity (ECDA, 2016).

Although these programmes address knowledge, skills and attitudes within the current work context, it is also necessary to equip leaders for a bigger role within the industry. In the long term, early childhood leaders will have a central role in developing and creating a learning organisation within the wider ecological system of the early years sector (Aubrey, 2011). Ang (2012) also echoes this in her seminal report 'Vital Voices for Vital Years' and describes the need for effective leaders who are able to move policies from an 'idea to results' chain.

Within Singapore's highly dynamic early childhood setting, it is ever more important for preschool leaders to engage within the wider community and with stakeholders beyond their operational environment. For this to be possible, a more innovative programme that empowers leaders with an 'inside-out' approach and recognises leadership as 'a way of being' would be needed.

Principal Matters. A Lien Foundation leadership programme for preschool principals

Lien Foundation spearheaded this initiative and launched the Principal Matters leadership development programme in April 2016 in partnership with Seed Institute, Wheelock College, SIM University, Sequoia Consulting and the Korn Ferry Hay group. A White Paper which showcased the Behaviour Competency Model was published and it highlighted 10 important leadership traits

critical for an early childhood leader to have namely:

1. believe in people,
2. manage yourself,
3. care for people,
4. develop people,
5. lead the team,
6. drive change,
7. lead strategically,
8. influence people,
9. partner the community and
10. harness opportunities.

The model also identifies the important link between 'The Self, The Team and The Community'. Within this, the 10 competencies build upon each another in a cycle during the exercise of leadership (Lien, 2016). This establishes leadership development as a process of continuous learning and development across multiple contexts.

The Principal Matters programme aims to train 150 early childhood leaders over a 3 year period. Seed Institute is the local host for the programme and will partner Wheelock College in Boston for the overseas segment. Sequoia Consulting has been engaged to conduct the Organisational Change training whilst SIM University will undertake the leadership research component. The pioneer batch of 24 principals were selected from a diversity of early childhood settings and the programme commenced in August 2016. The principals have also been partnered with one of 8 early childhood veterans chosen as local mentors for the group.

The journey of leadership learning

As the Lead Mentor for the programme, I was fortunate to be a part of the

principals' learning experience. Their journey began with a workshop to develop an awareness of themselves before they learnt the skills to manage organisational change. The overseas programme with Wheelock College in Boston immersed the principals in early childhood practices within a different social and cultural context. The school attachments in Boston enabled opportunities for close observation of inspiring early childhood leaders who helped broaden their perspectives and forced them to interrogate their own practices. These experiences provided invaluable learning opportunities and a personal reflection of their own leadership practice.

Throughout the journey, I had many opportunities to engage in deep conversations about leadership with the group. These represent my personal insights on some key learning points which may be of value to other leaders.

1. Use tools not just 'instinct' in your work.

'Firefighting' is a phrase often used to characterise a preschool leader's work. When faced with an issue, leaders usually problem solve using 'instinctive knowledge' developed from their personal experience. Although some decisions may require quick thinking, this may not be the most ideal approach to use in the case of long term projects. During the 5 day workshop, the principals were encouraged to employ strategic thinking and action tools in their decision making process. Various strategic tools from the project management field such as the 'Threat and Opportunity Matrix', 'AID Feedback tool'

and 'Mind mapping' were introduced. We also learnt that in the process of implementing any change project, critical attention should be given to generate support, acceptance and commitment to the change for it to be successful. As part of the learning, the principals employed the 'The Change Activist Framework' which enabled them to experience a rigorous a process of mapping, questioning and communicating their change story .



© The Change Activist (TCA) framework

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2. Data! Data! Data! Use data to support your decisions.

“Our sector is going through times where we are constantly being tested. The realisation that data can come in so many different forms has motivated me to collect, analyse and use data to move forward in my goals.” - Kamal

To quote the Boston panellist, ‘Have a fierce commitment to DATA!’ This four letter word is now firmly imprinted into our minds and work vocabulary after the trip. As leaders we often make decisions based on ‘what we think is right’ but more importantly we need to validate that ‘what we think is actually true’. As an education professional, we have the responsibility to model and embrace an evidence based approach that is based on reliable data. To illustrate, let’s imagine we want to implement an activity that would increase parent support in the school. A normal process would be to brainstorm and come up with a list of random activity ideas that we think would work. Alternatively, a more strategic way would be to use attendance data of past events or the annual parent survey results to inform us of a more effective approach. Data is available only if we looked hard enough to find it. It also supports the leader’s work as the team recognises the decision is based on fact rather than personal preference. If you are a leader, try asking yourself these questions before you make a decision in future:

- What data/ information do I have?
- What does the data/information show?
- What more data/information would I need?
- How would this data/information support my aim?

3. Great leaders have great practices.

“She is never short of praises for whatever her staff does. She also performs little acts of kindness to show she cares.” - Carrin

“Children will be the focus of every conversation she has. They are also the central focus of any decision making process the team makes.”

- Yoges

“She ensures there is purposeful investment of time with the teachers. Time is allocated to meet every teacher once a week. She sits in curriculum meetings and training sessions with them.” - Mag

Over the 3 days of school attachments, the principals had the opportunity to observe their Boston mentors who were chosen for their outstanding leadership. Our principals were able to observe the dedication and creativity of the Boston school leaders in managing challenges of funding, staff and work regulations. This rare opportunity to observe their work and communication habits up close created a strong impact and led them to reflect on their own practices.

In addition, these inspiring school mentors also demonstrated that a good leader is acutely aware of the limited resources they have yet is skilful to manage those resources in a way that works for their organisational practice. As an example, the principal of a large school engaged parents to lead the Open House tours instead of their staff. This allowed new parents to have a personal testimony of the school whilst simultaneously reducing staff workload. In contrast, a very small early childhood centre made use of media and its university links to create awareness of its unique pedagogical approach. This enhanced their standing

within the wider early childhood community despite the physical limitations of the school. The practices showed the need for a ‘flexibility of mind’ to develop practices that could overcome the unique challenges of each setting.

4. Transform your mission, passion and vision into ACTION.

“My mentor knows her purpose as a leader. She understands how important it is to consider age appropriateness in all that they do. With a clear purpose in her heart she fights for what is important for the children and the teachers under her care. She fights for what she believes in.” - Ada

“The important thing I learnt from my mentor is how passionate she is as an advocate in serving children and communities.” - Vas

“My mentor showed me that you can do anything as long as you have the passion, the drive, the focus and the support.” - Jamie

“Being a leader with vision and passion makes you grounded and committed. I saw how our mentor believes in her vision. Armed with her passion she made key changes and tough decisions.” - Yin Jie

It is easy to memorise and recite the vision and mission of a school but it is another challenge altogether to be a living example of it. The principals were able to observe how the Boston mentors integrated this vision into their leadership

roles and how this vision was achieved through the culture of practices in the school. To illustrate, a leader of a faith based school advocated the strong need for diversity and acceptance of children from other cultures and economic backgrounds. Despite funding pressures, the school would raise money to offer scholarships for the less privileged. Another school believed in the strong respect for others. This belief was consistently and consciously exercised in the school activities and daily interactions between teachers, children, parents and the community. These examples reflect the important responsibility leaders have to translate a vision into tangible achievable actions in the school programme. It also requires the leader's ability to align her own purpose and personal beliefs as part of the school vision.

5. Work at building your network.

"My mentor worked very hard to extend her network in the community to gather information, resources and more. This allowed her to improve the centre's brand name. Another leader set up the network as a way to manage her stress and share with others. This network helped her recharge her energy." - Serene

"My mentor is also a teaching staff at the university. I admire her ability to manage her 2 roles so competently." - Diana

The conversations with the principals showed the enormous power of

developing a network within the school community, social community and the professional community. Driven by the need for funding, the Boston leaders needed a proactive approach to attain financial support for some of its projects. The Boston mentors demonstrated how these connections proved to be critical in their ability to reach their goals. The network also allowed principals to share practices and continue to build their knowledge from others. It showed that leadership learning can be supported when leaders make the effort to engage themselves in different communities.

The pioneer group of Principal Matters also experienced building this network among themselves over the course of the programme. The informal conversations during their journey together helped build a bond within the group which led to generous sharing of ideas and emotional support.

"I learnt so much from the casual conversations we had together, bouncing off ideas about what we learnt and our own self-reflection."

"Sharing of ideas between ourselves. Transfer of learning. Problem solving and helping one another see light in our practices."

"The relationship and network built with the other 23 principals is precious. We learnt so much about each other and we know that with the support given throughout this journey, we are not alone."

Conclusion

This leadership learning journey has triggered a shift in the leader's thinking by exposing leaders to environments, personalities and practices outside of their usual work space. The introduction to a new 'management vocabulary', the use of project management tools and learning from others beyond our field allowed the principals to interrogate their assumptions, beliefs and habits. The experience which started with an 'inside-out' approach was enriched by a learning journey as 'outside-in' practices were integrated into the process of learning.

The education to be a leader is an infinite process and the challenges ahead will be different for each member of the group. Principal Matters has brought them together and introduced a dimension to leadership learning that strengthens their confidence and empowers each leader with their sense of purpose. These principles will certainly matter in the long run.

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The Principal Matters Cohort 1 at Wheelock College, Boston.

Finnish Early Childhood Education Settings: General Approach and Considerations for Leadership

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[About the author: Eeva Hujala is Professor of early childhood education. During her academic career she has been working as professor at many universities in Finland and abroad as well as in university administration e.g., as Dean of the Faculty of Education. Her research areas include quality evaluation, parent-teacher partnership as well as leadership and teachers' professionalism in ECE. Recently, her research orientation is in cross-cultural comparisons. She has done research on leadership in Singapore, Japan and Finland. At this moment, she is doing a follow-up study on the quality of child care in Russia, USA and Finland. She is the founder of "International Leadership Research Forum" and "Journal of Early Childhood Education Research".]

Introduction

Leadership practices must be guided by a vision of 'quality' and its accompanying goals. Hence, a large part of this article introduces Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Finland along with what is considered quality practice, before I describe some of the key considerations necessary for leaders.

In Finland, young children are supported to learn and develop in an unhurried manner, at her/his natural pace. Finnish children begin primary school the year they turn seven. Before that, adults do not push for them to excel in academic skills. The core values of Finnish ECEC emphasise children's equal treatment and full attention to their views as participants in the world. The child is valued as an active and competent social agent who has the ability to influence her/his own learning and development. Finnish ECEC emphasises the importance

of artistic and creative experiences, various forms of play, and respect for children's individual learning needs. The main goal of Finnish ECEC is to have healthy and happy children.

One of the unquestionable strengths of Finnish ECEC is the presence of well-educated and well-trained staff who share a common vision of "quality" care and education. Teachers and assistant teachers work closely together as a team, and their focus is on providing an array of learning experiences that do not emphasise academic learning.

Universal Provision of ECEC

ECEC (both 'child care' and 'preschool' that is for 6-year-olds) is voluntary but is made freely available to all Finns. Comprehensive family support is considered the foundation for secure childhood. Therefore, family services are granted to families regardless of their

socio-economic status. This means that parents are entitled to maternity, paternity, and parental leave before their children turn three in order to spend time with their children. A maternity package (Fig 1) is also given to parents before the arrival of their baby. The package contains children's clothing and other necessary items such as bedding, cloth diapers, gauze towels and other basic childcare products.



Fig 1: Maternity package

In Finland, every child has the right to child care. The child care system consists of child care centres, family day care, and various other forms of child care services for children aged 1 to 6. Compulsory education begins at the age of 7. The year before this, children attend 'preschool' for four hours a day and these programmes are also free of charge. Fig 2 shows the adult-child ratios for the various age groups and settings.

<p>Child care centres: 1:8 in groups for 3- to-6-year-old children 1:4 in groups for birth to 3-year-old children 1:13 in pre-primary education (6-year-olds)</p> <p>Family day care: 1:4 in groups for birth to 6-year-old children</p>
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Fig 2: Adult-Child Ratios in ECEC

At least one third of the teaching staff (i.e. lead teachers) is required to have a Bachelor's Degree in early education. Assistant teachers are required to have an upper secondary level of education. Child care fees are based on the parental income. The fees cover an average of 15% of the actual costs and the rest is funded by public taxes. For low-income families, the services are free of charge.

The ECEC National Curriculum

Teachers' independence to plan the activities is a key foundation for curriculum implementation. There is no need for the testing of children's learning outcomes or an over-emphasis on teacher accountability. Instead, due to the high-level of teacher preparation, teachers are trusted to make professional judgments. High-quality ECEC criteria include the teacher's commitment, sensitivity, and ability to respond to the feelings and needs of children, as well as the creation of an atmosphere which strengthens community togetherness and participation.

In cooperation with parents, teachers develop an individual educational plan for each child. The main goal is to ensure that the individual needs of each child are taken into account as part of the planning, implementation and evaluation of the programme. As reflected in the sample individual education plan (Fig 3), the child's perception of herself/himself is a key focus in these plans.


Sample individual education plan for a 5- to 6-year-old child		
This is who I am:	I have many skills. I know how to...	
With my friends I like to...	I would like to learn more skills! Next I would like to learn...	

Fig 3: Sample Individual Education Plan (used in municipality, Kurikka)

Although the theoretical foundations that drive ECEC have expanded, the influences of Friedrich Fröbel have continued to have a strong influence on Finnish ECEC. For example, Fröbel emphasised the importance of nature and of play – nature still plays a strong part in the Finnish ECEC, and, according to the tradition of Finnish child care, the daily program consists of playing, singing, crafts, physical exercises, daily construction activity and outdoors activities. Although many of these traditional activities are still a big part of daily practices, there is a current body of ECEC research that has yielded new theoretical knowledge and scientific evidence to ground such practices and strengthen teachers’ pedagogical thinking. The following paragraphs explain these pedagogical fundamentals.

Children’s participation as a basis for pedagogy

At the core of contemporary Finnish ECEC is the belief that the child has the right to be an engaged young human being who actively participates in our social world. Instead of emphasizing academic skills, the focus is on supporting emotional development and nurturing thinking skills. Tangible proof of quality ECEC, to Finns, is the visible joy that is exhibited in children’s learning process.

As such, play and child-initiated curriculum have continued to take on a crucial role in ECEC. Participation has to do with creating opportunities for children to influence their own lives and their own learning. We believe that when teachers observe children and have discussions with them, they will begin to understand children’s thinking and how they perceive the world.



Fig 4: Child-initiated play as part of curriculum

Children’s ways of acting as curriculum

The curriculum incorporates children’s ways of acting as the foundation for planning and implementation. Children’s ways of acting and thinking include: play, exploration, physical activity and self-expression through different forms of art.

These activities are natural and meaningful for children and they enhance their well-being and participation, as well as increase their motivation to learn.

Playing. Finnish teachers put into practice the cultural mantras, 'let children be children' and 'the work of a child is to play.' Teachers trust that children learn through play. Teachers know that play is children's way of thinking, acting, learning and processing what they see, hear and experience. The teacher's role is to respect the ideas that children develop, as well as to enrich their play by bringing in the tools for adding new dimensions to their thinking. The teacher's task is to ensure that there is enough time and space for play, for it is during play that a child feels joy, happiness and satisfaction.

Exploring. Young children are naturally curious and have infinite questions that they may not necessarily articulate in words. Such inquiring minds are a result of their constant observation of the environment. Therefore, teachers should be sensitive and listen to children's questions and reflections about the world.

Seasonal changes impact life in Finnish ECEC, offering natural opportunities for varying activities. In the fall, children wander into the woods to see the colors of trees. They play in the mud, taste apples and explore mushrooms. In winter, activities include skiing, skating and sledding downhill, playing with snow. In the spring, the children see the snow melting and creating streams; they listen to the birds sing, examine the growth of a seed in sunlight and observe a bud changing into a leaf. In the summer,

children play with water, explore insects, swing and build various constructions from the sand in the sandbox. Here is an illustrative vignette:

"A group of seven children has left with the teacher to visit the autumn forest to pick blueberries for a blueberry pie they will be baking at the child care centre. The excursion also allows the group to look at nature, plants and the signs of autumn. Mushrooms are of great interest, and whenever one is found, the group stops to examine it and wonder whether it is edible or poisonous. The children's cups start filling up, although at different rates: some of the children gather berries conscientiously, some berries disappear immediately in the mouths. At the same time, there is some discussion about littering and respecting nature. Suddenly, a mouse runs across the path, and it is discussed all the way back to the child care centre."



Fig 5: Children observe natural phenomena on a daily basis

Physical activities. Children naturally engage in physical activities which also strengthen and promote other skills necessary for learning, while supporting their development of a positive self-image, self-esteem and an awareness of one's own body in relation to physical space.



Fig 6: Joy of movement out in nature is appreciated in Finnish ECEC

Artistic experiences and self-expression. Artistic experiences provide children with additional ways to experience the world they live in as well as opportunities for spontaneous self-expression. When encouraged, children naturally sing, hum, dance, draw, paint, color, dramatize, tell stories, and play with play dough; just about anything! The sky is the limit.

“Naptime for the 3- to 5-year-old children begins with the telling of stories and fairytales. The group has shown a great deal of interest in their own story crafting, and the children want to tell their own stories, one by one. When one tells a story, the others listen with great interest, laughing at funny parts and delving into the story”.

Integration of routine care in child care centres

Daily outdoor activities, balanced diet and adequate sleep bring security and rhythm to children's everyday life. The “care” and “education” aspects of ECEC are an integrated whole in the Finnish perspective. Teachers have experienced that outdoor activities have a positive effect on children's well-being and happiness. Outside, children can work off their energy in running and playing. In child care centres, children go out every day, all year round, and in variable weather. Various field trips to forests are an integral part of the Finnish ECE and children enjoy them greatly.



Fig 7: For Finns, there is no such thing as a bad weather as long as the clothing is appropriate.

Collaborative parent-teacher partnership involves parents' and teachers' conscious commitment to educational collaboration to support children's development and learning. This educational partnership emphasises equal interaction, trust and respect. It is actualized in daily teacher-parent conversations, the co-development of an individual ECEC plan for each child, and regularly-organised parent conferences and meetings.

Leadership practices found in the Finnish ECEC context

Having described the underpinning values of Finnish ECEC and its curricular practices, the remaining section in this article addresses, in broad strokes, leadership practices that have been found in the Finnish context. Maintaining quality ECEC services calls for efficient leadership which includes following core dimensions: human resource management, pedagogical leadership and team leadership that integrates the first two dimensions. Underlying the success of quality leadership and management is the belief that leaders should support rather than control teachers' work. The following paragraphs elaborate on the three key dimensions.

Human resource management in Finnish early childhood education has been seen as the most important leadership task by leaders. Also, leaders use most of their working time to human resource management – to appropriately distribute staff resources so as to achieve the centre's ECE vision and goals; to support teachers to reach their professional goals; and to provide emotional support for teachers in their professional work. Finnish leadership research has shown that human resource management often dominates leaders' work. Much time and effort is spent on creating and maintaining good staff relationships, setting clear goals, supporting and motivating staff to work efficiently, encouraging staff to educate themselves further, solving conflicts and communicating effectively with everyone.

Leaders emphasise that successful recruitment builds a foundation for successful human resource management. One such leader has shared in a research study, "my wisdom as a leader is to recruit teachers that are able to work towards developing high quality practices in the centre". In addition to paying attention to recruiting teachers who match the centre's vision, newcomers' induction into the work and colleagues is also important for teamwork to take place.

Teachers expect leaders to be "easily reachable, psychologically secure and takes care of teachers' wellbeing." Also leaders hope that they could create "a climate in the centre where teachers feel free to make contact with the leader to share their problems or joys". Teachers trust leaders' competence to find out all the problems that they face. Equality between the leader and teachers is emphasised as this is seen as a prerequisite for creating a good work climate in the centre.

Pedagogical leadership comprises guidance on pedagogical work with children, planning and assessing pedagogical actions, and improving pedagogical practices. Pedagogical leadership is closely connected to human resource management, both of which are strongly prioritized among Finnish leaders. Leaders with undefined responsibilities in pedagogical leadership and too large work loadings may take their leadership focus away from pedagogy and thus affect the quality of ECEC in the centre. The most vital tool for pedagogical leadership is conversation – this is seen as foundation

for professional development within centres. The staff of child care centres are expected to generate in-depth and specific discussions about pedagogical practices.

The foundation for implementing pedagogical leadership is to sort out strengths and weaknesses in teachers' pedagogical practice. Leaders have reported that the best way to do so is to regularly observe teachers' behaviours and interactions with children and then discuss with teachers based on those first-hand observations. One of the interviewed leaders revealed that pedagogical leadership was not easy – “most difficult and challenging for me is knowledge management in order to support and develop teachers' professional skills and capacity to advance their pedagogical practices.”

Team leadership integrates human resource management and pedagogical leadership. Team leadership emphasises team leaders' support and encouragement towards teachers, open interaction between the leader and employees as well as the sharing of leadership responsibilities. Discussion in teams enables mutual feedback regarding the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of peers and thus generates meaning-making among team members. To be supportive of one's team members, the team leader is required to have strong self-esteem and good leadership skills so that the delegation of responsibilities will be successful. Teachers clarify that “the team must have shared values, common guidelines and goals. It is important that

the team maintain continuous discussion of these topics.”

In interviewing teachers and leaders in my research, it was interesting to notice that their opinions of leadership and leaders work were quite the same. They were ready to support each other's work and also distribute the leadership. Teachers as well as leaders themselves emphasise that the most important skill of the leader is to hear the silent signals and anticipate the future in order to be able to do long-term plans. This is seen as one of the most important prerequisite of the successful leadership in ECE.



Fig 8: A playing child is the focus of Finnish ECE.

Beyond Leadership: The Why, What, Who and How of Education Diplomacy

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Introduction

This article is a summary of the authors' reflections on the Education Diplomacy Course offered by the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI). The authors embarked on a journey of discovery through learning in a community and reflecting on each other's personal takeaways.

When we first started, we had a confused and vague idea of education diplomacy. But all of us dived into this new learning opportunity. We were aware that diplomacy has traditionally been seen to be "... the conduct of relations between sovereign states through the medium of officials based at home or abroad" (Berridge and James, 2003, p. 69). As such, in the traditional sense, a diplomat is one appointed by the government to conduct official negotiations and maintain political, economic and social relations with another country.

During the course, however, we discovered the "new diplomacy" in which each one of us can play a leadership role as education diplomats who take on the responsibility of identifying an education issue, initiating an idea, advocating and negotiating a sustainable plan that would

improve the lives of children and their families. We also found answers to the questions: Why is education diplomacy important? What exactly is education diplomacy? Who is the education diplomat? What does it require of us? And, how do we carry out our role as an education diplomat? This article will address these questions each in turn.

Why We Need Education Diplomacy

Education diplomacy has to do with the advancement of the education field at local, national and international levels. In Singapore, even though we have a high enrolment rate in preschools, the government has had to address the issue of high absenteeism among 5-to-6-year-olds (Ng, 2015). The Early Childhood Education Agency (ECDA), in working with community partners and preschools, has been involved in addressing this issue with various initiatives that include garnering the assistance of neighbours within vulnerable community groups, to take children to school each day. Such initiatives reflect the commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in making education available and accessible to all children including

taking measures to encourage school attendance and reduce drop-out rates (UNHR, 1989).

Around the region in South East Asia, the education landscape is quite different. For example, in Laos only 15% of children ages 3 to 5 years are participating in early childhood care and education (UNICEF, 2012). In Myanmar, although enrolment rate is 84% in primary education, the drop-out rate of children who do not complete primary level is 46% (UNICEF, 2012). The recent news of the dire circumstances of refugees has prompted UNHCR and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to highlight the dismal fact that globally, only one in two refugee children go to primary school and one in four to secondary (Global Partnership for Education, 2016). Furthermore, more than half of the world's out-of-school children live in countries facing strife and violence and are deprived of their right to education (Global Partnership for Education, 2016). The different education scenarios so far highlighted and the many more that are evidenced in the diverse communities around the world compose the purpose and scope for education diplomacy.

Also, UNESCO has been tasked with the mandate to cover all aspects of education including formal and non-formal education (UNESCO, 2016). This responsibility is tied closely to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, to SDG4 – “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” The interconnectedness of the SDGs requires

both partnerships and networks at all levels to undertake such transformational change. Thus, education diplomacy requires a commitment to using negotiation and diplomacy in understanding the cultural context when setting educational goals. Considerations such as successful implementation, follow-up and the review process can only be effective if supported by effective multi-stakeholder partnerships and financing (UNESCO, 2016). Therein lies another angle to the purpose of the human connection. Through such interactions that cultivate trust among state and non-state players, it provides the roots for education diplomacy to advance education goals that mutually benefit the learner, his family, his neighborhood and the community at large.

While children and young people are shaped by the world, they too have the ability to influence the world around them (UNICEF, 2013). The era of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) saw progress made in the reduction of household poverty, an increase in school attendance, a decrease in child death rates, and increased access to clean drinking water (UNICEF, 2013). The entry of the SDGs into a world of economic uncertainty, war and violence has made it ever more clear that if these goals are to be met, then ‘holding hands to work together’ has to be our mantra. As of 2015, the SDGs are spearheading efforts in the areas of health and education among others, so as to ensure investment in the future of *Every Person*. Sustainable development must

balance the scales of equity across all spectrums in order to break cycles of poverty and ensure that children and families of today and tomorrow are able to inherit and thrive in a liveable, safe and peaceful world (UNICEF, 2013). Education diplomacy thus has to take a serious look at its role in being a channel of peace.

All these reasons have given us the scope, impetus and direction for education diplomacy.

What Education Diplomacy Achieves

Educational diplomacy has been envisaged to exceed the normal traditional understanding of diplomacy between diplomats at the governmental level. “Education diplomacy cultivates trust to achieve benefits in the pursuit of context-specific education goals using negotiation and other diplomatic skills to communicate across regional or national boundaries or with local communities responsible for education delivery” (Hone & Murphy, 2016). It now includes new actors across other structures. As shown in Fig 1, these actors may constitute non-governmental organisations, high profile personalities, private sector, funding or philanthropy organisations, religious organisations and academics. Simply put, any one person or organisation can be argued to be an education diplomat provided the agenda is related to that of education.

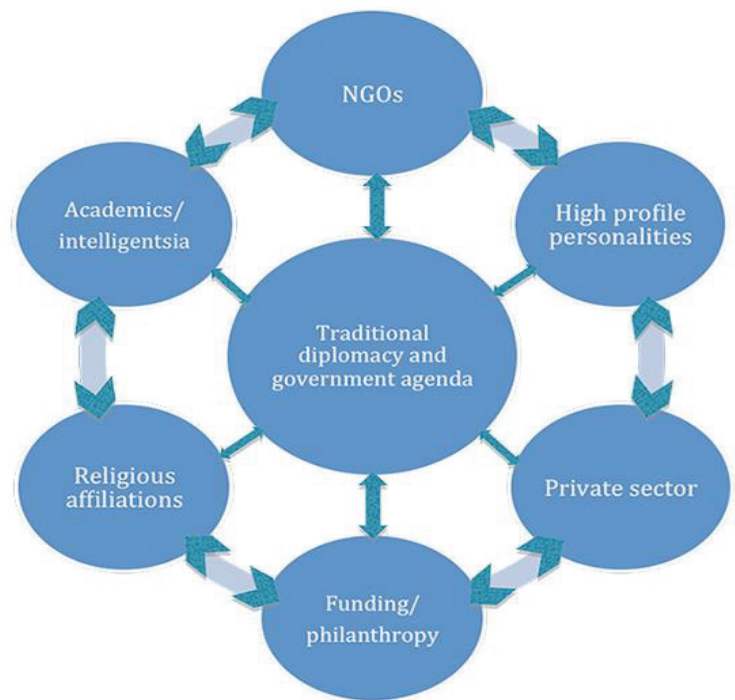


Fig 1: Actors in New Diplomacy (adapted from Kelley, 2010, p. 296)

How did this come to be so? What brought about the change from traditional ideas of diplomacy to this “new diplomacy”? Two separate arguments are pertinent here – that the emergence of new topics have caused this change, and this builds on an earlier argument that “organised crime, international terrorism, the environment, human rights, finance, trade, health, migration and new technology have changed the face of the international agenda quite profoundly (Riordan, 2003)”. As these new or changed topics have altered the international agenda, new actors have become the subject of the shift between tradition diplomacy to the new version. All of us can become new actors in this new era of education diplomacy.

Who Should Engage in Education Diplomacy

Education diplomats may be artistes, celebrities, politicians, philanthropists, tycoons and other people of renown who are able to publicise and push agendas as education diplomats. Individuals who are well-known public figures may easily become education diplomats because of their reputation. Examples of such diplomats are: Andre Agassi, the sports personality, created a fund to open 23 charter schools; Angelina Jolie, the actress, opened a girls' school in Afghanistan and Oprah Winfrey, media owner and host, started an academy for girls in South Africa and donates generously to American charter schools.

However, education diplomats may also be people like you and us who are deeply passionate about an education issue that has yet been addressed. In the following paragraphs we provide examples of how we have acted as education diplomats in the Singapore context, through two community-based projects.

How to Enact Education Diplomacy

To carry out our roles effectively, we needed to have the basic knowledge of the community that we were working in and the practices of the individuals in that community. Having the knowledge was not enough; we needed to respect their perspectives, be able to put ourselves in their shoes, and be willing to learn from them. Only then could we create a win-win situation in which all parties collaborated

towards an agreed upon goal or vision for change. As such, as an education diplomat, the following skills and abilities were necessary:

1. Be able to respect the different beliefs and putting oneself in another's shoes so as to develop a common language in goal setting.
2. Have the ability to understand the goals of all parties involved and make sense of it once the goals have been reached.
3. Embrace the system thinking skills because education does not exist in solace. There are many factors affecting this system, in the micro, meso and macro levels. It is important to identify crucial leverage points to effect change.
4. Possess good communication skills; be open, listen, show empathy towards the views of others because in today's "new diplomacy", we need to weigh the differing priorities and decide if it is worthwhile to sacrifice the issue at hand for other business opportunities.
5. Build trusting relationships by exhibiting integrity and sincerity because education diplomacy is not about short term gains but the collaborative effort of stakeholders coming together to achieve the SDGs.

Putting the above abilities and skills into action, the Project Hand in Hand and Project Tinker Kit were initiated.

Project Hand in Hand. Singapore certainly believes that education is critical in lifting people out of poverty; research has also

shown that high absenteeism rate at preschool predicts a worsening trend that will eventually result in children dropping out of school. As high absenteeism at preschool has unfavourable impact on children’s continued education in schools, the Association for Early Childhood Educators, Singapore (AECES) introduced an early intervention programme, the Project Hand in Hand with the support of a funding partner. This Project aimed to get preschool children who were frequently absent to attend school regularly and the actors acted as education diplomats. This project started off with several rounds of pre-negotiations with the relevant partners before proper agenda set in for project implementation (see Fig 2).



- Some preliminary ideas that were discussed at the pre-negotiations were:
1. Are the relevant partners contacted and included for the subsequent meetings?
 2. What are the challenges / problems on the ground that we are trying to resolve?
 3. Are there any other alternatives to help these children? Or can technology help?
 4. Who will be the right agency to implement the project?
 5. When will be a good period to implement the project?

Fig 2: Illustration of the Project’s Process

Working with several partners required a higher level of negotiation, it was important that the formula or outcome was agreeable to all parties and every party felt that their interests were reflected in the formula or outcome. The agenda was then decided by the key actors for the concerned-agenda which was to increase preschool attendance (see Fig 3). Each had a role to play.

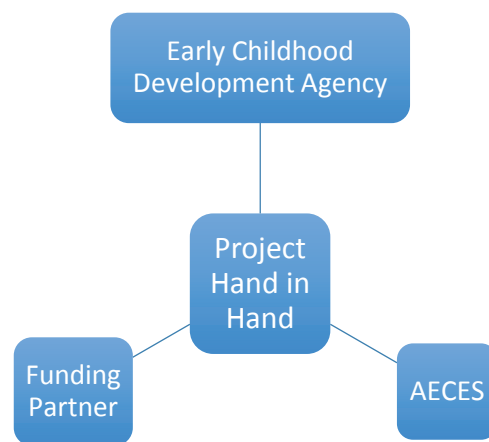


Fig 3: Key actors

All the actors were acting as education diplomats and through negotiations, each party agreed on the agenda and the scope before proceeding with the implementation. The Association proceeded with the project after the funding partner cleared the project with management. Its role was to find adults (volunteers) who were willing to take children to school and back. So far, AECES had matched about 20 children to the volunteers and the number is growing.

Project Tinker Kit. This was another project started by a social enterprise, Preschool Market. The founders of this social enterprise, acted as education

diplomats. Their aim was to give a tinker kit to each identified child of age 4-6 from less-privileged backgrounds, in particular those living in one- or two-room public housing. They were driven by their passion of giving every child the opportunity to learn and create. As such, they created a tinker kit for each child to give children and their families a means to express themselves through art and craft with the basic tools and guidance in the tinker kit. Project Tinker Kit also hoped to initiate family bonding between parents and children through the activities in the kit.

In order to get it going, the founders needed to source for funding and also make connections with children of the target group. For funding, much support was garnered through sponsorships and crowdfunding. Effort was put into communicating the objective of the project to the sponsors and what they can stand to gain through the sponsorship; creating a win-win situation. Also, engaging the families, volunteers and social services groups were its main thrust and tinker kits were brought into the

homes of the families. Included in this project were government agencies like the ECDA and IDA. They were interested in this project as it was a bottom-up initiative and had a social mission. Besides the government agencies, this project also involved other partners (Fig 4).

In 2015, about 100 children had benefitted from the Project Tinker Kit and there would be another 150 beneficiaries in 2016. The two projects, Hand in Hand and Tinker Kit, demonstrated the role that education diplomats could play in convincing others of their cause and achieve buy-in as we reminded ourselves that Every Child Matters.

Conclusion

The purpose of education diplomacy was to take the leadership in identifying, initiating, advocating, negotiating a sustainable plan on an education issue that would improve the lives of children and their families. It appeared a daunting task but working in a trusting and collaborative manner, taking baby steps and celebrating little victories along the way, made the whole process most fulfilling.

Government Agencies	Families	Family and Social Services Groups	Sponsors and Contributors	Polytechnics and students
Intervention for the children of 4-6 years old from the lower income families to lessen the income gap	Opportunities for family bonding and engaging in meaningful play	Intervention for the families and to encourage more engagement.	To provide learning opportunities for the children To engage in corporate social responsibility events	Opportunities for the younger generation to reach out to the community in supporting families, planning and executing the project

Fig 4

Children represent close to one-third of the world's population and this means that they rely on the other two-thirds to help them create a better tomorrow. The paths we take as education diplomats is wrought with challenges but it is our belief in the human spirit that keeps our purpose grounded and our efforts steadfast as education diplomats.

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Using Structured Teaching to Promote Independence in Children with Global Developmental Delay

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Introduction

For the past two years, I have worked with children with Global Developmental Delay (GDD) in a centre that runs an early intervention programme for infants and children. GDD is defined as a significant delay in two or more developmental domains: gross motor, fine motor, speech and language, social, cognitive, and daily living skills (Shevell et al, 2001), when observed in children 5 years and below.

In my work, one of the most chaotic times happens during the arrival routine when a majority of the students requires teachers' attention and/or assistance at the same time. Through my observations, I grouped these students into three categories:

- Group 1: Highly independent, requiring no assistance or attention.
- Group 2: Dependent on teachers' assistance, unable to complete the arrival routine due to a lack of motor skills.
- Group 3: Also dependent on teachers' assistance to complete the routine; possesses the necessary skills to handle the individual steps of the routine but needed teachers' prompts to move them from one step to another.

If we could teach the final group of students to be independent, my co-teacher and I would be better able to

concentrate on the second group of students, and reduce the total time required for the entire class to complete the arrival routine. This could result in additional time for other interventions.

Tapping on my co-teacher's vast experience, we decided on an idea of implementing structured teaching to promote independence in this group of students. Initially, I had misgivings as structured teaching is an approach designed specifically for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and not traditionally used for teaching children with GDD.

My action research question was: "How can the use of structured teaching promote independence in children with Global Developmental Delay during the arrival routine?" The objective of this research was to decrease the level of teachers' prompting and teachers' assistance and/or attention required for completion of the arrival routine, leading to independence. This research also aimed to challenge current beliefs on structured teaching and to extend its use beyond individuals with ASD.

Literature Review

Structured Teaching

'Structured teaching', a fundamental component of the TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children)

approach (Schopler, Mesibov, & Hearshey, 1995), is a widely recognized approach used to facilitate teaching and learning for individuals with ASD. Structured teaching is designed around the central strengths and deficits of autism that affect learning and daily living.

There are four major components to TEACCH –

- 1) **Physical structure.** It refers to the organization of physical layout to enhance ability of individuals to make sense of and function effectively in their environments. It provides consistent, visually clear areas and boundaries that help understand where specific activities take place; it is used to limit external distractions and reduce anxiety.
- 2) **Schedules.** They are visual timetables that show when and what specific activities will occur in a day. Schedules can be individualized according to a child's understanding, and include object, picture, symbols, and written schedules. They help individuals sequence and organise, anticipate and predict activities. Visual schedules can also minimize problems with receptive language, poor memory or attention and independence.
- 3) **Work systems.** They inform individuals what to do while in the specified area for an activity. These organizational systems indicate
 - what task or activity the person is supposed to do
 - how much work is to be done
 - when the activity is finished, and

- what happens next after the task or activity is completed.

Work systems can be in the form of left to right systems, matching systems and written 'to do' lists. They mitigate difficulties with time concepts, organizing and sequencing, and independence.

- 4) **Task organization.** It uses visual structure within individual tasks or activities to clarify task requirements, sequences, relevant concepts, and other important directions required to complete task. Providing such visually clear information taps on their strong visual processing abilities to help with difficulties with organizing, focusing on relevant details of tasks, understanding verbal instructions, and independence.

Different levels of structure can be adapted at every age and developmental level, according to individual needs.

Structured Teaching and Independence

Various studies document the positive outcome of structured teaching on independence in individuals. Research evidence reports increased independence in work, play, routines, and transitions with the use of different aspects of structured teaching (Howley, 2013).

Pierce & Schreibman (1994) investigated the effect of visual information in task organization upon routine activities. In their study, using a pictorial self-management package, all three children successfully completed all tasks, in all settings, in the absence of supervision. Clarke, Dunlap & Vaughn (1999) adapted a work system for a boy's

morning routine and observed decreased prompting and considerable reduction in the time taken for successful completion of the routine. The application of structured teaching principles to toilet training was elucidated by Boswell & Gray (1998), which included information in structuring the physical environment and establishing a visually supported routine.

Importance of Promoting Independence

According to Koyama & Wang (2011), promoting independence in individuals with disabilities was a crucial theme in educational settings, regardless of diagnosis. Independent functioning and reduction of dependency on supervising adults might result in increased intervention time, increased opportunities for peer interaction, efficient and effective learning and decreased teacher supervision. Independent performance was also essential for the successful inclusion of students with GDD, considering the lack of personalized attention from teachers in such less restrictive environments.

In far sight, the ability to perform tasks in the absence of supervision increased the chance for people with disabilities to secure employment in a vocational setting (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998).

Co-morbidity of GDD and ASD

Co-morbidity is the presence of more than one distinct condition in an individual (Valderas et al., 2009). According to the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), GDD may often be the secondary diagnosis and co-morbid with other disorders such as ASD, Down Syndrome (DS), Cerebral Palsy (CP),

Epilepsy, and Visual and Hearing Impairment (VI/HI).

In “The TEACCH approach to Autism Spectrum Disorders”, Mesibov et al. (2004) clarified that most of the features of ASD were not unique to the diagnosis. Many of these characteristics were also seen in typically developing children as well as in other developmental disabilities such as GDD, learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and language disorders.

The presence of ASD traits were also reported to be common in children with ADHD (Cooper et al., 2014; Kochhar et al., 2011; Kröger et al., 2011), Intellectual Disability (ID) (Goldin, Matson, & Cervantes, 2014; LoVullo & Matson, 2009), VI (Howley & Preece, 2003), and epilepsy (Reilly et al., 2015; Ryland et al., 2012).

Therefore, children with a diagnosis of GDD could possibly share a similar profile of characteristics and behaviors as children with ASD, making structured teaching a possible intervention strategy.

Precedence of Using Structured Teaching with Children with GDD

In a review by Koyama & Wang (2011), their results demonstrated the effectiveness of activity schedules for promoting independence, enhancing learning and minimizing behaviors in individuals with intellectual disabilities such as ID, ADHD and DS. They concluded that there was no theoretical ground to limit the use of activity schedules to individuals with ASD and that it may be a valuable tool for any individual who required greater independence.

A small scale study (Bennett, Reichow & Wolery, 2011) on the effects of structured teaching on the behavior of three children with disabilities (two with ASD and one with GDD) also produced positive results, suggesting that individuals with disabilities other than ASD may benefit from elements of structured teaching. In this study, the use of a structured work system, visual schedule and organization of physical structure resulted in increased engagement, speed and accuracy of task completion and decreased stereotypic behavior and escape attempts.

Conclusion

The literature review yielded extensive results concerning the application and benefits of structured teaching with children with ASD. However, research on the use of structured teaching with children with other diagnosis was significantly lacking. Therefore, this action research investigated the use of structured teaching with children with GDD, particularly in the area of independence in a specific routine activity.

Methodology

Participants

Two students, Hannah* and Charis* (*pseudonyms), participated in this action research. They needed to (a) have the primary diagnosis of GDD, (b) demonstrate a lack of independence during the arrival routine, despite having the necessary skills to complete individual steps of the routine, and (c) have no prior experience with structured teaching.

Hannah, female, 5 years 7 months old, attended 2-hour intervention sessions on

the afternoons of Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. There were three other students in her class, together with two teachers. Hannah was predominantly non-verbal but she had demonstrated the ability to produce single word approximations. She communicated by pointing to picture cards and/or gesturing and responded best when photographs of concrete objects, events or persons was used. She was inconsistent in carrying out one-step instructions within context.

Charis, female, 4 years 5 months old, attended 2-hour intervention sessions on the afternoons of Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. There were four other students in her class, together with two teachers. Charis communicated using 2-4 word phrases and sentences and was able to understand abstract symbols when used in her picture communication system. Charis was able to read and understand common words used in the classroom. Charis could carry out two- step instructions within context.

Children's parents gave their consent prior to the start of this action research. They were assured of their child's full anonymity and confidentiality in the research.

Establishing the Baseline

We used methodological triangulation (Patton, 1999) for the collection of baseline information in order to ensure validity as well as to elucidate different aspects of the action research. These questions were posed -

(a) which elements of structured teaching should be implemented for the arrival routine?

- (b) how prompt or dependent were the students?
- (c) what were the reasons for the lack of independence during the arrival routine?

Rating scale. Heflin & Hess's (2007) "Enhancing Instructional Contexts for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (EIC-ASD)" rating scale was used. It was designed to validate current practices in any given setting and to identify elements that could be improved.

We found that the arrival routine was lacking in 3 aspects of structured teaching -physical structure, schedules and task organization; 4 of 5 items corresponded to these aspects, scoring "insufficient level", 1 was scored at "emerging level". The element of 'work systems' was not assessed by this tool.

This tool also provided insight into what constituted an "exemplary level" for each element of structured teaching and this set the standard in my action plan.

Observational checklists. Checklists were used to record the total prompts required to complete the arrival routine.

For the arrival routine, tasks were analysed prior to observations. Students were given 5 seconds to respond independently to the natural cues upon arriving at the classroom. If an error or no response occurred, prompts were given (West & Billingsley, 2005), starting from the least intrusive to the most intrusive. These included: indirect verbal prompt, direct verbal prompt, gestural prompt, modelling prompt and physical prompt.

The next intrusive prompt was given at every 5 seconds of unresponsiveness or

incorrect response, until the student responded correctly. The level of prompt required for each step of the arrival routine was recorded in the checklist.

Both students were dependent on teachers' prompts for the arrival routine. Hannah required 21 prompts on each of the two observations. Charis required 12 and 13 prompts on two separate observations. As performance was consistent over two observations, we did not make any further observations.

Charis responded well to direct verbal prompts better than indirect verbal. Hannah did not respond well to verbal prompts, she required gestural, modelling and physical prompts for most the routine. This could possibly be due to poor auditory processing skills.

Anecdotal records were made of the students' environment and behavior during the arrival routine. This was to find out the possible reasons for its occurrence. We concluded that both Hannah and Charis were highly distracted by the physical environment, such as the swimming pool that faced the classroom, students' movements along the corridor, peers and materials around them. The teacher had to be with both students, on a 1:1 basis, throughout the arrival routine. Both were also unable to answer most of the "What's next" questions. This could be due to poor memory, organization and/or sequencing skills.

Action Plan

From the baseline findings, I decided to implement three aspects of structured teaching to promote independence during the arrival routine.

Physical structure

To minimize the distractions caused by the swimming pool and students' movement along the corridor during arrival, I moved the arrival routine into the classroom.

Using the "exemplary level" of the EIC-ASD tool (items 1.1 and 1.9), we created an individual work area in a corner of the classroom, it was kept clear of materials except for those required for the routine. We equipped this place with a child-sized table, chair, a work system board and a snack basket (Photo 1). Other students were not allowed into this area, they were directed to the play area at the opposite end of the classroom once they completed their routine. This was to minimize distraction caused by peers.



Photo 1 : Work area for arrival routine

Work system and task organization

For the arrival routine, it was organised into steps and presented in the form of visuals. This was to help mitigate possible difficulties with memory, organization, sequencing and/or auditory processing in both participants. The visuals were adapted according to each child's cognitive level.

Hannah's work system comprised of photographs supported with words (Photo 2).



Photo 2: Left to right work system for Hannah's arrival routine.

Charis's work system was a word list, supported by abstract symbols (Photo 3). A "finished" folder was at the end of the sequence, for her to keep the visuals.

After completion of the arrival routine, there would be a visual of the next activity, this was placed on the upper right corner of the table (Photo 1). The next activity serves as a reward and motivation for completing the arrival routine, and hence, highly preferred activities were chosen. For Hannah, she would have the whiteboard while Charis' would be a picture showing "playtime".

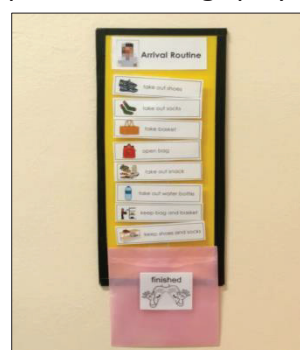


Photo 3: Top to bottom work system for Charis's arrival routine.

Implementation

Intervention was over six sessions in three weeks. Using graduated guidance (O'Hara & Hall, 2014), both students were

taught how to use the work system. Both started with hand over hand prompts. When the student became adept with the hand over hand prompts, I progressed to wrist prompts, elbow prompts and finally gestural prompts until all prompts were faded. If the student were unable to perform, we would go back to the previous level of prompt.

Hannah used a left to right system; she learnt to start the routine from her most left. Upon completion of that step, she removed and placed the photograph into the “finished” folder, and then started on the next step (on her most left again), until the entire routine was completed.

Charis used a top to bottom word list, starting the routine from the top. She would remove the word strip and keep it in the “finished” folder as she completed a step and then would start from the top again until the routine was completed.

The use of left to right system and top to bottom system was non-discriminative, but was chosen based on the most efficient use of space.

After six sessions, we had post-intervention data through anecdotal recording and a revised observational checklist. We made a change in the sequence of steps compared to that used during baseline data collection. The change was necessary because of a change in one routine - “keep shoes and socks” on the shoe rack outside the classroom was shifted into the classroom and it became the last step of the arrival routine. This was to minimize movement of student in the middle of the routine as it could possibly lead to distractions and unsuccessful completion of arrival routine.

Findings

Structured teaching for the arrival routine increased independence in both children with GDD.

Results were more positive for Hannah:

- Before intervention – she managed only 25% of the steps independently (2 of 8 steps).
- With intervention, she was able to complete 87.5% of the steps independently (7 of 8 steps)
- There was a significant 90.4% reduction in the average total number of prompts required for completion of routine.
- There was also a move in the nature of prompts required for completion, from more intrusive prompts (physical, modelling and gestural) to less intrusive verbal prompts.
- Furthermore, Hannah was able to complete the first 7 steps of the routine in total absence of teacher’s assistance and attention. Teacher’s prompting was required for the final step of the routine and this could be due to environmental distractions.

For Charis –

- Before intervention – she managed only 25% of the steps independently (2 of 8 steps).
- After intervention – she was able to complete 56.3% (an average of 4.5 of 8 steps) of the steps independently.
- There was a 72% reduction in the average total number of prompts required for completion of routine.
- There was also a move in the nature of prompts required for completion, from more intrusive prompts (gestural

and direct verbal) to least intrusive indirect verbal prompt.

- However, despite these improvements, Charis still required teacher's supervision and attention to complete the arrival routine. She would repeatedly seek out her teacher's attention, indicating a possible emotional dependence.

Discussion

This study demonstrated that structured teaching was effective in increasing independence for two children with GDD. There were immense improvements in the percentage of steps completed independently and a significant decrease also in adult prompting. The results also illuminated the issue of emotional dependence in Charis.

Decrease in Adult Prompting

The decrease in adult prompting supported existing research that examined structured teaching's visually orientated approaches to promoting independence in children (Bennett, Reichow & Wolery, 2011; Clarke, Dunlap & Vaughn, 1999; Hume & Odom, 2007; Hume, Plavnick & Odom, 2012; Koyama & Wang, 2011; Pierce & Schreibman, 1994). These studies involved a shift of stimulus control from continuous adult instruction to an alternative stimulus. This shift in stimulus control is a key component in increasing student independence (Hume, Plavnick & Odom, 2012).

The alternative stimulus in this action research was the work system. The work system provided visual cues and information (e.g. what task was supposed

to be done, how much work was to be done, when the activity was finished, and what happens next after the task was completed) that the teacher was previously providing during the baseline phase. With the arrival routine organised into steps and sequences through visuals, it mitigated possible difficulties with memory, organization, sequencing and/or auditory processing in both participants.

The physical structure in the environment could have helped with the decrease in prompts. Moving the routine indoor, setting up the work area void of excessive materials were effective in minimizing distractions, and there was less need for adult prompting, which was previously used to redirect both participants when distractions occurred.

The difference in the effectiveness of structured teaching in both participants could be attributed to their learning styles. Kanar (1995) described three learning styles related to physiological factors: visual (seeing/picture), auditory (hearing/audio) and kinesthetic (touching/physical). In the baseline assessment, Hannah demonstrated poor auditory processing skills. It could be possible that Hannah shared the characteristics of autism that made the intervention successful. Charis, on the other hand, did not demonstrate difficulties with auditory processing during baseline assessment. Charis' dominant learning style could be auditory and/or kinesthetic, hence possibly explaining the less effective results. The improvement could be due to the organization and sequencing aspect of the work system.

Emotional Dependence

During post-intervention assessments, when there was a withdrawal of 1:1 attention, it was observed that Charis displayed attention-seeking behaviors, and this pointed to a possibility of emotional dependence. Gewirtz (1954) defined emotional dependence to include behaviors for reinforcers that are provided through social responses from another person, such as behaviors employed for approval, attention, affection, praise, reassurance, closeness and touch. According to Gewirtz, the display of attention-seeking behaviors could be linked to a person's reinforcement history, lack of attention from a caregiver during early years and family attitudes or conditions of socialization, for example, over-protection, rejection and deprivation. This could possibly describe Charis where, in her first 18 months of development, both parents were absent and her maternal grandparents were her primary caregivers. After the age of 18 months, Charis was placed in a childcare service, she would be with her parents for 3 hours a day before her bedtime. The absence of both parents' involvement and a lack of attention from parents could have led to feelings of rejection and abandonment.

According to the Dollard and Miller Theory, children typically develop an association between the absence of the mother and other enabling persons and the prolonged suffering from pain and other discomforts; and the close presence of the mother and other enabling persons becomes associated with elimination of discomforts. Subsequently, a child will

learn to respond to cues of separation and distance with approach responses, such as that of attention seeking behavior (Dollard & Miller, 1950). In Charis' case, it is possible that feelings of rejection and abandonment were associated to cues provided by the absence or distance of her mother. Through conditioning, cues provided by the distancing of teacher and isolation in the work area during post-intervention assessment could have triggered feelings of rejection and abandonment, providing the occasion for Charis to employ instrumental behavior for attention.

Future cycles of action research could look into functional analysis of Charis' attention-seeking behavior and the development of a replacement behavior and strategies for behavior modification.

Reflections

By using physical structure, work systems and task organization, structured teaching promoted independence in two children with GDD during the arrival routine. Such positive results have encouraged me to continue looking to structured teaching as a viable teaching strategy in my class, especially for students who exhibit characteristics similar to that of ASD. Nevertheless, it is in my opinion that structured teaching should not be thoughtlessly implemented but be adapted according to the needs of children with GDD. Being a multi-component teaching strategy, it would be more efficient if a teacher could master the merits of each component and identify the appropriate component(s) that targets the deficits in a child before

implementing it. The learning of a child should always be the focus, not strict adherence to an approach.

However, the use of structured teaching may be space and time consuming when implemented on a larger scale bigger. To set up the work area for the arrival routine, space for the reading corner was sacrificed. More workstations would mean less space for group activities. The extensive use of visuals in structured teaching, coupled with the need for individualization, according to different cognitive and understanding levels (ranging from concrete to abstract representation of objects, persons and/or events), may also be time consuming to prepare.

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影响教师培养幼儿自我规训能力的动机因素：在新加坡的研究结果摘要

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黄仿是新苗师范学院的全职讲师。她在学前教育领域里有 13 年的教学和管理经验，从最基础的华语老师升到一家公司的高级主管。同时她在成人幼儿教师培训领域里有 9 年的教学经验。在进入早期教育领域前，她在生物学教学与科研领域里有 16 年的工作经验。目前她在新苗负责教学的科目分别隶属于早期教育大专课程，新跃大学的本科课程和相关在职培训课程等。

背景

在过去的三十年里，我们对于儿童认知和社交技能发展的认识有了很大的提高。研究发现具备一些基本能力的幼儿倾向于有更良好的幼小衔接经验和将来有更成功的学业成就 (Duncan et al., 2007; La Paro & Pianta, 2003)。对个人将来学业成功有贡献的许多重要能力包括认知技能、社交技能和自我规训能力 (Duncan et al., 2007; La Paro & Pianta, 2003; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000)。在上述几种能力中，自我规训在近年来日益凸显

出在预示幼儿将来学术成就的指标性意义。自我规训跟多重认知能力相关，例如强烈情绪管理、注意力集中、在某项任务上的停留能力、干扰的排除、冲动的抑制、行动的计划性、对个人思维的反思和合作、表现出同理心，等等。

尽管在教师的幼教专业课程里一直强调培养幼儿自我规训能力的重要性，可是在实际情况下幼儿还是被观察到缺少这些重要的技能。因此，为了找到影响教师培养幼儿自我规训能力的动机因素，研究组成员跟两个托儿所教师

合作，协助她们运用一些课堂管理策略来提高这两个托儿所 5 岁孩子发展自我规训能力，并了解这些教师在实施过程中的心路历程。

本研究的目的在于找到影响教师培养幼儿自我规训能力的动机因素。在这个研究中，自我规训意味着孩子根据确定的社会期待独立控制自己的行为 (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 1998)。具体表现如下：

- 通过语言交流自身的需要，愿望和思想
- 在新活动中保有持续的注意力、热忱和好奇心
- 服从方向性要求和抑制冲动
- 能等待自己的机会并对其他幼儿的感受敏感 (Blair, 2009)

我们希望通过本次的研究，能让教师学会使用一些管理技巧去帮助幼儿提高他们的自我规训能力，并且可以更加顺其自然地学习。同时教师也能感受到当幼儿可以自己对自己的学习负责，他

们自己的教学工作也会变得更加愉悦和富有成果。

缘起

在新加坡，Shanmugaratnam (2003) 指出，在早期教育阶段，幼儿发展提出问题、元认知、主动探究等广义的认知技能可作为他们启蒙阶段的主要基本学业技能，并且可以成为他们将来阅读、书写和数学学业成功的一个坚实基础。然而，作为一个幼教老师的培训者，我们经常听到一线老师在父母、祖父母的压力下，被迫把教学时间用在短期内提高成绩有好处的机械学业作业和死记硬背的学习任务上。新加坡父母倾向于把关注的焦点集中在孩子的学业发展而不是心理和社会发展。Hoon (1994) 和 Raban 与 Ure (1999 引自 Ebbeck & Gokhale, 2004) 证实，父母们把更多的注意力放在模仿正式教育的纸笔作业训练活动上。另外，在课堂上学员们也经常反映他们因为要维持孩子们做作业的注意力和让他们服从指令而时常感到烦

躁和倦怠。

既然明确知道培养幼儿自我规训能力可以对将来语文和数学技能获得方面有积极的影响，因此这项研究可以说服教师和父母亲们把注意力放在帮助孩子们自己规范自己的行为作为他们学习的主要目标，而不是仅仅关注幼儿的学业发展。

研究问题：

如果有的话，是什么原因会导致教师有意识地去培养幼儿的自我规训能力？

文献综述。在对自我规训、注意跨度和认知发展的研究表明，在相关任务上表现良好需要集中的注意力，警觉的注意力和能记住的多条信息的能力。例如，在 NICHD 托儿研究网络的支持下，摘录自 Morrison, Ponitz & McClelland (2010) 的文献表明一个 5-6 岁的幼儿在完成繁琐的计算机任务时能集中注意力可以预示将来会有更好的阅读和数学成绩。除此以外还发现那些在完成任务时注意力更集中的学龄前儿童比那些注意

力不集中的孩子的测试成绩明显偏高 (Howse et al., 2003 引自 Morrison, Ponitz & McClelland, 2010)。

自我规训的定义。 自我规训意味着孩子根据确定的社会期待独立控制自己的行为 (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 1998)。Blair, & Razza, (2007) 也提供了与自我规训相关的一些有用的信息，并把它们定义为有努力的控制、执行功能和错误信念理解。有努力的控制指的是为了认同一个亚强效的或者更微弱的反应而抑制强效的或者前强效的响应的能力。执行功能指的是运用在计划、问题解决和目标导向的活动时的注意力转移、工作记忆和认知过程的抑制控制 (Blair & Razza, 2007)。错误信念理解关切在学前阶段特有的一个意识现象，就是他们头脑里持有的和行动所依据的信念是错误的 (Blair & Razza, 2007)。

在文献里还浮现了一些问题：为什么自我规训对认知发展那么重要？

从思维理论可知，自我规训的出现

为处于儿童早期的幼儿发展他们的认知能力提供了一个宽广的基础 (Carlson, Mandell, & Williams, 2004)。一些研究的结果表明支持幼儿同时发展自我规训能力和学业能力的课程可以最有效地支持孩子未来的学业成功 (Blair, & Razza, 2007)。

为什么高行为规训跟高学业成就相关？

原因可能是“一个可以集中注意力，抑制冲动性行为，以及在课堂上跟成年人和同侪正常交往的儿童，结果导致他更容易掌握学校里教授的阅读和数学概念” (Duncan et al., 2007)。

怎样提高孩子的自我规训能力？

好成绩对一个孩子获得更高一级教育的机会具有非常重要的意义。父母亲和教育政策的制定者都非常看重教育的价值。然而，我们怎样才可以帮助幼儿在学校里获得成功？在孩子的儿童早期我们怎样做才可以最好地帮助他们将来取得学业成就？什么课程可以帮助孩子准备他们的学业能力？每个成年人的答案

都不同。一些学校任谁把注意力集中在直接帮助准备学业能力的“练习加实践”教学法上。它的工作前提是儿童早期良好的学业成绩是下一阶段学业成就的最好基础。而在另一方面，游戏课程的支持者则关注孩子们的心理健康和认为孩子们的社会情感发展和学业发展具有同等重要的意义 (Minett & Gunstone, 1996; Ministry of Education, 2012; Meece & Daniels, 2008; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2010)。

Kopp 的另一项研究提出孩子跟照顾者和其他重要他人的早期经验和社交互动帮助幼儿发展的自我规训能力最终可以推动他的各项学习 (1989)。为进一步理解自我规训的发展，Tarullo, Obradovic and Gunnar (2009) 阐释到韩国和中国的孩子比他们的美国同龄人在自我控制任务上表现得更好。他们发展在这些文化中，自我规训的价值一直被重视，因此孩子们自我控制能力的发展因此更为快速。在一个社会文化环境中大范围地强调自我规训的价值，也许

会改变大脑某些区域的网络回路结构使之成熟得更早，使得孩子有更好的自我规训行为。

基本上说，在早教机构环境里，象新教师，新朋友课堂环境和行为管理技巧等因素可能会让幼儿感觉到不安全。改进其中一些因素会让幼儿大安全感有所提升。这些发现指出成功的自我规训发展有赖于环境的影响和跟他人的互动，当然也有孩子本身的因素和个人倾向性 (Morrison, Ponitz & McClelland, 2010)。

没有任何的证据表明那种课程可以最好地培养自我规训能力和注意力的能力。

“为幼儿大脑发展需要而设计的游戏课程，‘练习与实践’课程的对立面可以通过设计投入和有趣的活动让幼儿在发展学业能力的同时也发展集中注意力的能力” (Duncan et al., 2007)。

设置和取样

设置

新加坡同一间托幼机构的两个中心被选用来作为实验场地。每个中心选取

一个中班的教师组合以及她们班上的幼儿一起参与研究。每个教师组合由一位级任英文老师和一位配班华文教师组成。其中一间的英文老师中途换人，所有最后的数据以参与整个研究过程的华文教师为主。

取样

中心取样原则是随机在两种不同课程类型的中心任意选择一个，作为实验场所。

方法

本次研究是在正常运作中的两个幼教中心里进行小规模**定性**行动研究。研究方法包括在干预**之前**和**之后**对研究对象进行调查研究，研究组成员协助教师实施一些课堂管理策略作为干预实验，期待发现幼儿的行为有差异之后会对教师的参与动机会造成影响。

具体研究方法

(A) 干预前测试

1. 对教师进行半结构式访谈，找出她们对自我规训可以作为支持幼儿学

习的策略这个观点有什么个人意见。

2. 通过由多项选择题和问答题组成的问卷，让教师个人对自我课堂管理情况进行评估，并表达自己在工作中的主观感受。
3. 每间中心分别进行一个小时的课堂观察。

(B) 干预实验 (两个月)

研究组成员分别对两组教师进行培训，理清自我规训的概念以及跟她们一起探讨一些可以用在她们课堂上的行为规则。例如她们可以在安排学生进学习区的时候，可以根据轮值表自己选取感兴趣的学习区和同伴；教师在组织大组教学时规范每个人的发言机会和实践，等等。

表1: 师生互动模式

	中心A	中心B
干预前	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 两位教师都倾向于用直接命令的方式与幼儿互动 • 华文老师两次使用规则来管理幼儿的行为 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 两位教师都倾向于用直接命令的方式与幼儿互动 • 英文老师三次使用规则来管理幼儿的行为
干预后	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 一个幼儿用直接命令的方式被授权代替老师管理班级 • 华文教师三次使用直接命令以及一次讲道理来管理班级 • 没有出现任何规则 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 没有听到教师使用直接命令 • 课堂规则被提到一次

(C) 干预后测试

1. 对教师进行访谈，找出她对自我规训可以作为支持幼儿学习的策略有没有新的看法。最后会让教师分享她在实验过程中的发现和主观感。
2. 通过由多项选择题和问答题组成的问卷，让教师个人再次对自我课堂管理情况进行评估。
3. 每间中心分别进行一个小时的课堂观察。研究组成员通过与级任教师在整個干预过程中保持沟通来监控干预实验可以正常进行。

研究工具有: 1. 多项选择题/半结构化访谈; 2. 录影录像; 3. 观察记录

实 验 结 果 与 分 析

从上表可以看到，在干预实验前两间中心的教师都倾向于使用直接命令的方式来管理班级幼儿的行为。在干预实验后

中心B的教师主要靠规则管理幼儿的行为，而中心A的情况则改变不大。

表2: 教师对她们自己课堂管理情况的评估

	中心 A	中心 B
干预前	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 英语教师对她的课堂管理情况不满意 华语教师对她的课堂情况表示满意 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 英语教师对她的课堂管理情况不满意，特别是当幼儿进学习区的时候 华语教师对她的课堂管理情况非常不满意，特别是当幼儿进学习区的时候
干预后	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 两个教师都认为幼儿没有达到最好的自我规训水平，虽然他们表现有一定的进步 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 华语教师认为幼儿们在自我规训方面有很大的提高，特别是在决策技巧方面

在干预前的测试中，只有中心A的华语教师对自己的课堂管理现状表示满意。也许她认为当前的状况是正常现象。

在干预后的测试中，只有中心B的华语教师觉得幼儿们有最大的进步，其他教师感觉不明显。

表 3: 教师对自我规训概念的理解 (干预前)

中心 A	中心 B
自我规训概念	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 除了基本定义以外，英语教师对该概念有更广泛的理解 华语教师的理解相当准确 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 英语教师对概念有部分的理解。 华语教师的理解相当准确
可以培养自我规训能力的策略	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 英语教师认为培养责任心可以提高幼儿的自我规训能力 华语教师相信需要不断的引导和教育 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 英语教师认为给予选择权可以提高幼儿的自我规训能力 华语教师相信需要不断的引导和教育

幼儿的自我规训能力	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 英语教师认为幼儿们在自己选择的活动中有自我规训能力 • 华语教师认为幼儿只有在成年人的引导下才可能有自我规训能力 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 英语教师认为幼儿们在自己选择的活动中有自我规训能力 • 华语教师认为幼儿只有在成年人的引导下才可能有自我规训能力

从上表可以看出，虽然两位华语教师来自两个不同的中心，她们的答案高度一致。原因可能是他们都来自相同的文化背景和实践，结果导致她们享有同样的想法和观点。她们更倾向于使用不断提醒的方式来培养幼儿的自我规训技能。意思就是：“我告诉孩子，然后他们自然就知道怎样去做了。”

在另一方面，两个英语教师更加相信经验式学习，她们希望幼儿可以通过

亲自动手操作来学习。虽然两位华语教师对自我规训的定义有精确的理解，然而同时她们还拥有相同的观点，认为幼儿在没有成年人的引导下将没有能力发展出自我规训的能力。这个反差可能是由于她们潜意识当中来自“集体主义”文化背景的相同的思维定式，认为给幼儿们灌输知识比提供机会给幼儿自己从经验中发展能力来得要重要得多。

表4. 教师对培养幼儿自我规训给自己带来益处的理解

	中心 A	中心 B
干预前	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 没有信息 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 华语教师感觉到因为缺少某些技能而很有负担
干预后	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 华语老师认为现在上课更加容易了 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 华语老师看到幼儿们的进步而感到没有那么负担了

在干预实验进行之前，所有教师对研究组成员所建议的课堂管理规则在培养幼儿的自我规训能力上都没有表现出

什么兴趣。中心B的华语教师对这个行动还有一些负面的感。但是当她尝试使用了所建议的策略以后，发现幼儿们有

了明显的进步。后来她发自内心地努力去帮助幼儿发展他们的自我规训能力。她可以看到研究的结果可以给自己带来更多的新成就，因此感到愉快而不再觉得是负担。中心A的英文教师不觉得有什么必要培养幼儿的自我规训能力。她

主要的关切点是教学材料不足的问题。中心B的英语教师只是觉得在进学习区的时候，需要培养一些自我管理的能力。她们对参与这个研究可以给自己带来什么益处完全没有感觉。

表 5: 教师工作的压力水平

	中心 A	中心 B
干预前	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 英语教师觉得有压力。压力来自教学材料不足而不是管理技能不足 华语教师觉得压力来自于上课时幼儿的注意力不足 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 英语教师觉得压力来自被幼儿的“投诉”打断教学 华语教师的压力来自于上课时幼儿的注意力不足。当幼儿进学习区的时候她感觉很不安全
干预后	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 华语教师觉得压力减轻 英语教师觉得没有变化 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 华语教师觉得压力减轻了很多 英语教师辞职了，没有资料

刚开始的时候，两位华语教师都意识到在课堂上幼儿缺少足够的注意力是她们面对的主要问题，因为这导致她们不能有效地把应该教给幼儿的知识传授给他们。她们在要努力保持幼儿注意力

时觉得很有压力。干预实验之后，两位华语教师都觉得压力减轻了。与此同时，中心A的英语教师觉得干预前和干预后没有什么差别；中心B的英语教师在干预进行到一半时辞职，因此拿不到她的资料。

表 6: 中心的校园文化和实践

中心 A	中心 B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 没有资料显示校方支持本研究 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 园长对此项研究表现出很大的兴趣，并把研究成果积极跟其他教师分享 其他所有教师也很积极把管理策略应用到自己的教学实践中

中心B的华语教师得到园长和同事们的的大力支持和协助，她也非常热心地跟同事们分享她的管理经验和感受。

当我们在干预后对她进行的访谈中，她兴奋地跟我们分享幼儿的种种进步表现以及她未曾经历过的许多新发现。她说：

“……但我觉得对孩子的这个自主能力啊，他们各方面的能力啊，都有很大的提高，嗯。

这是因为说真的在开始之前我也没有想到有这么好的效果。只想到他们在班上的自我约束能力会很好。但是在真正实施的过程中，真的是发现很多的优点。我没有想到两个孩子会提早去商量我们玩这个啊，不要那个啊，自己可以计划自己，自己可以锻炼这种能力，我要做什么，我想做什么，等等。



在下面的对话中，可以看到该老师从原来不支持培养幼儿自我规训能力到主动热情提供机会给幼儿学习的心路历程：
研究者（以下简称R）：你说你原来不喜欢，现在喜欢。你觉得跨越这个过程，最主要的因素是什么？什么因素可以帮你很顺利地从不喜欢跨越到喜欢小组教学？原因在哪里？

中心B华语老师（以下简称B）：嗯，原因就是我看到孩子的进步。

R：原来你不知道孩子会这样？

B：是，我原来不知道孩子会这样。我原来没有看到，也没有想到可以有这么大的成就。

R：象是你原来一样教学的老师，我相信是很多。你觉得给他们什么样的培训，他们才会更愿意尝试这样的教学呢？你觉得有什么关键？你觉得怎样才最好地帮助到他们？

B：可能他们还没有真正地看到孩子们的进步吧。

R: 你觉得孩子的进步是你改变的动力，是吧。

B: 然后就是说，最重要的是老师感觉轻松。没有以前上课感觉到那么大的压力。就像我们以前培训的时候，嗯，每次我们培训都是讲要小组教学，要小组教学。我们这些老师在下面就一起讨论说，你有没有小组教学，他们就说没有啦，累得要死。我们就大组教学，哪有那么多的精力去做啊。

R: 你们原来以为分组累，其实大组教学更累。

B: 就是。其实分组是个正确的方法。

R: 你觉得原来没有教给你们正确的方法去分组吗？

B: 嗯……因为我们每次去培训，就是说分组教学，分组教学，让他们去角落。他们也是说要给他们分这些角落。但是我还是觉得没有很系统地告诉我们应该怎样去做。可能老师也是在摸索怎样去给他们分角落。我个人来说，我就觉得，嗯，就是说，比方没有说让孩子自己去

选择，也没有给孩子一个说每天都按照一个这个规则去走。……

R: 这个很关键。

B: 嗯，对。这就是没有让孩子自发地去做，孩子们很被动。

从上述对话中可以看到，B老师主动去培养幼儿自我规训能力的动力来自于看到幼儿的进步，自己有了很高的成就感；其次是感觉到自己本身的益处，幼儿有能力管理自己的行为，作为老师的她觉得压力减轻了许多，工作过程变得更加高效和愉悦了；最后是在改变的过程中有足够的专业支撑，有她信得过的专业人士给她提供了可操作的具体的管理规则，让她知道如何开始改变。



结论

参与研究的4位教师在教学风格、成果期待和成功经验上都有很大的不同。本次研究的主要发现有：教育者管理课堂的模式受到自身文化背景的影响超过自己对知识的认知。是自身文化背景决定一个教师管理课堂的模式，而知识的理解和掌握对直接影响一个教师的日常管理模式作用不大。



当教师认识到培养自我规训能力可以给幼儿以及自身都能带来益处时，他们才会发自内心付诸努力去发展幼儿的自我规训能力。这是一个双赢的局面，幼儿的进步让教师体验了更多的成就感，也就更有兴趣去探索新的教学管理技巧。教师对自己课堂管理现状的评估也很重

要。越是对自己的现状不满意教师，越是有动机去尝试新的管理策略。

校园文化、中心的政策和实践对教育者付诸实践去培养幼儿的自我规训能力有影响。当一个教师一旦能够得到恰当的支持，她会有更高的动机踏出自己的安全区域，去尝试用新的管理模式与幼儿互动。在本次研究中，中心B的华语教师在自己上司的积极支持下，同时还拥有可信任的和有专业知识的研究者做后盾，她才会没有后顾之忧地投入实验，才能收获到成功的喜悦。

对老师有用的一些技巧

- 教育者需要给幼儿时间和机会去协商解决问题的方法，特别是当有冲突发生的时候。

例子 - 教师可以提供一些提示和建议去帮助幼儿解决问题。

- 给幼儿分派真实的责任区帮助他们提升自我规训的能力。

例子 - 提供值日表。

- 配班老师需要一起讨论并采用类似的教学策略以保证对同一个班的幼儿有一个一致的期待值。
例子 - 跟同事讨论一些大家觉得可以长期使用的教学和班级管理策略。
- 为班级幼儿行为建立一些合理的限制并长期坚持实施到位。
例子 - 建立一些条规并长期向幼儿提醒强化。
- 强调值得提倡的行为并以身作则。
例子 - 使用口头语言：佳慧在耐心等待轮到她玩水呢。
- 允许幼儿有时间跟小组和同伴一起工作。
例子 - 跟幼儿探讨安排一些小组工作。
- 在教室里设置一些学习区，让幼儿可以在那里独立工作或者是跟同伴一起工作。
例子 - 跟幼儿讨论协商改变教室的空间布局，明确划分学习区的边界和使用规范。

这个小规模的研究向教育者突出了培养孩子自我规训能力的重要性和一些具体的实施方法。本研究积极的结果希望可以鼓励到更多的教师开始愿意在培养幼儿自我规训能力，真正付诸努力去实施到日常的教学工作中。教育者也会发现，当她们一旦开始培养孩子的自我规训能力之后，自己的工作也变得更加愉悦，更加有意义了。

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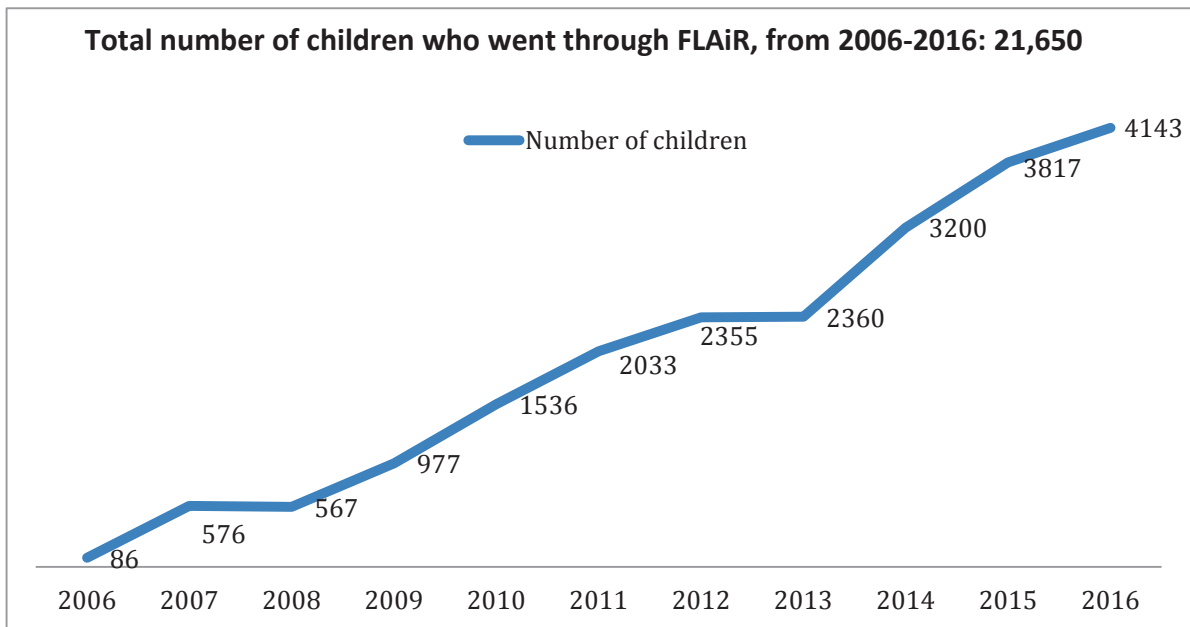
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Facts & Figures

Year	2006	2016
No. of FLAiR children	86	4143
No. of FLAiR centres	9	433
No. of Pro-FLAiRs	9	363



Reflections



Norami Rohana Haron, Master Pro-FLAiR

In the beginning... when I first heard about the FLAiR program, I was quite keen on it. I was told that it was a reading program. In my mind's eye, I visualised me sitting with a group of children, reading a book aloud. So I went for the interview, cleared it and went for the first meet-up at AECES.

As I learnt more about FLAiR, I felt a panic rise in me and thought, “What did I get myself into?” But I decided to hang in there because I focused on my main purpose, which was to build up literacy skills in children and this was something that I had wanted to do.

Research & planning

At the workshops and training sessions, I started to feel excited and inspired. At times, I even felt I was reliving my childhood. I soon realised that I had to do more, so I spent hundreds of hours on the internet, looking for ideas for activities, lessons and even how to go about doing the portfolios. Then came the perils of planning. I had huge headaches deciding on what was appropriate, what approaches and strategies to use. The first 2 years were tough but I persevered.

Challenges

Self-doubts and insecurities ... I did not come from an early childhood background and for the first few years, I kept questioning myself, whether I was on the right track, was I doing a good enough job, or, was I even doing the right thing? I had a lot of hang-ups. In 2010, Dr Christine Chen dropped by my class to see me. Something she said helped me to re-frame my mind - ‘Nora, stop thinking like that. Coming from a different field, you come with a different perspective on things. You see things with different eyes.’ That really helped. I was also blessed with a very supportive advocate, Mrs Loh Hui Meng. She was open to the different strategies that I tried and never tired of answering all the questions I had saved up for her visits.

It became my challenge to overcome my doubting self.

Lessons I’ve learnt

Flexibility. I learnt quite early on that we needed to be flexible, in our interactions with centre staff, even in the lessons that we plan. They may not always go as planned due to one reason or another. So it is important to be creative and spontaneous at times, without stressing ourselves up.

Slow down! ... a great lesson! In the beginning, I felt that I had to do as many things as possible in a given week, and I crammed as many learning activities as I could. But as I became more experienced, I realised that I needed to give time to revisiting and reviewing skills and concepts that I wanted to teach.

What keeps me going ...

My daily conversations and chats with the children are my daily doses of drama, joy and inspiration. I enjoy talking with them, listening to their stories and discoveries.

Magic moments happen when you see the look on the children’s faces when they realise they can do something and say to me, “Teacher Nora, I know this letter! Teacher Nora, I can read this word! Teacher Nora I can read this book!” Pure joy and wonder on their faces, and those moments validate the work I do.

That is why I carry on. That is why I go to work every day!



From Pro-FLAiR Jenny Liew on her former student from 7 years ago who came back to visit her –

“He is so much taller than me and he has grown into a handsome young man. Seven years ago, he was very quiet and refused to speak. His parents were told to send him to a psychiatrist. During my lessons, we played a lot of games to make him feel at ease and each child would rotate duties to be the leader of the day. I believe it was the buddy system that made a huge change in him, transforming him into an outstanding boy today. And of course, there was also support from his class teacher. I am so happy to hear he scored 1st in class and he volunteered as a class leader in Primary 1. As his teacher, I am so proud of him!”

From Yap Soon Lan, former Master Pro-FLAiR who is now in NIE on a fulltime training course. *“Learn what you love, love what you learn - the FLAiR children showed me that they can blossom when I engaged them using activities which interested them. It was amazing and inspiring to see how each of them blossom at their own pace towards the end of the academic year. I always remember their happy expressions when they were able to accomplish a task after having tried repeatedly. These*

moments really made my day and fed me with motivation to continue to survive to be a better and more tuned-in teacher who can help them to learn. I learnt that all children can learn when they are provided with the right environment and stimulus.”



From Principals and Teachers -

“The FLAiR programme has benefitted children of various backgrounds. I can see that the children are happy and looking forward to attending your classes.” – Principal

“Our students who had trouble with basic alphabet knowledge and sounds progressed to grasping the concept of blending and eventually being able to read simple words.” - Teacher

“There was a tremendous improvement in their vocabulary which further promotes their interest and skills in reading and writing. Socio-emotionally, children were more confident in speaking up for themselves, making choices and delivering mini messages.” - Principal

“At the end of each year, their listening, reading, writing and orals skills registered tremendous improvement! An absolute

contrast to when they first started the programme". - Teacher

"The interactive games are fun and children learn language in a fun and non-threatening environment. Through the games, children develop an interest in English and this motivated them to learn the English language". - Teacher

From grateful parents who recognise the impact of the work of Pro-FLAiRs on their children:

"My daughter could not even recognise ten words! But today, she has even won 3rd prize in an English writing competition. This is because of her FLAiR teacher who did not give up on her. Each time, he would come up with new ideas to coach my daughter, lend her storybooks for self-reading so that she could cultivate a good reading habit."

"She was very quiet and shy before she was selected for the FLAiR programme. She has blossomed into a friendly, playful and social little princess. She has made tremendous improvements in her reading abilities."

"He has shown great improvement since he joined the FLAiR class. He is able to recognise all the alphabets and phonic sounds. He likes to draw and is able to express himself well now. He is more confident in communicating with friends and teachers."

"My son was a FLAiR student in 2014. He was very quiet and shy, always scared about making mistakes. But since he joined FLAiR, he has learned a lot, he speaks up and is more talkative. He started to love reading and is able to read aloud with confidence. He is in P2 this year and holds a leadership role in his class."

"Thanks to you, she is brave enough to face P1."

"I am glad that she was a part of the FLAiR programme and had such a dedicated teacher like you. Thanks for making a positive difference in her."

Reflections from AECES:

It has been 10 years of FLAiR and on this journey, we not only teach the English language but we discover that children bring their whole self into our programme. We see children who have to not only cope with the English language but with life challenges as well. Often times, these challenges come in the form of challenging behaviours and absenteeism from school.

While Pro-FLAiRs address the child as a whole on a daily basis, AECES, with the support of the Temasek Care Foundation, has embarked in the Hand in Hand project to ensure that children attend school regularly.

Please read the insert on the Hand in Hand project and refer children and families whom we can help, as it takes a whole community to make a difference in the lives of children and families.

For more information on FLAiR, please visit: <http://www.aeces.org/project-flair/>

Finland Study Trip: ISSA Conference 2016 in Vilnius

Anita Yuen
Pat's Schoolhouse

My recent study trip to Finland organised by AECES was most enjoyable and engaging. Our group bonded well and I made lots of new friends.

At Vilnius, Lithuania, the ISSA Conference was both relaxing and enriching. The conference theme was "Early Childhood in Times of Rapid Change". We explored children's learning, the early childhood workforce, family support and the use of technology in the early years.



The main conference session



The Singapore and Malaysia delegates

There were insightful discussions, interactive sessions and the sharing of wisdom.



Concurrent session: Debate on the use of technology

The highlight of the trip for me was the school visits. The 3 schools we visited were very different. One was an international school offering the IB programme, with children ranging from 3 years old to 16 years old. The other 2 schools were preschools starting from toddler age. One of them offered a 24 hour service, catering to working parents on shift duty. We had a warm reception and the supervisors of the different schools were very passionate and filled with pride as they shared about their school. We were also given sufficient time in each school to interact with the children and be immersed in their programme.

Here is what other participants have to say

–

“It was great to observe practices of play-based approach. Good if we can spend more time.” – Ang Chin Fan, Tadika Xaris, Malaysia, on the photographs below:

In this picture, below, the child describes her strength and the parents add on below. Read more about this individual education plan and the Finnish ECEC curriculum in Eeva Hujala’s article (pages 12– 18).



Play in the preschool



18 month old playing with the teacher

“Having good learning objectives based on individual child’s development make learning meaningful for the preschoolers.” – Karen Lim Kiam Chan, Child At Street 11 Limited, and Toh Lu See, PCF Woodlands Block 604.

“Strong family values found in Finland do make the lives and roles of a teacher different compared to Singapore.” – Karen Lim



A Lilliputian moment! Dr Chen playing in the gigantic chair in the preschool.



2017 trip to Finland and ISSA Conference (Ghent, Belgium) will be in October. Do register your interest early with AECES : <http://www.aeces.org/programmes-project/conferences-study-trips/>

Overseas Learning Trip to Austria: Injecting Fresh Light to Our Local Practices

Koo Yi Jie

with

Luck Quek, Shirley Tan, Neo EePing, Ada Wong, Maryann Laud Forbes, Christine Chen

In June 2016, eight members of the Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore) who represent various preschools and educational institutions came together to travel across the globe to visit kindergartens in Austria. In this cross-cultural learning trip, we found distinct differences between the two cultures and their early childhood landscapes, yet there were similarities in both countries' preschool education.

In this trip, we gained valuable insights that inspired us to improve the lives of families and young children in Singapore. The trip underscored the importance for early childhood professionals to be exposed to and take part in overseas learning opportunities which provide opportunities for a different cultural perspective in the care and education of young children.

"We found this attachment very useful to us both personally and professionally - not only did we learn about how kindergartens operate in Lower Austria, we made personal friends and we had the chance to get to interact with fellow AECES members better."

- Neo EePing and Ada Wong,
KidsGlobal International, Hangzhou,
China

While our local system categorized each preschooler year by his/her chronological age in a classroom environment, children in Austria attend a home-like play-based learning environment. They are placed in a mixed-age group (two and a half years to six years), learning and playing throughout their preschool years. These children are given autonomy to choose what they wish to learn and play during their school hours while the role of the educators is to facilitate and scaffold their learning accordingly.

"It is always great to experience other centres' teaching practices, let alone other cultures and countries. It gives one a sense of perspective; it makes one reflect on what is currently working and what areas need or can be improved, and there are great practices to take away and integrate into our own."

- Maryann Laud Forbes, GEMS World Academy

The learning dynamics of mixed-age groups encourages a culture where older children help younger ones and the younger children learn through observing the older children. This learning has very naturally groomed a community of caring, empathetic and holistic learners who put the needs of others before theirs.



“A child with down syndrome (in checked dress) seen participating in a birthday celebration game. The more capable and older children included her in the game and gave her equal opportunity for her turn as with other children.”

- Lucy Quek, Ngee Ann Polytechnic

Kindergarteners who are a year away from primary school are taken out of their groups to attend formal lessons in languages, numeracy, sciences, music and art once a week and for an hour; compared to our Singapore children who are exposed to formal, teacher-directed learning.

In their play-based learning culture, children are brought outdoors for about one and a half hour each day, in the rain, snow or sunshine! These children are given real life items - for example, spades, screws, hammers, trees, nests, rabbits -and they have the time and space for risky, creative play. The only protective gear that these children wear is sunblock and sunglasses. There are no padded mats to cushion their falls or rubberized mats for them to land on. It is common to see them fall and scrape their knees, yet they still appear to enjoy themselves very much. With the teachers

supervising their play, these children are rewarded with independence and the teachers’ trust. It is evident to see happy, resilient and self-motivated children who are focused at work.

“What struck me when I stepped into these two kindergartens was their distinctive culture. Culture drives vision. A unified team is when vision and culture are amalgamated. This is evident in the dynamics of both kindergartens.”

- Shirley Tan, Church of the Holy Trinity Kindergarten



“A curious child seen trying to keep a leaf sucked close to her nose for as long as she could hold her breath in.”

- Lucy Quek, Ngee Ann Polytechnic

In Austria, preschool education, teachers, rent and resources are state funded and parents are not required to pay for preschool education in the mornings. They only pay a small fee for food and materials each month and for extended school hours. Fortunately, principals of schools are not responsible for enrolments,

profits or targeted growths, their job is to ensure the best quality of education and care is provided.



Creation of a bugs' habitat - Each centre exhibited children's learning in different ways. In this school, the children were studying the bugs outside their school.

Beyond the differences, there are common grounds that both early childhood landscapes in Singapore and Austria uphold. First, both countries provide clear educational pathways for interested teachers-to-be and adhere to good quality teacher training. In Austria, preschool teacher training is five years of course work, examinations and apprenticeship. Trainee teachers are required to learn the piano, guitar and other basic instruments. Such training provides them with an understanding of the process of music, movement and literacy so that they can facilitate learning.

The training programme is very similar – Austria also has core modules covering child development, designing learning environments, family and community partnership and classroom management.

In terms of curriculum outcomes, both countries have desired learning outcomes

for pre-schoolers. Different kindergartens use different methodologies and pedagogy to achieve these outcomes. Teachers in both cultures demonstrate a strong documentation of children's work and progress.



"A child lying in this prone position for a good two minutes, counting how long it would take the ball, which was released at the top of the structure, to reach the bottom of it."

- Lucy Quek, Ngee Ann Polytechnic

Like Singapore's local culture, preschools in various demographics cater to unique groups of family structures, socio-economic and educational attainment. In Austria, for schools located in city areas, we learnt that school operating hours and services may be extended to cater to families' needs. Thus, the schools needed longer operating hours and they would take great pains to work out teachers' schedule and timings.

Families in Austria have different expectations; some families enjoy looking at the product of children's work while others enjoy admiring the process of children's play and learning. Akin to our

own culture, different centres/groups have different family dynamics of various socio-economic status, expectation and commitments. These pose different challenges and joys at work. As a Founder and Manager of a childcare in China, EePing firmly believed that leadership sets the culture at school and decides the learning environment beneficial for their children.



Fig 5: “Children in Austria learning about our culture through books and activities.” - Koo Yi Jie, The Caterpillar’s Cove Child Development and Study Centre

We may not have a preschool in a rainforest, nor can we even think of banishing formal learning in preschool. But we can change our pedagogy to be child-initiated, building a culture that allows children to be who they want to be and to give them the autonomy to engage in their own learning and play. We could slow down, listen to our pre-schoolers. Why? Because they have so much to share! We could think about moving them out of padded mats and indoor gyms, and to try nature treks because there could be so much to learn out there. We need to continue to shift parents’ and policy makers’ mindsets, from formal learning and to play, play and more play.

“We see the children’s passion in the love for learning and it is contagious. We witness that learning can take place across cultures, children are naturally curious and they love to learn so let’s build on their innate drive.”

- Koo Yi Jie

2017 Vienna trip will be in May-June 2017. Only 7 places left. Please register your interest with AECES: <http://www.aeces.org/programmes-project/conferences-study-trips/>

A Garden in Every Preschool Reclaiming Nature for Children Living in Cities

Ding Zhen Xin
Cheong Su Fen
Christine Chen

Research has shown that being in nature has diverse positive effects for children in terms of social functioning, psychological functioning and physical health (Kuo, 2010). Children who are more exposed to natural environments are found to be more generous and willing to connect with others, display better cognitive function and impulse control. They also recover faster from a surgery and have a better immune system.

We believe that increased exposure to nature and the outdoors will improve the social and physical development of the

children in Singapore. This is how the vision of “A Garden in Every Preschool” was born in 2015.

AECES first launched “A Garden in Every Preschool” together with Preschool Market during the 2015 Teachers’ day celebrations at Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Kindergarten. About 70 members of AECES came together to Plant-a-Pot and engage in other nature-based activities. Preschools which were interested in starting a garden were linked up with National Parks Community-in-Bloom Ambassadors.



Photos 1: “Plant-a-pot” Teacher's day celebration 2015 at Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Kindergarten. Every participant went home with a pot of plant!

We have taken baby steps towards the vision of "A Garden in Every Preschool". In 2016, we took a step further and launched our inaugural "Our Dream Garden" grant. Preschools were invited to submit their garden proposals. Seven preschools (Annex A) were awarded the grants to build gardens, ranging from indoor gardens, edible plots to plants with medicinal value. Teachers and children have had enriching moments in their gardens.

Representatives from the preschools received their award at the Early Childhood Conference on 1 October 2016 (photos below). They were all thrilled to receive the seed fund's support to start their gardens.

Together, with the support of our early childhood community, we can make Singapore a city in the garden.

Note: Please visit <http://www.preschoolmarket.com/a-garden-in-every-pre-school.html> to learn more about "A Garden in Every Preschool" or email ideas@preschoolmarket.com with "I want a garden" if any of you would like to start a garden.



Photos 2: Award ceremony for "My Dream Garden" at the ECDA conference 2016



Photo 3: Recipients of "My Dream Garden" award

References

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Annex A

Preschools Awarded with Our Dream Garden Seed Fund

S/N	Name of Centre	Garden Title
1	Bethany Childcare Centre	Gems Amongst the Weeds
2	EtonHouse Kindergarten	Garden of Senses
3	MOE Kindergarten @Farrer Park	Mystical Passageway
4	Mulberry @ Alexandra (Ace Aspire Pte Ltd)	Indoor Nature Sanctuary
5	My First Skool, Jalan Kayu	The Salad Garden
6	Posso Preschool@Big Box	Whimsical DIY Garden
7	The Ascension Kindergarten	Blooming Hearts

Promoting Parent-Child Bonding through Meaningful Play Experience through Project Tinker Kit

Cheong Su Fen
Ding Zhen Xin
Preschool Market, Singapore

[About the authors: Preschool Market (www.preschoolmarket.com) is a social enterprise founded to support early childhood practitioners and parents in their efforts to support children's development through meaningful play-based projects. It believes that play is the most effective form of learning for young children. At the heart of Preschool Market is the goal of building a community of support for early childhood practitioners and parents to enhance the quality of early childhood in Singapore. Founders of Preschool Market: Cheong Su Fen and Ding Zhen Xin.]

Introduction

We are all too familiar with the African proverb that says "It takes a whole village to raise a child". Although it is recognised that parents are a child's first teachers, the larger social network both within their social group and across other segments of the society also contribute significantly to the child's development (Narayan, 1999; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; and Sylva et al, 2004). Thus, to optimise a child's support for development, one can look to strengthen both the social and cultural capital within the immediate family as well as within a larger community.

Bonding Social Capital¹ within Children's Social Group

For a child to develop optimally and achieve developmental milestones, his relationship with his primary caregiver, be it a parent, grandparent or guardian, is

very important (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Research has found that parents living under economic stress experience higher levels of emotional strain and mental health problems which can impair their ability to engage with and support their children (Conger, Vonger, Elder, Lorenz, Simons, & Whitebeck, 1992). Poverty also may impose logistical barriers, such as the lack of transportation and schedule conflicts. Low-income jobs usually afford less schedule flexibility, paid sick leave and paid vacation time. These could be reasons that lead to reduced parental involvement among those who receive financial aid (Soyoun, 2012). Families from low paying jobs often lack resources to provide educational materials and activities. For these families, whatever the parents possess as human capital² will not be accessible to the children if the parents are not physically present. Coleman suggests

¹ Social Capital refers to the resources rendered to an individual from surrounding social structures such as extended family and community that can help the individual achieve their interests. (Coleman, 1988)

² Human Capital refers to the skills and capabilities possessed by an individual which can facilitate production. (Coleman, 1988)

that efforts to involve families in their children's learning at home and at school must address some of the poverty-induced barriers to involvement and reconsider the relationship between educational success and adequate social welfare provision (Coleman, 1988).

Bridging Social Capital across Other Segments of Society

In the larger community, social capital is related to the involvement and active engagement of community members in community projects. The building of strong social ties will help to build values, norms of behaviour and trust that will enable individuals to work together for a child's development (Janssens, van de Gaag, & Gunning, 2004). This is particularly true when engaging families from lower socioeconomic status. In the study of an empowerment programme targeted at women from the impoverished sector in rural India (Janssens, van de Gaag, & Gunning, 2004) it was found that by empowering the women to act, there were several positive outcomes. Not only did their own children's school participation rate increase, but there was also a positive impact on non-participants living in the same village.

Conception of Intervention Programme

We recognise that it is important to elicit a change of perspectives on the part of parents by empowering them with the knowledge, skills and means to build strong relations with their children and bond with them. One key aspect of a good parent-child relationship is spending time together and getting to know each other.

Young children might not possess the abstract linguistic abilities to express themselves clearly, but they have symbolic communication (Farokhi & Hashemi, 2011) such as drawing and craft activities. Through art activities, children communicate their inner thoughts, develop skills for living and build a sense of trust with those around them (Walter, F. & Rankin, B (2004)). Getting children to engage in art activities allows them to unleash their imagination and creative minds (Farokhi and Hashemi 2011). Arts and crafts activities enable free rein of expression and creativity, encourage focus and concentration, and support the development of fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. To create something, they will usually rely on familiar events or things that they see often as a starting point. A child's creativity is enriched by her/his engagement with the physical world and having rich emotional experiences (Farokhi and Hashemi 2011).

A child's relationship with those around him is fundamental to his development of creative expression and thinking (Fumoto, 2012; Glaveanu, 2010). As parents and children share their thoughts and dreams in a non-threatening and fun manner, it would strengthen their relationship. The resulting sense of attachment and security will enable him to explore the world with greater confidence (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Hence, Preschool Market initiated a simple intervention programme, Project Tinker Kit, aimed at helping parents/families gain better understanding of child development and develop skills for interactions with their child. We believe

that these knowledge and skills would in turn provide children from the lower SES families with more equitable opportunities for continued development.

What is Project Tinker Kit?

Project Tinker Kit has been designed as a three-month programme, with the following elements:

- 1) A basic Tinker Kit and follow-up kits were essentially creative toolkits aimed to equip children with materials to inspire expression and excite the imagination through craft activities.
- 2) There were facilitated crafts sessions with parent and child. Each session lasted about 1 to 1.5hrs and was conducted either in the children's home or a central location such as preschool centre or voluntary welfare organisation workshop space.
- 3) This was followed by a pop-up exhibition for the children to display their work. This was held in conjunction with community events.

Project Tinker Kit is designed to support families by garnering the help of the community in strengthening the social capital among the immediate family. The multiple face-to-face sessions were incorporated to provide opportunities for sustained connection (Janssens, van de Gaag, & Gunning, 2004).

Design and Content of Tinker Kit

The Tinker Kit and follow-up kits contain an Activities Guide and a range of arts and crafts materials. These include coloured paper, felt, foam, scissors, paper plates, glue sticks, markers, pom-poms, ice cream

sticks and stickers. In the second follow-up kit, we introduced child-safe clay so children can explore and create things with clay, providing them a sensorial experience.

The activities were selected from a local parent-child bonding site (www.scienceofplay.sg). Care was taken to choose craft that could be achieved with everyday materials the parent could find at home. The activities were also designed such that the child would need the assistance of an adult to complete them. This was to create opportunities for parents to work with their children.

Another important consideration was that families from lower SES homes would very likely lack storage space or even a work surface in the home. In anticipation of this, we opted for a big enough flat box that could contain all the items and also double up as a work surface for the child, if necessary.



Photos: Children, volunteer and family members involved in crafting session

A Community Effort

In line with the community spirit of the project, Project Tinker Kit was put up on Kickstarter Garage, a crowdsourcing platform to encourage members of the public to pledge to preschool-related causes. Support was also sought from corporate partners to sponsor the required craft items. Polytechnic students participated in the project as part of their coursework. A group of Singapore Polytechnic students helped in the preparation phase, while a pair from Ngee Ann Polytechnic helped with the evaluation of Phase 1 and design of Phase 2 of the project. In future, we hope to continue to engage the students in bringing the project to more communities.

When planning for the craft sessions, we worked closely with the organisations that had been in constant contact with the selected families. We believe this helped put the families and children at ease so that they would be more open and receptive to what we had to offer them. Volunteers were briefed about the purpose of the project (to use arts and craft activities to facilitate parent-child bonding), their roles as facilitators who would be supporting the parent so that the s/he who would take the lead in the activity with the child. It was also emphasised that the Activities Guide need not be followed rigidly so that the child was free to explore each activity in any way he wanted or even initiate his own ideas with the resources provided.

Empowering Families

In the introductory session, we shared with the families how Project Tinker Kit

came about and introduced the volunteers and sponsors who had contributed to it. By doing so, we had hoped that the families would feel the warmth of and support from the community.

We conducted a parent survey to gather their views on the arts and crafts activities, parent-child bonding and how their children spend the free time they have. A resource guide of family bonding activities (AECES, 2012) was also distributed to the parents and volunteers were present to demonstrate crafting techniques. We encouraged the children to feel free to express themselves in any way they want and not be constrained by the guide. Our hope was that this session would help parents get a feel of what doing arts and crafts with their children was like and become aware of the benefits of such activities. In the second session, the volunteers took a back seat and rendered assistance only when the parents required it. For the last session, a post-project survey à la the first one will be conducted to see how the parents' views have changed.

The project finale was a pop-up exhibition to showcase the children's works. We wanted to have this platform to offer the children a real sense of achievement and to let the parents take pride in what they have achieved together with their children. In order to measure the impact of the project, the following paragraphs report the observation and survey findings.

Findings and Observations from Phase 1 Project Tinker Kit

The project was started in July 2015, in conjunction with preschool operators and voluntary welfare organisations. We identified 47 children, aged 3 – 6 years old, from lower SES families, in particular, those living in either one- or two-room public rental flats, for the project.

Parents’ views. At the start of the project, we did a brief survey among participating parents to find out their sentiments regarding craft work, family bonding and responsibility in nurturing their child. We conducted a mass session for 40 children from 32 families at a childcare centre and 12 parents turned up and took part in the survey. We also conducted another six home visits but only four parents were surveyed as the parents of the other two families were not at home when we called.

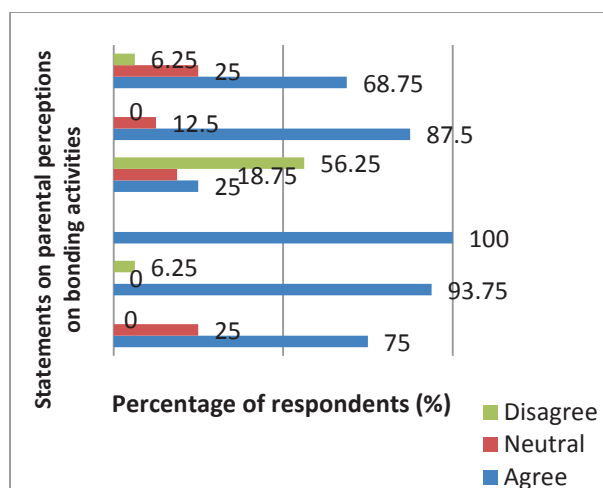


Fig 1: Percentage of respondents on statements on parental perceptions

Next, we picked three parents to conduct a more in-depth interview. All interviewees were mothers. They shared on the types of activities they did with their children and how their children spent their

free time. We found that only one family had a good supply of stationery and books. This could be because the girl had two older brothers who were in primary school. She was drawing and colouring before we arrived at her home. This also was the only family where the mother made use of recycled materials to do arts and crafts with her child. For the other families, they typically only completed arts and crafts assignments given by the school. The children usually spent their free time playing on their own, doing homework or playing with Lego. All mothers agreed that the responsibility of nurturing a child should lie with the parents. Parents play as important a role as preschool teachers.

Children’s views. As we conducted the craft sessions with the children, we noticed that all were delighted to have the resources to such work. During the second visit, the Ngee Ann Polytechnic students asked some of the children on what they thought of Project Tinker Kit. Here are examples of what they said:

“I like because my family is with me.”

“I like to choose what craft work to do.”

“I like to cut and draw and paint.”

“I like to make things.”

We were delighted when we went back to another group few months later, they had done a lot of craft work on their own and were eager for more.

Through the response of the children, we observed that children enjoyed the sessions as it encompassed the five essentials to meaningful play, cited by the United States-based National Association for the Education of Young Children

(NAEYC) on its website(<http://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/five-essentials-meaningful-play>):

- A. Children make their own decisions.
- B. Children are intrinsically motivated.
- C. Children become immersed in the moment.
- D. Play is spontaneous, not scripted.
- E. Play is enjoyable.

During the children's survey, it was observed that quite a handful of children were not very confident in expressing themselves linguistically. They gave mainly one word answers, even after much prompting. It was reported by Hart and Risley (2003) that children's early experience in the area of language would have a large, intractable effect in the skill difference among children from varying home environments. The child's few years at home, when he is especially malleable and uniquely dependent on the family, is very crucial to his development of language (Hart & Risley, 2003). Thus, in Phase 2 of Project Tinker Kit, we included more crafting activities that would build up a child's literacy capabilities in a fun and engaging manner.

Volunteers' views. Volunteers who joined us for the craft sessions were encouraged by how the children opened up while doing arts and crafts. They, too, felt a sense of accomplishment from helping the children, raising parents' awareness of the value of arts and crafts and how it could help parent-child to spend time in meaningful interaction.

Discussion

From the home visits and family surveys, we learned that a serious lack of fundamental arts and crafts resources prevented parents and children from crafting together.

Our survey of parents revealed that most families recognised that doing arts and crafts was a way of learning together and it was good for family bonding as well. However, only one family in the survey did crafts work outside of regular school assignments. The young girl in this family had two older siblings and this suggested transferability of the experiences received by the older children, giving the youngest child more opportunities to engage in creative expression. This was contrary to a finding that in families with more children, the youngest child was disadvantaged in academic development (Coleman, 1998). The mother of this child was also the highest educated among the parents surveyed; she entered university but did not complete her tertiary education. Here was a case of a parent who acted on her knowledge to benefit her child. For the other families surveyed, the lack of self-initiated craft activities could be due to a noticeable drop in the number of parents present. It could have been that parents did not find the first session useful and did not deem it necessary to return (Soyoun, 2012). Sensing the need for a more structured approach to parenting sessions so that parents could glean more benefits, we intend to find out more about the topics they would be interested in. We also planned to have more communication on the arts and crafts sessions so as to get more buy-in from the families. We

recognised that these parents would rather spend time taking care of their everyday needs than on doing arts and crafts. For the parents and children who came, there was no mistaking the excitement they felt in executing the numerous craft activities in the guide. We loved it as we watched them explaining to each other the steps to getting the final product out. We also took pains to highlight to the families that the importance of these sessions was not in the final product but in the learning process that both parent and child underwent.

Conclusion

From this pilot project, we saw how parents valued opportunities to engage in bonding activities with their children and both benefitted from the process. Parents spent dedicated time doing activities with their children; children enjoyed the nature of the activities and appreciated that they had the freedom to choose the activities with their parents. Both were thrilled when the children's artwork was displayed.

Project Tinker Kit was enabled by social networks in the community which helped parents gain access to more materials for their children. The structured programme also helped parents to set aside time for their children. Trust had to be forged between the programme provider and families in order for programme objectives to be achieved. When working with families from lower SES background, a holistic, sustained approach is imperative for results to be seen. For Preschool Market, our objective now is to expand the outreach of Project Tinker Kit and focus on

parenting issues relevant and helpful to families.

Afternote:

- *By February 2016, we reached out to 100 children and we are in the midst of reaching out to 150 more children by end-2016.*
- *This article is an updated version. The original article was presented as a Poster at "China's Fourth International Early Childhood Development and Poverty Reduction Summit and 2015 Asia-Pacific Regional ECD Conference" 21-24 October 2015, Beijing.*
- *More information on Project Tinker Kit can be obtained from the writers –*
 - Cheong Su Fen
(sufen@preschoolmarket.com)
 - Ding Zhen Xin
(zhenxin@preschoolmarket.com)

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