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Front Cover: *Little Home Bird* by Sarah Thong Zhi Yuan, K2, YWCA Marine Drive Development Centre

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From the Editor

Have you taken a study or conference trip lately? It is by no means inexpensive, on the contrary, it can cost quite a bit. Many are sponsored by their organization or centres. Why? For professional development? Yes, definitely. To me, it is a simple reason. It changes you. What you see and hear begins to excite you; your heart beats a little faster. You ask yourself – can this be? How come I did not know or thought about this perspective? Would it work for us back home?

Our issue here delves into all these, again. *'Again'* because *Early Educators* has been featuring articles written by our participants who travel with us to various countries. In 2017, AECES led groups to Finland, Belgium, Kota Kinabalu and Jakarta. In past years, we have been to Taiwan, UK, Estonia, Japan, Austria, Italy, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia.

The articles in this issue cover the places visited in the first six months of this year - Kathmandu, Japan and Belgium. There is a common sentiment evident throughout our writers. They describe succinctly what they observe, their experiences and their takeaways from their journey, they also wonder if transformation could be possible back home in their own centre. In Belgium, one school calls itself a 'home' for their children. In the Japanese Musashino Kindergarten which has a mixed education system for typically developing children and children with autism, they have a 'heart to heart education'. Our writers leave with many thoughts in their heads. Dr Lim Hong Huay describes it as an 'epiphany' that is still reverberating in her mind long after her return. Cassandra Teh puts it poignantly "Ultimately, if we continue to teach today as we taught yesterday, would we rob our children of tomorrow?"

Will you come with us? Come and experience with an open mind, see and learn what is beyond our shores.

Ruth Wong
Editor

The Value of Early Childhood Education

Geeta Velu

Director & Co-Founder, The Preparatory Place

Introduction

The early years of a child make up the crucial formative phase of his/her life. To a large extent, the social-emotional experiences and knowledge a child receives during this phase provide the foundation for later formal education. This, as we are all aware, will have a bearing on his/her options and opportunities later on in life. Research in child development and the science of brain development emphasise that the essential elements needed for optimal growth are health, nutrition, and high quality care and education.

What this means is that the love and guidance we give to children cannot be overemphasised, and coupled with a positive nurturing early childhood education, they form the most precious gifts to our young children.

Philosophy

Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself - John Dewey

Our philosophical orientation derives from progressive educators like John Dewey, Friedrich Froebel, Jerome Bruner.

We believe that learning should be enriching and engaging for young children

- making sure that his/her transition from the familiarity of home to school is an enjoyable and meaningful experience. Even at an early age, a child has a wide range of inter-related emotional, social-psychological and intellectual needs (Bredekamp, Copple, 2011). We believe that in today's world of small nuclear families, working parents and rapid change, such needs can best be met in a professional, cosy and warm environment, where the joy of learning and self-discovery can be shared in the living classroom.

The Preparatory Place

The Preparatory Place aims to provide just this - a happy and caring second home to guide and nurture each child's growth and development. We believe in providing professional service of the highest quality - listening to the child, understanding the child's learning and development in the context of family, community and culture and then planning our childcare programme to meet each child's specific developmental strengths and needs; guided by the basic philosophy of nurturing them to their fullest potential.

Our principles derive from

- *the social cultural theories namely, Vygotsky, Howard Gardner, Ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner*
- *the Psychosocial theory of Erik Erikson*
- *the Reggio approach which inspires us to explore our own ways of enabling children to realise their own potential as knowledge builders and meaning makers*
- *UN Convention Article 12/13 which links to children's entitlement to freedom of expression and Article 29a recognises that education should focus on 'the development of the child's personality, talents, mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential*

*"Free the child's potential, and you will transform him into the world."
Maria Montessori*

The following key principles underlie how children should be cared for and educated.

Principle 1: A strong image of the child

The teacher's image of the child can impact educational decisions (Rinaldi, 2002; Fraser & Gestwick, 2002). How we design our spaces, how we plan our learning experiences, how we organise their schedule, how we interact with our



children, how we view parents' participation depends highly on how we view children and perceive children. Our view of children is that they are powerful thinkers who are rich in potential.

Principle 2: Relationships, the heart of quality care



We believe that children are active, self-motivated learners who seek to understand the world in which they live, and learn when supported through adult sensitive interactions.

Children learn best when they have a secure relationship with members of the school community - peers, teachers, centre leaders, para-educators and support staff. Life for young children is based on relationships. Wherever they spend their time, they need to be cared for by teachers who are emotionally invested in their well-being. Teachers focus on providing respectful, responsive and reciprocal relationships with children. *This is only possible when teachers have a strong image of the child; that every child is*

curious and has the potential to become effective and active contributors.

Teachers are role models for children. What they say, how they talk and how they encourage and guide a child will influence his/her self-worth, confidence and happiness.

Creating connections; a sense of belonging. Children thrive when their parents participate in the centre's experiences, even if it is for a short time.



Their eyes light up and it shows that it is a special moment. Family participation bridges the gap between the centre and home.

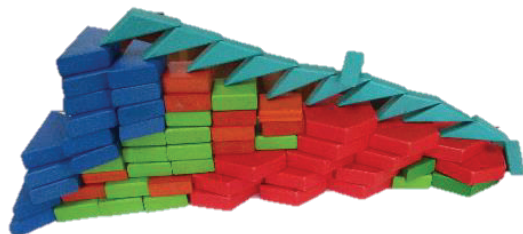


We work in partnership with parents to ensure our participation in the children's

education is in line with the best practices in education. The mutual respect of teachers, children and parents becomes palpable. When there is a connection and similarity between the centre and home, children feel secure within a circle of belonging.

Collegial relationships. Teachers work in pairs and often have opportunities to work in a group. It is important for teachers to have a sense of belonging in the centre, only then the children and the centre will thrive. When teachers engage in professional dialogue about their work and the children's work, inadvertently they contribute to their own professional growth.

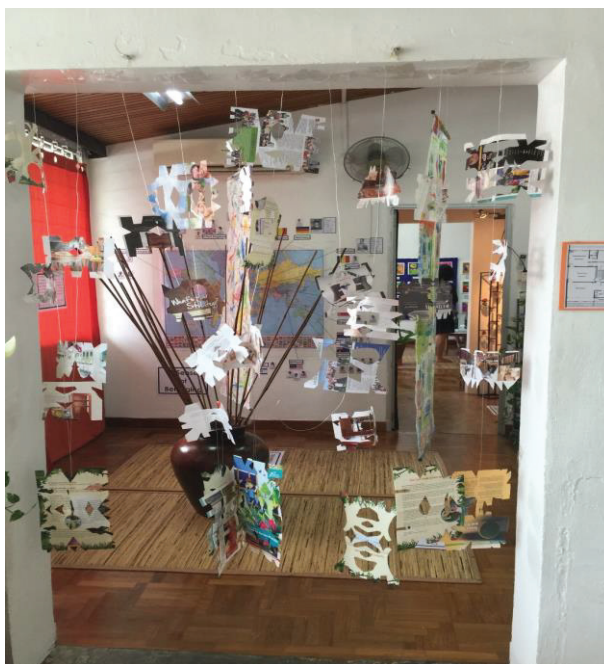
Principle 3: Learning environment, the third teacher



The child has a hundred languages to communicate meaning and understanding.

A functional and aesthetically pleasing learning environment provides children with experiential motivation and psychological motivation (Edwards, Gandini and Formann, 1998; Rinaldi, 2008). We carefully design the environment to develop the child fully, concentrating on what works for the children. The environment provides consistency, continuity and progression in order to engage the children's minds, emphasising the process of thinking and

communicating.



Children are given choices and the responsibility to take ownership for their

learning and are given the time - over days or weeks - to develop their own ideas, to explore and to investigate new possibilities. Children are allowed to make mistakes and to learn from their mistakes. As such, they require a constant environment with different work spaces that meet the demands of the child's pattern of thinking. Hence, teachers provide a flexible learning environment rich with a varied collection of resources. When given the space and time, children find possibilities for playing, learning and discovering which provides opportunity for in-depth experiences, ensuring breadth, balance and relevance of learning in early education.

Play - The Seed of Learning.



“The play of children is not recreation; it means earnest work. Play is the purest intellectual production of the human being, in this stage...for the whole man is visible in them, in his finest capacities, in his innermost being.”

Play is of central importance to the intellectual, social, emotional and moral development of children. Children are meaning makers and pattern seekers ((Nutbrown, 2011) who need active education so that they can construct, co-construct and reconstruct their theories (Malaguzzi, 1993). They need time to ponder their ideas and theories and validate with their peers and teachers.

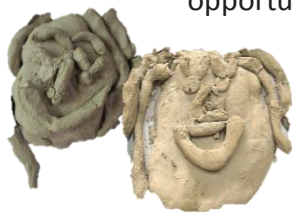


An original alphabet poster by a four years six months old child -



A for apple, B for ball, C for cat, D for drawing book, E for egg, F for fish, G for girl, H for helicopter, I for igloo, J for jelly, K for camel, L for lemon, M for marker, N for envelope, O for octopus, P for pink, Q for cute, R for red, S for spaghetti, T for tea, U for you, V for volcano, W for water, X for X-ray, Y for yawn, Z for zebra.

We encourage purposeful play that helps children to develop their interest, motivation, and capabilities; we provide children with experiences where they have opportunities to wonder,



think about, observe and create.

During play we observe our children with wide eyes and open minds to make sense of their actions, speech and representations so that we can create further learning opportunities to match their forms of thought.

Decision-making. The development of independent learning and self-regulation relies upon the ability to make effective decisions. Teachers enhance such development by providing the child with a range of work spaces and open ended materials to choose from. In such an environment, exchanges and negotiations take place and children's ideas are taken seriously. Children and teachers collaborate to decide what projects to embark on, what materials are needed to extend the play, what we could add to our playground or even if they are contented with the school menu.

Teachers collaborate with children and make informed decisions from daily observations on how best to support each child's growth and development at unhurried pace. We place importance on children's decision-making in their learning, allowing more time for relationships to grow and thinking to

deepen in the living classroom.

Principle 4: Curriculum



Children are capable, competent, curious and creative.

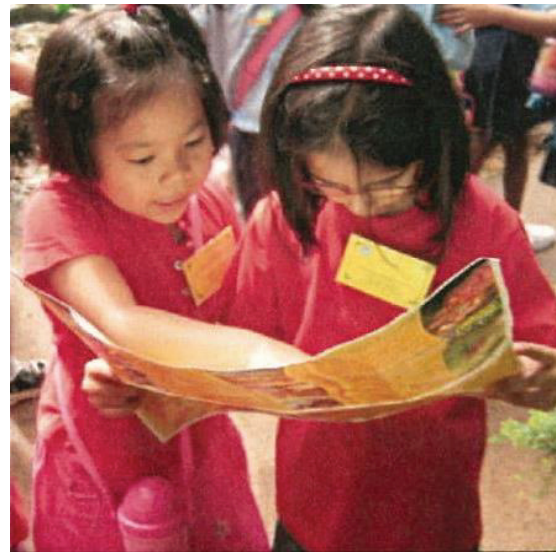
The child centred curriculum. The child is the centre of the curriculum. Fulfilling this responsibility forms the cornerstone of the curriculum. This means that the curriculum is designed to meet the developmental needs of each individual child. We focus our attention on the individual child, and the individual child in group settings. We use observation as an integral part of our daily work. We take the child's point of view, by asking ourselves what is the child figuring out, what theories are they testing?



The child's strengths and current abilities are determined through a cycle of

listening, observing, recording, analysing and planning. We act upon the knowledge we gain from the assessment by planning realistic and challenging goals that motivate the child to engage in provocative and challenging experiences.

The inquiry curriculum; nourishing children's form of thought with worthwhile and interesting content.



Children are natural researchers – they question what they see, hypothesize solutions, predict outcomes, experiment, reflect on and represent their discoveries.

In line with our commitment to produce the best in early childhood education and to be innovative and open to change, we have adopted the inquiry curriculum using the project approach. Project work is a comprehensive approach which creates a vibrant classroom culture that focuses on relationships and inquiry (Katz & Helm, 2011). Children learn across experiences and across curriculum. Over a year, the children work on class projects, spontaneous group projects and self-managed projects. When responding to

children's strengths, abilities and dispositions, the teachers consider each child's developmental level and what skills the child should be learning next based on their interests and developmentally appropriate learning outcomes.

They then plan experiences to move the child forward on the learning continuum in the foundation learning areas of personal, social and emotional development, physical development, creative development, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, communication, language and literacy,

Documentation.

“We teachers must see ourselves as researchers able to think, and produce a true curriculum, a curriculum produced from all the children.”

Malaguzzi, 1993, p.4

Documentation is highly valued as it is used as a tool to make children's theories and learning visible and teachers' teaching visible. It is used as a medium for dialogue with parents, teachers and children about the children's group stories and their discoveries.



The purpose of high quality documentation of children's work and ideas is to guide quality early childhood programme - a cycle of documentation, reflection and action (Forman & Fyfe, 1998). Documentation provides an insight into the child's thought processes during his/her work individually or in a group setting and particularly of their increasing knowledge, skills and dispositions. It thus provides a complex view and detailed picture of the child. It is a pathway to acknowledge and celebrate a child's accomplishments and helping him or her to continue their learning journey. When children see that we take a serious view of documenting their work, we communicate to children that we value their work, we value them.

Conclusion

We can make a difference in children's lives if we are morally committed to the profession, always guided by the AECES code of ethics. As teachers we need to engage in on-going professional development to keep abreast of sound research in early childhood education so that we are knowledgeable and have the

skills and dispositions to do our job well. We need to make children our top priority. Can we afford not to?

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品格教育的开展——幼儿园庆生案例

Unfold Character Education——sharing of Preschoolers' Birthday Celebration

陈鸣鸾

Tan Beng Luan

Founder

Creative O Preschoolers' Bay

新加坡教育部官方文件陈述的教育实践包括德、智、体、群、美等“五育”，其中“德育”指道德与行为品质的习得。本地中小学积极倡导“公民教育”有年，教育部还为学生制定品格与公民教育的课程标准，而幼儿园方面，职总幼乐园也在2015年推出新的《品格塑造课程》。可以这么说，大家都认同品格教育对学生成长至关重要。

编写品格课程与手册是很好的参考，然而在前线的老师也需要提高个人对学生品格教育的认识与执行能力，方能相得益彰。在教育过程中，我们也相信，关怀、尊重、诚信、责任、坚韧、勤奋、自信、勇敢和独立等普世价值观的培养，比知识与技能的习得还要来得艰难与漫长，需要从幼儿阶段就开始。

新意元幼源的品格教育

在新意元幼源，我们认为品格的塑造不能靠课堂口授或阅读课文就能见效，它须要长年累月的努力耕耘。这是一个漫长的、持续的、潜移默化的过程，必须渗透在孩子日常生活与学习中，通过课堂学习方案、角落游戏，或和友伴玩耍中，或是参与社

区关怀活动中，甚至是日常的吃饭歇息中所提供的学习契机，让老师在现实情境中，观察、引领和纠正，将基本价值观扎根于孩子心中，假以时日，经过内化，孩子才可以将这些基本价值转化成终身的正向态度。必须指出，在孩子的成长道路上，老师也只能作短程陪伴，家长才是孩子的最佳陪跑伙伴。因此，品格教育不能忽略家长的参与和扮演的积极角色。（1）

幼儿园庆生案例

在这里和大家分享新意元借助幼儿园常见的孩子庆生活动，来铺展品格教育。严格而言，庆生还够不上是个完整的课程，我们只是在庆生时渗透了一些课程的元素，即教育意义、教学目标、教学设计与执行，以及学习评估，以下一一说明。

一 庆生意义

首先，为什么选择以庆生为内容？（2）在幼儿园过生日，几乎是所有孩子的最爱：收礼物，吹奶油蛋糕，派发礼包给朋友，甚至在园所开生日派对，这已形成了一股风气，也是很多孩子对生日的普遍理解。不愁吃穿的新加坡小家庭，家长一切以孩子为中心，溺爱娇宠成风，大手笔为孩子

庆生，造成孩子养尊处优，以自我为中心，视一切为理所当然，完全没意识到自己的生日与父母或他人的关系。尤有甚者，孩子目中无人，对家人长辈态度蛮横无礼，如果不为他们大肆庆祝生日，他们会爆哭乱闹，让家长为难。可是孩子并非天生如此，而是后天生活环境使然，家长没有把握教育孩子的机会，履行成人的责任，那是家长的过失。

正因为幼儿园庆生的频率高，庆生也是生活教育素材，涉及孩子与家长，我们就应该将它视为德育的契机。

全世界各个民族对新生命的到来，都认为是一种幸福与恩赐，大家会用祈祷、颂歌和礼品等来表示感恩之情。在生活和卫生条件都极差的年代，小生命很容易就被疾病夺走，若孩子能顺利长到一周岁，确实值得庆贺。在中华文化里，出世那天也称为“母难日”，意指孩子出世当天，母亲会受苦，甚至有生命的危险，这在佛经和古代文献中都有记载。因此，古代一些君主在生日那天会斋戒如南朝梁元帝，或不庆祝如唐朝的唐太宗等。在日本，子女生日当天会请母亲吃饭并向她鞠躬；在巴西，过生日的孩子必须将切下的第一片蛋糕递给家长，以示感恩。

从2008年开始，新意元的老师们积极引领孩子重新思考生日的意义和其与他人的关系。

二 教学目标、设计与执行

聚焦的庆生目标可根据不同孩子的庆生另外制定，广泛的目标则可归纳为以下几点：

- 1 理解家长与自己身心成长的关系
- 2 认识健康的食物
- 3 能执行庆生的活动
- 4 赏识朋友

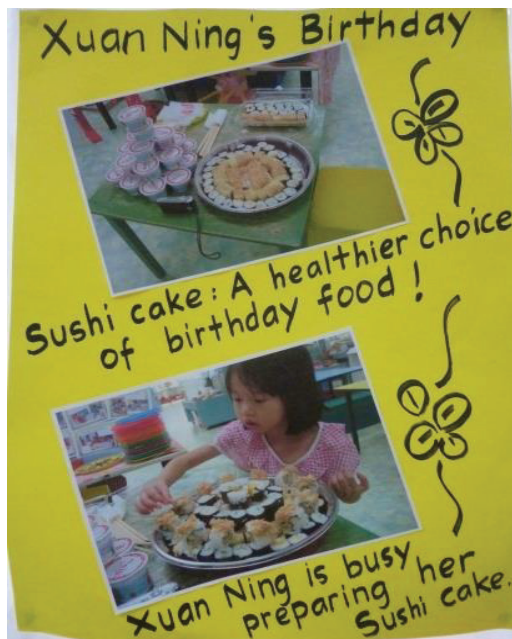
在中、大班新学年开始时，老师可以就庆生的方式，提出一些关键问题：

- 1 生日要如何才会吃得健康？
- 2 生日那天要做什么？
- 3 是谁帮忙他们顺利长大一岁？
- 4 长大一岁能做什么？
- 5 要如何表达感谢？

老师鼓励家长在家里和孩子讨论第一和第二道问题。由于园所不鼓励吃奶油蛋糕，因此特别希望家长在庆生食品上能和孩子讨论设计和自制健康食物。自2008年起，我们发现新意元的孩子庆生方式开始有了改变。

用心的家长会事先和老师沟通所意属的食物和活动，并确定所需的时间。多年下来，我们看到家长呈现了不少很有创意、别开生面的庆生食物和活动，以下举几个为例：

年龄	庆生食物	庆生活动
4岁	1 三文治 孩子和家长一起准备食材 牛油蛋糕 孩子和家长在家烘焙带来园所	小寿星引导同学自制三文治 小寿星教同学制作香蕉牛奶饮料
5 - 6岁	生日面线 孩子和家长一起采购食材 红鸡蛋 孩子和家长一起采购 西瓜水果串 孩子和家长一起准备食材 杯子蛋糕 孩子和家长在家烘焙带来园所	小寿星和同学们一起洗、切所需食材，进行烹煮 小寿星和妈妈教导同学如何染红鸡蛋，之后小寿星表演魔术并教同学一个简单的魔术 小寿星和同学一起做水果串插在生日西瓜上面 小寿星和爸爸带领同学自制纸张



(图一) 将寿司叠成“蛋糕” (2013年)



(图二) 自制果冻“蛋糕” (2013年)



(图三至图六) 煮生日面线 (2010年)

至于其他三道题问：是谁帮忙他们顺利长大一岁？长大一岁能做什么？要如何表达感谢？

老师和孩子们在班上讨论，过程中孩子理解和感受到父母的爱与辛劳，很自然地会想出种种途径来回报爱。这方面，每个班级各不相同，完全按小朋友的意愿来处理：有父母出席庆生会，孩子用敬茶方式来感谢父母养育之恩；有反省了自己的生活习惯后，向父母许下戒除坏习惯的成长诺言；也有集体编写感谢词或卡等。“感恩教育”就是从感谢身边的人做起，庆生就是一个具体的机会。



(图七) 给爸爸献上第一条自制春卷 (2013年)



(图八) 老师将家长提供的成长照片和孩子的感谢词合成送给孩子 (2016年)

三 评估

前面说过，在新意元庆生案例还够不上是个完整的课程，是因为课程根据孩子几时庆生来开展，是机动性的，这个庆生与下个庆生之间的时距也不固定，它是持续的，不像一般课程会在一个时段内完成。因此，我们认为没有必要针对一般用的六大学习领域，即美术与创意表达、探索世界、语文与识字、运动技能发展、数字概念、社会与情绪发展来进行评估。尽管如此，孩子在语文、创意、探索和情商方面依然有斩获，如他们能认读中、英文的字词如：五岁生日、长大、常用食材等；从朋友或家长那里学得一些特别的技能如变魔术、制纸等。其实更需要重视的是孩子在心智发展上是否有所提升，这方面来自家长的反馈更为珍贵，只是新意元并没有很系统地针对家长收集反馈并进行评估，反而是很被动地等待家长自由反馈，我们将会在这方面进行反思、改进。

幼儿园庆生的挑战

(1) 品格教育是个内化的过程，新意元认为以一连串的规定对庆生活动提出要求，并未达到教育的功能，我们希望对庆生的新理解能从班级里、从孩子和家长内心中激发) 滋长，因此，每年年底在召开的各级别家

长会上，老师都会就庆生活动提出我们的看法，分享我们如何引导孩子去讨论，并期待家长的参与，聆听他们的意见。在这过程中，不是每个家庭都十分认同，老师就得借助支持的家长，通过图文并茂展示别有意义的庆生活动，进而在家长群中发挥影响力。

结语

改变观念与习惯，确实不是一朝一夕的事，自2008年以来在师生和家长的不懈努力下，园所的庆生方式有显著的改变，首先食用奶油蛋糕大幅度下降，派发礼物包经已绝迹；孩子在参与讨论和计划自己的庆生方式时，也不再以“我”为中心，而是会考虑到家人。我们衷心期待孩子在离开园所后，对庆生的认知能继续深化，当然在很大程度上，良好品格的培养离不开家长的一路扶持。

注

- (1) 喻洁、陈鸣鸾，*渗透在课程中的幼儿德育*，陈鸣鸾主编，《与孩子一同学习——幼儿教师反思》，235 - 242 页，新意元基金会出版，2014
- (2) 陈鸣鸾，*孩子庆生的意义*，《联合早报》，2010年5月2日

Wellbeing in Early Learning Settings

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Introduction

This research is part of my PhD study on spirituality of young children and it took place in an early learning centre (ELC) in Melbourne, Australia. Part of the praxis of the ELC was a weekly walk into the natural bush setting of the school. The ELC welcomed parents, friends and family members into the centre and onto the walks. The 2-3 hour walk was a highlight of the school week and children responded in many positive and different ways. Children that were perhaps quieter or tended to follow others in the classroom, were soon gathering friends to help make cubby houses, children who tended to be louder in the classroom were found spending time studying ants or gathering stones and feathers on their own.



Photo 1: Children making cubby houses

As I began my PhD, I found that the use of the term spirituality and wellbeing were being increasingly used in early childhood curricula around the world. Among the examples:

- Aotearoa New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* (Education, 2017)
- The Welsh Foundation Phase Framework (Early Years Team Department for Educations and Skills, 2015)
- *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009)

However, when I went looking for supporting guidance and documentation for early childhood educators in how to recognise or nurture young children's spirituality and wellbeing, I could not find anything. I was concerned that EC educators who may not be familiar with the concept of spirituality or wellbeing would not know how to recognise or nurture it in young children and perhaps ignore these areas in favour of more measurable outcomes such as cognitive or physical development.

As I spent time on the walks, I could see how relationships were central to the way children and adults interacted and learnt together. I noticed the care that went into the creation of safe spaces where small and large groups of children were made to feel comfortable and that their ideas and perspectives were taken seriously and valued. I could see that children as young as three and four were able to hold different opinions from one another and

that that was acceptable. I observed the way educators listened to not just the words that were being spoken by the children but to the body language of the children and what was under the language, not quite being able to be expressed.

At the end of the walk and at the end of the day, children were invited to sit together and share their ideas and thoughts. Experiences and events were revisited and time was given for children to contribute their ideas and thoughts.



Photo 2: Children sharing their thoughts and reflections

The data from my research showed that there are four pathways of wellbeing and spirituality that were being manifested in young children; 1) relationships and connection; 2) reflection; 3) creativity and imagination and 4) awe and wonder. The four pathways are explored further below:

Pathway 1: Relationships and connection

Relationships were central to children's wellbeing and spirituality. There are three types of relationships, I observed; the relationships children had with themselves, with others and with the outdoor environment and the community. The relationship the children had with themselves focused around children feeling comfortable playing alone and

making discoveries. One of the ways for educators to encourage this is through mindfulness practices. Two simple mindfulness practices educators use with children involve the breath:

Star Fish Breathing Ask a child to place one hand up and spread their fingers wide like a starfish. With the pointer finger on the other hand begin at the base of their thumb and as they inhale in ask them to move their finger up to the top of the thumb, as they exhale out, ask them to move their finger down the other side of their thumb and down to the base of the pointer finger. Inhale up the finger, exhale down. Do this until the pointer finger reaches the base of the pinky finger.

7/11 Breath Invite the children to take a deep breath as you count to 7 ask them to pause at the top of the breath and then count to 11 as they slowly exhale.

The relationship with others can involve other children or educators and adults. It is important to provide opportunities for children to share their experiences and make meaning from them. There is additional information below in the reflection pathway.

The connection with the outdoors is becoming increasingly researched and the benefits found to be multiple. Unstructured play outdoors:

- Increases the level of self-confidence and self-belief that children develop from the freedom, time and space they have been given to learn, grow and demonstrate independence.
- Allows children to attain an increased awareness of the

consequences of their actions on other people, peers and adults.

- Develops a keenness to participate in exploratory learning and play activities as well as forging an ability to focus on specific tasks for extended periods of time.
- Improves stamina and gross motor skills
- Develops an increased respect for the environment in children and an interest in natural surroundings.

Pathway 2: Creativity and Imagination

While a lot of research exists exploring the importance of play in early childhood, there is very little in the area of creativity in young children. The word “imagination” is often used interchangeably with creativity, yet sociocultural theorist Lev Vygotsky (2004) asserted that imagination is the basis of all creative activity. Vygotsky defined creativity as any human act that gives rise to something new and argued that the active promotion of creativity should be a central function of schooling. Vygotsky (2004) also believed that creativity was a social process which required appropriate tools, artefacts, and cultures in order to thrive. “Creation is a historical cumulative process where every succeeding manifestation [is] determined by the previous one” (2004, p. 7).

Hart (2009) considered there are six layers of transformation that occur during children’s education and he noticed a strong link between children’s creativity and their expressions of spirituality and wellbeing. Hart (2009) believed that imaginative play in children shows their

capacity for “expressing meaning making and negotiating identity” Hart (2009). Hart regarded creativity as the most tangible symbol of transformation.

My research found that it was often in acts of creativity and imagination that wellbeing and spirituality were realised.

Pathway 3: Awe and Wonder

Within research around young children’s spirituality, often awe and wonder is seen as an important dimension. Here is a short case study from my research.

The Blackberry Bush The ELC educator and children had discovered a blackberry bush covered with spider webs. It had rained during the night and so many of the spiders’ webs had tiny droplets of rain caught in them. The children expressed curiosity as to the origins of the raindrops and wondered at the beauty and symmetry of a spider’s web, which led to the following exchange:



The educator: *I wonder how they are there; how do those raindrops stay there?*

Claire: *Because it’s squeezed on.*

The educator: *What’s squeezed on?*

Claire: *The drops.*

The educator: *How?*

Patrick: *The raindrops are just all over and they just did it.*

The children demonstrated a capacity of appreciating the beauty of the raindrops and of communicating feelings about their origin. All the children had recognised something larger than themselves was responsible for placing the raindrops on the spider's web.

Pathway 4: Reflection

The fourth pathway is that of reflection. During my research, I saw numerous examples of the value of small and large group reflective practices both on the walk and back in the classroom. Without a way for children to take the time to reflect upon the events and experiences from their walk and to be gently led through the unfolding and unpacking of these experiences, they would remain just memories, soon forgotten. However, I was delighted to discover that by listening deeply and asking open ended questions, children as young as 3 and 4 were more than capable to draw meaning and be transformed by experiences and events. The creation of a safe and nurturing environment is vital for children to feel that their ideas and perspectives are valued. Open ended questions work best where children are encouraged to explore experiences from a number of different viewpoints. Active listening is important where educators slow down and allow to pause and reflect upon events. Educators should take a stance of curiosity and wonder putting aside their own biases. Educators do not need to know all the answers, the act of creating a safe space for children to explore issues themselves is very valuable.

My research drew upon Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and I discovered his

concept of *perezhivanie*. It is a Russian word representing a complex, multilayered concept. A current translation of this word in modern usage is "experience"; however, Vygotsky (1994) used this word to capture the process by which young children make meaning and to describe how a child "becomes aware of, interprets and emotionally relates to a certain event" (1994, p. 340). He believed that meaning is an internal structure resulting from the unification of thinking and speech yet lying between thought and word.

As I engaged with the children by reflecting on events, I could see the value of this practice in allowing children to develop higher mental and psychological functions, thereby enabling them to move through different stages of awareness to arrive at deeper levels of understanding regarding the experience, which in turn can transform their levels of awareness and consciousness. Again, I could see the *perezhivanie* process as a profound and helpful tool of reflection, transformation and growth.

Taking the data that I had collected, I was able to take his concept and map it to the lived experiences of spirituality of young children. The mapping involved five key steps which allow children to re-enter experiences and derive meaning from them.

1. *The event*. Vygotsky believed that this could be a significant event such as a trauma or perhaps a crisis emanating from the transition from one stage of childhood to the next. However, the findings from my research showed it did not necessarily have to be a traumatic

event but it did appear to require an emotional reaction. At this stage, the child is unable to separate him or herself from the environment or the actual event.

2. *Reflection.* This involves a recounting of the event by the child. This study used small and large group discussions as well as the stimulated recall (Thomson, 2008) process of showing children video footage of experiences back in the classroom a few days after the event which allowed children to accurately re-enter the event, both with their feelings and all their senses.

Some helpful questions here are:

- Tell me about your experience.
- You may ask the child to draw a picture of the event and then offer to discuss the picture with him or her.
- You might like to involve the five senses: What did you see/hear/smell/taste? What did you feel?

3. *Awareness of self and others.* As the child begins to reflect further on the experience they become aware of who else was part of the experience for them. They become aware of themselves as an entity separate from others and the environment.

Some helpful questions here are:

- Who else was there with you?
- What was the experience like for them?

4. *Meaning making and expression.* As the process unfolds through the reflective

practices of safe and nurturing spaces, open ended questions and active listening, the child is developing higher psychological functions and creating new formations. He or she is moving from being a practitioner to a theorist of his or her own life. At this stage, children are able to articulate their thoughts and feelings to others and learn to see the connection between their own and others' experiences.

Some helpful questions here are:

- What did you learn from the experience?
- If this event happened again, would you do anything differently?
- How did this event change your ideas about yourself and/or others?

5. *Transformation and growth.* In this stage, children are able to move beyond the boundaries of their own self-consciousness and move towards an increased level of self-awareness. Here I propose that *perezhivanie* links directly with the lived experience of spirituality in young children. Children are able to experience the mystery of life and are able to hold the 'not-knowing' or the 'not-knowing-yet' associated with some experiences. This may lead to an experience of Transcendence. Children are also able to see themselves in new ways, as philosophers, scientists or teachers.

Some helpful questions here are:

- Did you come to see things differently?
- What new things do you now know?

In order for these steps to occur, children need to be guided by someone who is aware of this process such as an

educator, who can act as a role model, source of knowledge and mediator. This perezhivanie process allows children to reflect upon an event that sparked an emotional response and then find meaning within it.

Conclusion

My research demonstrated that the four pathways offer a way for early childhood educators to contribute significantly to the nurture of young children's spirituality and wellbeing. It does this through an emphasis on relationships and connections, active listening, open ended questions, reflective practices, small and large groups and encouraging creativity, awe and wonder. I encourage early childhood educators to listen deeply to young children, providing them with helpful and beautiful opportunities to reflect upon their experiences and to allow them to learn and grow from them.

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Strategies in Addressing Children's Emotions

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Play is a robust way to interact with children and made adaptive to help young children in regulating their emotions. On a developmental level, playing games with children helps them in reshaping brain circuits. These very circuits set the foundation to better academic learning and interpersonal skills (Cozolino, 2010). Educators and parents can adopt some useful strategies in addressing children's emotional needs. Play can be more than fun and relaxation, it can also support a child's emotional being. Overwhelming events in a child's life can impact concentration level and interpersonal relationships, thus further frustrating the child's school life. Laughter and humour serve as a powerful universal language in nurturing the self, in both the adult and the child. Play-based games frequently assist educators in helping children to express their feelings.

There are four main emotional difficulties we might find children experiencing in their lives, these include

- 1) self-control
- 2) anger
- 3) worry
- 4) fear.

There are some useful games or activities to address these emotions. Importantly, the approach should be done in a playful and child-centred manner rather than instructional. Efforts should also be made in explaining to the child that he/she has the right to halt the game/activity at any point in time should he/she feel uncomfortable to carry on.

Self-control

This game is best suited for children who are extremely active and who struggle to regulate and control their emotions. Often, they have a poor sense of self-control and appear to be disruptive in a group setting or during classroom teaching. One game to use would be the 'Slow Motion' game (Heidi Kaduson 2001).

- Outline the importance of self-control (e.g. distracting others in group learning).
- Explain to the child, self-control is not easily achieved and when one moves fast, it becomes incredibly difficult.
- Start the game by getting the child to demonstrate fast moving actions.

- The child can hold his/her own stopwatch.
- Use cards created with various scenes of daily live activities (e.g. kicking a ball) and have the child act out the card picked.



- After 1 minute – child or teacher to shout ‘Stop!’.
- This game will continue and as it repeats, the time increases.
- Child to feel the achievement made on managing his/her actions over different time frames and gradually be able to control actions at different levels.

Anger

This game aims to prevent child’s angry behaviours and can be used as a form of relaxation, reducing anger and anxiety. The focus for this activity is regulating the child’s breath.

Many of us are attracted to bubbles; it seems almost instinctive that we want to chase after them as the wind carries them away and there is always the desire to burst them. ‘Bubble Breaths’, by Neil Cabe (in Kaduson & Schaefer, 2001), is a good game for the child’s anger management. This game allows the child to be more aware of his/her own mind-body connections.

- Teacher could facilitate and first invite a child to play by blowing some bubbles in the room.
- Explain to the child that when one is angry, the brain would naturally want more air because the lungs are working too hard when one is being upset.
- Child to understand that by breathing deeply, the brain tells the heart to slow down and therefore the lungs would work better.
- Children are encouraged to blow 1 big bubble using a deep and controlled breath.



Worry

Children often do not have the verbal capacity to express their worries and they are often found to be bottling-up their feelings inside them. One game to play with these children would be the game “Worry Can” (by Debbie S. Jones, cited in Kaduson & Schaefer, 1997). Children may worry about many things, some examples are their grades in school, performing in a school play, losing a loved one, parents who are separating. These anxieties, if left unregulated, could manifest into a difficult emotional state in a child. Ideally, someone close could discuss the child’s

worries and promote a calming presence. The activity can be done with one child or with a small group of children. The key idea is to help the child to express and single out his/her bottled-up feelings. This activity could then be a springboard to a therapeutic conversation with the child and the steps are:

- Teacher or parent can use a 'container' and call it a 'Worry Can'.
- Child is encouraged to write his/her worry on a small piece of paper and to place that piece of paper into the can.
- The next day or next session, child can pick these pieces of paper from the same Worry Can.
- Teacher or parent can facilitate role playing with the child. This can be done using a play approach, using toys or puppets and the scenario can be acted out from a third person's point of view.
- Over a period of sessions, this game aims to aid the child in developing his/her own solutions.



Fear

Children who enjoy drawing could work on this activity. This game is suitable for children from preschool to school-going age. A good number of children do find a sense of comfort in expressing themselves through drawing compared to talking

about it. It is not necessary that they have to be skilled in drawing. They also do not need to draw or paint in ways that is representative or realistic. This activity can be easily modified with the use of other materials such as play-doh, clay or sticks. The guidelines to this activity are:

- Have the child draw nice and lovely things or objects.
- Introduce the object or things the child is fearful of (e.g. cockroach).
- Suggest to the child to combine lovely things with the scary image.
- The combined image could look ridiculous and this situation could even generate loads of laughter. With this, it becomes an opportunity where one gains 'a foot in the door', in relaxing fearsome notions of objects or situations surrounding the child.
- This visual modification on paper may gradually enable a change in the way the child thinks.

Example -

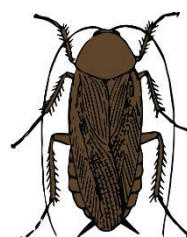


Image 1:
Cockroach, the
feared object

Image 2:
‘Tranformed’ visual
image of cockroach.



Every child is different, and children also play differently. Play is the language of the child and individuals working with children are expected to set consistent boundaries too. Depending on the child’s experience and background, the above activities can sometimes be challenging. I hope teachers and parents can extend unconditional positive regard and empathy when working with the child, especially when introducing it to an already vulnerable child. Working with emotional behaviour is extremely delicate especially for young people. Thus one must work with passion and patience, bearing in mind that the process should be appropriately paced. Rushing to complete the activity is certainly unwise and is not part of the game!

Most importantly, the teacher, parent or caregiver ought to be attuned to the child’s verbal and non-verbal language and at the same time, be respectful and sensitive to the needs of the child. Naturally, the teacher or parent may take several sessions before the child could trust and comfortably disclose his/her fears or anxieties. However, by using activities centring on the concept of play and the potential richness of playfulness, there are certainly better opportunities to connect with children’s emotions.

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Little Home Bird - Meaning Making, Imagination and Creativity

Irene Wee
Pro-FLAiR

From the story “Little Home Bird” by Jo Empson, I was able to plan activities designed to reinforce the story, enhance the imagination of the children and support their creativity in drawing and writing.

Strategy 1

After listening to the story, the 3 children enacted the “Little Home Bird” carrying things into its new home. For the role play, props were provided for the children, musical instruments such as bells, eggs shakers and tambourines as well. Mei Ling wanted to bring eggs (plastic egg props) to the new home, Marcus chose leaves and twigs and Mariam picked grass and flowers; each had a scarf where they placed their items.



After building the new home, the “Little Home Bird” was happy and used the musical instruments to celebrate “their success”. The children in this play communicated creatively and I believed

that, given the right spur, the children will learn together.

Strategy 2

During the week, I showed the children the “Little Home Bird” story book again, asking if they would like to build a home for the bird. They became excited and said, “Yes!”. We talked about taking a walk around the neighbourhood, to pick things a bird would use to build its home. During the discussion, the children used words like ‘twigs, leaves, grass, strings, flowers’, recalling the vocabulary from the story.



Out for the walk, the children found and picked twigs, leaves and dried grass.



But they collected too little.

When they returned to the classroom, they found they needed more materials to build a bigger home. I asked, "Why?"

Mariam: Or the baby birds will fall off the nest!"

Marcus: Space here, can put more leaves.

Mei Ling: More leaves to build the home stronger so the wind will not blow it down!

This cooperative learning helped develop oral communication, social and thinking skills.

The next day, we were off again, this time to a nearby nature park to explore and gather more materials.



Collectively, the children managed to build a bigger home for the bird. The huge smiles on their faces reflected their sense of accomplishment. Their curiosity had motivated their learning.

Strategy 3

Finally, the children were ready to create their own individual piece of art based on the story. A good variety of materials were offered - paints, coloured pencils, coloured marker pens, glue, recycled materials such as newspapers, cotton wool, Vitagen caps,

assorted Lipton's tea bag tags. In the provision of developmentally appropriate art materials and tools, I also considered the development of autonomy in children – this would allow for mastery and challenge.

The children's art work



The bird looks for a new home.

Teacher: Marcus, I can see two houses in your drawing, what are they?

Marcus: The bird house.

Teacher: Why are there two bird houses?

Marcus: The old house (behind the bird) is broken. The bird walk and look for a new home (red house).

Teacher: I can see two suns too. Why are there two suns?

Marcus: Very hot day.

Teacher: Mariam, why is the bird looking for worms?

Mariam: The bird is always hungry.



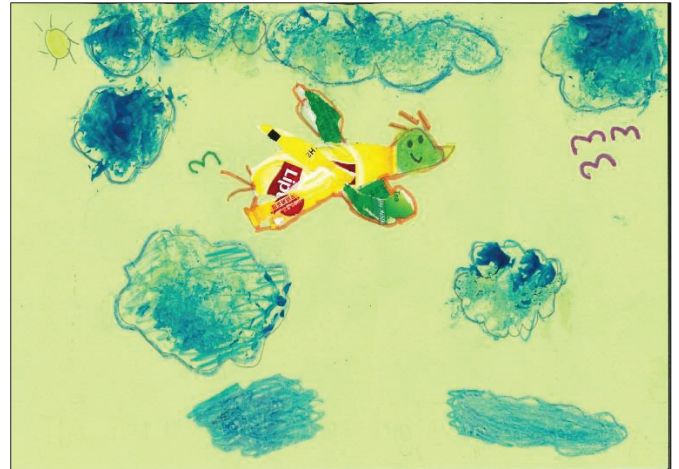
The bird is looking for worms.

Teacher: I see small, greenish-grey leaves falling from the tree, what happened?

Mariam: Because the wind is very strong and blow the leaves down, like autumn leaves. (She had this prior knowledge from a song the children learnt in an earlier lesson, "Autumn leaves are now falling, red and yellow and brown. When the wind blows its trumpet, see them twirling around.")

Mei Ling was the most prolific, she created a series of art pieces.

Art work 1:

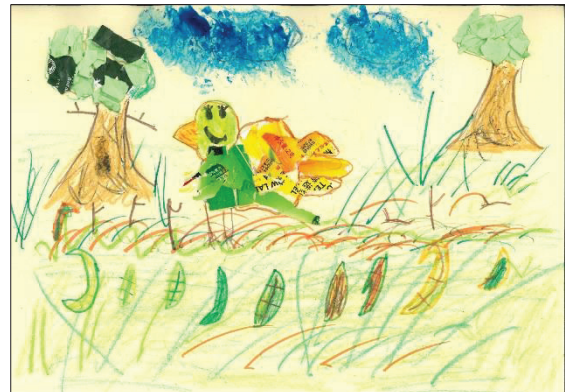


The nature bird flies high up in the sky.

Mei Ling: Why must the nature bird fly high up in the sky?

Mei Ling: So that it can see many twigs when it looks down.

Art work 2:



Teacher: What is the bird doing?

Mei Ling: It is flying every morning to look for twigs to build the new home!

Art work 3:

Teacher: Mei Ling, why are there music notes in this drawing.



Mei Ling: The birds found many friends. They are happy together. They are singing. They love their new home.

Their drawings meant many things for the children. There was a lot of meaning making going on as they engaged and participated actively and freely in creative conversations. Not being able to spell some words did not stop the children from trying. With some assistance from me, they could name the letters, decipher the

beginning and ending letter sounds and blend them together to make the words. I gave them a lot of encouragement verbally, with nods and smiles and I saw them persevere in their tasks, seeing it to completion.

I observed that art experiences helped and motivated them towards nurturing the learning dispositions of perseverance (to keep working, to complete a task), reflectiveness (they draw and write about their art experiences), appreciation (they admire and give positive comments on their peers' artwork), inventiveness (they explore various ideas and materials), sense of wonder and curiosity (discover their creativity during the process) and engagement (in showing keenness and initiative in using art materials to create). The benefits in providing a rich environment, supporting play opportunities and giving them freedom to explore and to make sense of things will all come together to help develop their enthusiasm, channel their imagination and they will confidently blossom in their learning.

Tracing the Heritage of Popular Children Songs; More than a Minute Worth of Meaning

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Imagine walking into a children's birthday party at McDonald's. The song "Happy birthday to you" will be sung melodiously to the birthday child. Transport yourself to another setting in a toddler room where the caregiver is conducting a small group discussion on stars. She will most probably share the song "Twinkle twinkle little star" to the group of toddlers. Finally imagine a mother reading an alphabet book to her infant, she will most likely sing the letters to the tune of the "Alphabet" or the "ABC" song. Have you ever wondered what makes these children songs so popular across the ages from infants to adults? Through tracing the heritage of popular children songs, this paper attempts to discuss the origin of these songs; defining popular children's songs; selecting children's songs; their relations to theories of child development; the various forms of songs and the impact and influence on today's early childhood education.

Tracing the Origin

According to Spodek and Saracho (2003), "Only by building on the past, and understanding the past, can we come to understand the practices of the present and seek better ways of working with young children" (p.3). For centuries,

nursery rhymes and young children's songs have been passed down orally from one generation to another, perhaps now is the time to trace back to the origin.

In the 17th century, the melody of "twinkle, twinkle little star" first appeared without lyrics in 1761, Paris, known as "Ah! Vous Dirai-Je, Maman" (Fuld, 1996). Mozart wrote 12 variations on the melody for piano in 1778 in Paris and published in 1785 in Vienna under the title "Airs Variee". The lyrics of "Twinkle, twinkle little star" was written by an English lady, Jane Taylor in 1806 and published under the title "The Star" in her "Rhymes for the Nursery". The song came to be sung as the "ABC" song in 1824 and was first published in the issue of "Musikalischer". It was copyrighted by Charles Bradlee in Boston in 1834 and was titled "The Schoolmaster". The words and melody of "Twinkle, twinkle little star" were first printed together in "The Singing Master" in London, 1838.

Another very popular celebrative song "Happy Birthday" was written by Patty Smith Hill and composed by Mildred J. Hill in 1935 in Louisville, Kentucky (Odland, 1996). In their career as kindergarten teachers, both sisters felt that children needed a special song to commemorate their birthday (Wolfe, 2002). They created many works following the birthday song and was originally published in 'Song

Stories for the Kindergarten' in 1896. Patty Smith Hill was an avid learner and an advocate for the early childhood profession. In 1892, she was one of the eight teachers who started the International Kindergarten Union which later became the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI). In 1909 she became the President of ACEI. One evening in 1935, she and her sister Jessica Hill attended a Broadway play and were shocked to hear "Happy Birthday" being played. They filed for copyright infringement and won the lawsuit and 'Happy Birthday' was copyrighted until 2010. A large amount of money was awarded to the sisters for this extremely popular birthday song.

Defining popular children songs

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, popular was defined as "Accepted, followed, used or done by many people" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/popular>). How did these children songs withstand the test of time and get passed down to the current generation? In 1990, Charles Elliot invited the music education community to identify songs that were common to the heritage of United States (McGuire, 2000). The purpose of all these investigation was to ascertain songs that remain popular through the generation. In a country like United States, where the population is multicultural, tracing a common heritage can be quite a challenge. Based on the common lists identified by Music Educators National Conference (MENC); Whitlock and Ramsey; Prickett and

Bridges; Harwood and Killian; two categories of songs emerged known as the devised lists and the authentic lists (McGuire, 2000). The devised lists were constructed by the researchers with no attempt to identify popular songs among the population. The devised list determine what people "should know" rather than what they "did know". The other category was known as the authentic lists that were derived from informants themselves focusing on what people "did know" rather than what people "should know".

Under the authentic list, 26 songs were identified that appeared in the contents of two community songbooks that were popular during First and Second World War. I attempted to categorize these songs under five categories. Children songs were songs sung in most preschools such as "The Alphabet Song"; "Yankee Doodle"; "The wheels on the bus"; "Row, Row, Row your Boat" and "Rock-a-bye-Baby". Patriotic songs were songs that evoke loyalty and love for the country such as "America". Celebrative or festive songs were sung during celebrations or festivals such as "Happy Birthday"; "Deck the Halls"; "Jingle Bells" and "Silent Night". Religious songs were sung during religious events such as "Jesus Loves Me" and "others" were songs that did not belong to any of the four categories. It was interesting that 16 of the songs in the authentic listing were popular children's songs including "The Alphabet Song", "Happy Birthday" and "Twinkle, twinkle, little star". The second authentic listing contained 16 songs that were not found in the community songbooks; "All American Songbook" and "The Golden

Book of Favourite Songs”. Eleven of the songs were popular children’s songs and “The Alphabet Song” and “Happy Birthday” were listed on it again.

The devised list consisted of 11 songs with only three children songs; six patriotic songs and two others. This listing did not have “The Alphabet Song”, “Happy Birthday” and “Twinkle, twinkle little star”. However, McGuire (2000) noted a discrepancy between the two categories as the devised list contained 42% less songs and differing songs than the authentic lists. A further comparison was made with the early devised and authentic listing to the 20th century community song books. Again the three popular children songs were not listed. McGuire (2000) suggested the possibility that “The Alphabet Song” and “Happy Birthday” did not appear on the songbook not because they were not known but due to their familiarity, were omitted from the songbooks. With such wide range of popular children songs, how do parents and early childhood educators look into the song selection that is most appropriate for young children?

Selecting children’s songs

According to Killian (1993), “song selection is considered of primary importance to the musical development of children”. To make a wise decision in introducing the appropriate songs to children, we need to look into the purpose of the songs. I believe children songs can serve several purposes; to perpetuate ideology; to introduce concepts; to celebrate festivity and to promote religion. According to Kong (1995), “Music is used

by the ruling elite to perpetuate certain ideologies aimed at political socialization and to inculcate a civil religion that directs favour and fervour towards the nation”. In the authentic listing above, the song “America” was listed as one of the song that Americans should know. Let us examine the lyrics

*O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!*

The lyrics painted a beautiful and spacious America with fruitful plains and close knitted relationship. With the anthemic melody, it evoked the feeling of loyalty and fervour towards America. Such songs were taught to children when they were young to convert and arouse in them the sense of patriotism towards America so as to promote a sense of ‘national identity’ to the country when they become an adult.

Children songs were also used to introduce concepts especially in enhancing the language development of young children (Parlakian & Lerner, 2010). Through chanting and singing the “The Alphabet Song”, preschoolers learn the letters in the Alphabets. In fact, this is how I learned the alphabet when I was young. Although important concepts were taught through songs, we need to examine the lyrics carefully before we introduce a new song. Let us examine the lyrics of another authentic song that all Americans know, “Rock-a-bye-Baby”.

*Rock-a-bye-Baby, on the tree-top
When the wind blows, the cradle
will rock
When the bough breaks, the cradle
will fall
And down will come baby, cradle
and all*

This is a lullaby commonly used to rock the infant to sleep in the mother's arms or the care-takers arms. However, did the caretaker consider the social emotional aspect of a dropping infant? How could we sing it as a soothing bedtime lullaby when an infant fell from the tree? Perhaps we could hummed the melody or make up our own lyrics to the soothing melody such as

*Rock-a-bye-Baby, on the tree-top
When the wind blows, the cradle will
rock
When the sun shines, the baby will
smile
And rock-a-bye baby, cradle and all.*

The next purpose to consider in song selection is the occasion, is this celebration, festivals or a religious ceremony. The Hill's sisters "Happy Birthday" song were usually sung during birthday celebrations across all ages. Early childhood educators could also consider singing various cultural version of the "Happy Birthday" song such as in Spanish, Italian, and Mandarin. This will be a good opportunity to introduce another culture and at the same time create awareness and understanding of the values and norms of another culture. Armed with a better understanding of song selection, how does popular children songs relate to theories of child development?

Relating to theories of child development in music

Preschool music education did not begin in the United States until mid 1800s (McDonald and Simons, 1989 cited in Scott-Kassner, 1991). Study of children's musical progress was also limited in the late 1800s (Humphreys, 1985, cited in Scott-Kassner, 1991). Through the work of Frederick Froebel in the early 1900s, music became a standard part of kindergarten curriculum and children's songs became an important educational tool. Froebel introduced various songs along with his gifts to help children acquire the concepts of his gifts and learn about the various jobs and work that the children might see around them (Wolfe, 2002). In the 1960s, Jean Piaget's cognitive theory was brought to music education by Marilyn Pflederer Zimmerman (Scott-Kassner, 1991). Zimmerman believes that musical intelligence develops in a similar way to Piaget's theory. How does knowing these popular children songs help the child in their musical development? To answer this question, we need to find out the forms of song.

Forms of song

Howard Gardner and his colleagues Lyle Davidson, Patricia McKernon and Dennie Wolf at Harvard's Project Zero have been observing the development of musical abilities in a group of nine children during the first five years of life (Gardner, 1981). In the first year, they found that infants were capable of imitating the intonational patterns of linguistic structure they heard.

By two, children were aware of tunes sung by others especially familiar children songs such as “Happy Birthday”, “The Alphabet Song” and “Twinkle, twinkle little star”. They begin to make attempts to reproduce these songs; thus creating a contrast between spontaneous song and learned song. Moog (1976) identified three forms of spontaneous singing; “imaginative”, “narrative” and “pot-pourri” songs. Imaginative songs bore no resemblance to a known song and were often hummed or sung to a single syllable. Narrative songs tell a story and are monologues consisting of mainly nonsensical words, tunes with occasional excerpts of learned songs. Pot-pourri songs were combinations of learned songs with mixed up words and melodies and might contain original improvisations. Young (2002) documented children singing during free play and observed some known songs emerging from children’s singing which she labelled “reworking of known songs” (cited in Mang, 2005). I recalled my two year old nephew performing a “pot-pourri” or “reworking of known songs” when he was working with play dough. He improvised the original lyrics of the popular children song “Eency Weency Spider” to “Eency Weency Snake” as follows:

Popular Children song	Pot-Pourri song
Eency Weency Spider climbing up the spout Down came the rain and washed the spider out	Eency Weency Snake Rolling up the spout Down came the rain and Washed the snaky out

Out came the sun and dried up all the rain Now Eency Weency Spider climb up the spout again	Out came the sun and dried up all the rain and Eency Weency Snake climb up the spout again
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Zimmerman (1993) states that a child’s musical growth moves from receiver of information (perception), to imitator, and to organizer of information (improvisation) (cited in Burton, 2002). Learning of popular children’s songs has an important influence on the child’s musical growth as seen from the spontaneous improvisation of songs. How can we seek better ways of working with young children with the understanding of past knowledge of popular children’s songs?

More than a minute worth of meaning: Impact and influence on today’s early childhood education

Although it takes only a minute to sing a popular children song such as “Happy Birthday”, the impact and influence on early childhood education cannot be ignored. Four impacts and influences of children songs on today’s early childhood education will be examined.

I started the article tracing the heritage of popular children song. One of the most popular songs “Happy Birthday” brought in a large amount of money for the Hill’s sisters. What did they do with the money and who were the beneficiaries? Before Patty’s death in 1946, she and her sister Jessica established a trust fund - the Hill foundation to provide for their heirs and to

further the interest of children (Odland, 1996). It was the Hill's sisters wish that ACEI, where Patty Smith Hill was the president in 1909 to receive the money following their death. After the death of the Hill's sisters' nephew Archibald A. Hill in 1992, ACEI became the remainder beneficiary of the Hill estate. The annual income from the fund is around \$150,000. Never would the Hill sisters imagine that this simple song will bring close to one million dollars for ACEI before the copyright expires. This financial aid support ACEI in their mission to "To promote and support in the global community the optimal education and development of children, from birth to early adolescence, and to influence the professional growth of educators and the efforts of others who are committed to the needs of children in a changing society" (<http://www.acei.org/>).

The second impact can be seen in how music transcend across various cultures when children and adults across the globe cited similar favourite children songs. John Blacking (1928-1990), an advocate in the study of music in culture was convinced that "the study of a variety of world's music could lead to a fuller understanding of "music as music" and that performers and listeners alike "carry the cognitive equipment to transcend cultural boundaries" with regards to musical expressions that help them to understand music and to "resonate (with it) at the common level of humanity" (cited in Campbell, 2000). However, to better understand the various cultures, these popular children songs could be played

with a different genre or cultural instruments. Imagine various versions of "Happy Birthday" being played with Africa drumbeat; Mexican castanets; Japanese Shamisen. It would definitely create a global awareness in the early childhood classroom and help children and educators to connect across various cultures. According to McGuire (2000) "knowledge and experience in cultures outside one's own may help to alleviate some of the ignorance that often accompanies people's music preferences".

The third impact of children song is the positive impact in the total development of a young child. It enhances the language development of young children as cited by Gardner (1981), "initial observations confirm that children's babbling includes melodic and intonational as well as phonological experimentation". Thus early language and early musical chanting are inseparable. Music is rule-governed as is language. According to Trehub (2003), "Just as a sentence can be lengthened indefinitely by the insertion of words or other sentences, so a musical piece can be altered by the insertion of phrases or other musical units"(p.669). Besides the positive effect on language, children's songs also benefit the children's social emotional bonding with adults (Morehouse, 2013). To further nurture the music behaviour of infants and toddlers, adults could imitate and celebrate the children's musical behaviour thus recognizing their value in music making (Kenney, 2008). As a result, music has been an integral part in the preschool curriculum.

The fourth impact could be seen in the focus on music through the establishment of the music association both locally and internationally. In 1907, the Music Supervisors National Conference was founded and later renamed Music Educators National Conference (MENC) (<http://members.tripod.com/cmenc/menc.htm>). It started with 69 members and today it has grown to nearly 70,000 members. The mission of MENC is to advance music education as a profession and to ensure that every child in America has access to a balanced, sequential, high-quality education that includes music as a core subject of study. Thus in 1940, MENC published an outline of the first K-12 music education curriculum.

Conclusion

The journey that I embarked to trace the heritage of popular children songs is like searching for a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Each discovery is like catching a glimpse of the colours of the rainbow. In my attempt to present a clearer vision or rays of rainbows behind the meaning of each popular children song, I am awed by the rich heritage behind the children songs such as “Happy Birthday”, “Twinkle, twinkle, little star” and “The Alphabet Song”. The chart below provides different purpose of popular children songs and suggestions for parents and early childhood educators to consider during selection. Now when I hear or sing the popular children songs; it will hold special meaning that takes more than a minute to share.

Purpose of Songs	Examples
Ideology	America the Beautiful God bless the U.S.A. This land is your land
Concepts	Alphabet Song Eency Weency Spider Mary had a little lamb Old Macdonald Row, row, row your boat Shoo, Fly The wheels on the bus
Festivity	Deck the Halls Happy Birthday Jingle Bells Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer Silent Night
Religious	Jesus loves me

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**Towards Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals:
What is a Successful Multi-sectorial Approach to ECD?
The ARNEC Conference 2018
Kathmandu, Nepal, 5-7 June 2018**

Lim Hong Huay and Christine Chen

Dr Lim Hong Huay, a developmental pediatrician, reflects.

“A child’s brain is like a playground!”

*(from Dr Vibha Krishnamurthy, MD,
Founder and Executive Director of
Ummeed Child Development Center, India)*

That statement of epiphany reverberates in my mind long after my return flight touched down on the tarmac of Changi International Airport, after the ARNEC conference in Kathmandu, Nepal. Every so often in my 15 years of clinical practices and teaching experience in child development, I have heard and even personally used the analogy that a child’s brain is like a sponge. This analogy is meant to illustrate the immense learning potential of a young child’s mind.

I was wrong. A child’s brain is not airy and empty like a sponge. Therein of each child lies a unique **pre-existing neural and emotional infrastructure** built by genetic make-up and past experiences. This is to be appreciated, cherished and creatively enriched by each early childhood professional. Much like a playground, positive learning is a **two-way process** to build new experiences and beautiful memories. You throw a ball into a playground, the playground bounces it around and then it may roll the ball back

to you or send it off in an unexpected direction. Active learning is not a one-way process of didactic absorption, retention then regurgitation of knowledge. As early childhood professionals, we are entrusted with the simple yet most challenging task to **have fun** with a child.

Even in the utmost dire social condition, fun cuts across all barriers to reach a child’s soul and mind. In an inspiring sharing by Dr Nishat Fatimah Rahman (BRAC Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University, Bangladesh) on her work with displaced Rohingya children at Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh, I saw laughter and joy ignite learning in these traumatized children. Collaboration with “Clown’s without borders” (<http://response.brac.net/lighting-up-hearts-in-the-middle-of-a-humanitarian-crisis/>) and hundreds of child-friendly spaces set-up by Dr Rahman’s team offered **playful early stimulation** and psychosocial support, over and above the safety and security provided by the programme.

Similarly, in the pre-conference study visit to the Early Childhood Development Programme at Shree Chandi Adarsha Saral Secondary School in Lalitpur, **responsive care and joyful play** is clearly at work. The children were amazingly happy whilst

learning. The scenes reminded me of a nurturing mother spending a playful day out with her young children. Something that I poignantly realized is missing in some ECD programmes back home.



At the conference, Dr Nirmala Karupiah of the National Institute of Education, Singapore, also shared her landmark study on the quality of teacher-child interaction in Singapore pre-school classrooms. On the CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) tool, the Singaporean pre-schools fared relatively lower in terms of social and emotional support compared to the USA pre-schools. As we chased after curriculum excellence in Singapore, have we unknowingly forgotten the fundamental role of nurturing fun and playful joy in responsive care-giving and early learning?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) officially launched the Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development at this year's ARNEC conference. This framework aspires to help children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential. There are 5 components of this framework, namely safety and security, opportunities for early learning, responsive care-giving, good health and adequate nutrition. **Fun and play** may well be a key ECD strategy to enhance

social and emotional well-being, even amidst the ghastliest humanitarian crisis. It is also a powerful medium through which responsive care-giving can be effectively provided and early learning opportunities maximized.

With a renewed and strengthened conviction that **"Fun is the business"** of Early Childhood Development, I shall have a fun day out with my kids tomorrow.

Dr Christine Chen, President, AECES, on her reflections.

While the content of the conference was rich and thought provoking, I had the opportunity to connect with two organisations whose work inspired me. One was Seto Gurans National Child Development Services in Lalitpur, Nepal and the other Aarohan, New Dehli, India.

Seto Gurans means "white rhododendron" a plant which grows in harsh mountainous terrain; their symbol represents children growing under harsh



conditions and marginalized for their gender, caste, creed, ethnicity, geographical barriers added to severe poverty. It started in 1979 when Ms Agatha Thapa started a free school for young children. Agatha, with the help of a translator, convinced parents to send

their children to school. In addition, to have children attend school regularly, one family is appointed each day to take turns to bring the children to school. This reminds me of the “Hand in Hand” project that AECES is coordinating for Temasek Cares. The preschool children here in Singapore face the same predicament of not attending school regularly. “What do we need to make Hand in Hand successful?” this question ran through my mind.

I met the eager and excited ladies who work at Seto Gurans, proud of the work their organization is doing and dressed in the colours of the white rhododendron with its green leaves. They proudly shared with me their booklet entitled “Reflections: contributing towards ECD in Nepal 1979-2017”. From the one school started in 1979, Seto Gurans’ programmes now include Home-based Early Child Development (ECD) programme, educational audio/radio programme on information for underserved communities, parent to child early stimulation programme, and child to child programme where older siblings support the younger ones. What kept Seto Gurans growing?



The values behind the ladies in green and white have kept Seto Gurans going for 40 years and more to come.

Another inspiring story is how and why Ms Rani Patel started Aarohan in Delhi, India. Rani had been losing the wing-mirror of her car several times. She finally managed to catch the culprit red-handed, a 7 year boy Rohan. Instead of reporting Rohan to the police, on her husband’s advice, she decided to find out why Rohan stole it. Upon investigation, she found out that Rohan, a rag picker, was a member of a group of street children aged between 7-13 years who were involved in petty thefts. They were also victims of all kinds of abuse, including sexual abuse; these children were also abusing substances like inhaling rubber solution or correction fluid so as to be intoxicated. Rani was deeply moved by this experience and it transformed her world view. She knew for sure that a call to action was definitely necessary!

Rani, with her friend Anjana Tata, started Aarohan, named after Rohan. ‘Aarohan’ means ‘climb up high, Rohan!’. The objective of Aarohan was to bring the children from the street to school. What a noble act! But bringing children to school was only the first step as many children faced problems in educational institutions and were prevented from completing school.

Aarohan became involved in many other support services but always held to its strong educational beliefs where education is not equated with schooling. At Aarohan, education is a process of inviting possibilities, of encouraging and giving time to discovery. Education is a social process where teachers work with their students to develop potential by igniting interest in learning about the

world around them in order to enjoy it fully and contribute their share to it.

Education the Aarohan way reminds us as early childhood educators what education really means when we work with young children in early childhood settings.

Meet Rani Patel in the photo; she is my inspiration.



In attending conferences, not only do we listen to the content but we meet people and organisations that inspire and help us renew our commitment to children and families and put meaning to what we do on a daily basis.

aarohan
STREET TO SCHOOL
www.aarohanngo.org

Musashino Higashi 2nd Kindergarten in Tokyo, Japan

Shirley Tan

Principal, Church of the Holy Trinity Kindergarten

Musashino Higashi 2nd Kindergarten is one of two private kindergartens of Musashino Higashi Gakuen (MHG) founded by Dr. Kiyo Kitahara whose motto is ‘to bring up the children with healthy mind and body’. The kindergarten opened its first door in 1965. 45 years later, it has two kindergartens, an elementary school, a junior high school and a specialised high

school in Japan and in 1987, a sister school in Boston Massachusetts, USA. The essence of MHG education is anchored in the overarching principles of “Mixed Education System” (Fig. 1) for typically developing children and children with autism, and “Daily Life Therapy^R” (a registered trademark owned by Musashino Higashi Gakuen) for children with autism.

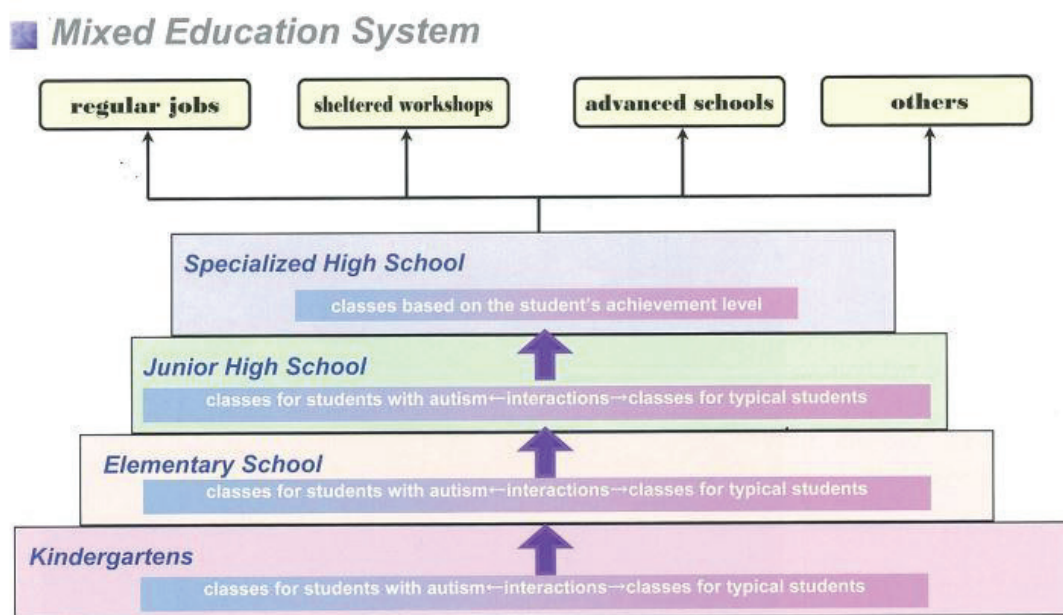


Fig 1: Mixed Education System of Musashino Higashi Gakuen

In the Mixed Education System, students with autism spend a part or whole day in a typical setting. This is a chance for them to experience their learning side by side with their peers. This is a whole school practice. This practice exercises flexibility, taking

into account the learning needs and potential of the students. The purpose is to ensure no child is left behind and every individual has an opportunity to grow regardless of their learning abilities and competencies. This approach creates an

atmosphere where students with autism learn in an environment packed with vibrancy and stimulation from their peers. At the same time, their peers will learn, in a natural setting, about the importance of life such as accepting differences in people and helping others in need, thereby promoting humanity and inculcating values of persistence and diligence. The teachers on the other hand broaden their knowledge of their students' development and interests through their interaction with students with autism.

Daily Life Therapy^R (Seikatsu Ryouhou) provides different educational services in an all-inclusive group-dynamic programme. It is a structured programme that takes into consideration each student's learning needs. It enhances learning through real and purposeful experiences of regular living activities and community experiences within a standardised classroom setting. Embedded in the programme is the emphasis on vigorous physical exercise. Physical exercise as researched is known to lessen anxiety and improve concentration. The programme believes that in the natural, predictable and loving environment, the student's emotions can be managed. The motivators in this environment to encourage learning interests include praise, achieving mastery and having pride in their education. The process of learning in the group-dynamic programme is to develop the individual student's self-reliance.

The above was conceptualised when Dr. Kiyo Kitahara (1925-1989) whole-heartedly accepted a child with autism in 1964. Desperate parents started knocking on the

doors of Musashino Higashi Gakuen. However, the children seemed to regress after they finished kindergarten and progressed to local schools that had limitations in handling them. At the fervent cry of their parents to build an elementary school for these children, Higashi Elementary School was established in 1977. In 1983, Higashi Junior High School was opened. In 1986, Higashi Specialised High School began as a preparatory educational school to help students be valued members of society. In its aim to achieve 'its original mission and openness to educate as many children as possible', Musashino Higashi Center for Education and Research was set up in 2006. The objectives of the centre are:

1. *To develop and provide services under Daily Life Therapy^R to as many children in need as possible,*
2. *To provide guidance and support to parents and family members of children with autism at home,*
3. *To organize and provide seminars and training courses of Daily Life Therapy^R for professionals and the educators, and*
4. *To promote and participate in as many opportunities as possible to raise autism awareness and introduce the Higashi method domestically and also at the international level.*

I had the privilege of visiting the school this year in March. However, I had no prior knowledge of their MHG programme. Upon our arrival, we were greeted by an impeccably dressed gentleman at the

school door. Mr. Kato, principal of Masashino Hagashi 2nd Kindergarten, greeted us warmly. He lost no time in bringing us through a learning journey, sharing facts and figures of the school. As we ambled through the environment, we noticed that what they practised and what was written in their brochure synchronised perfectly. That was impressive.

Audible sounds filled the school. These were 'good noise' of cheerful chattering of children, music to the ears of any teacher. Children were also seen moving around confidently in the different areas. In the open field was a group of youths and young children collaborating in an activity. We were told that these were youths with autism, they were once part of the school and now return to assist with the kindergarteners.

In one of the classrooms, there was a group of 10 – 12 kindergarteners seated on chairs, listening to a teacher telling a story. These children were attentive and a couple of them responded to the teacher's questions. Mr. Kato shared that these young children were autistic. If he had not pointed this out to us, we would not have picked that out to be significant. No PECs or other communication strategies that we normally associate with when working with children with different needs were used.

Mr Kato also shared that the children had the liberty to move between classes. This was to encourage them to interact with other peers, it helped to enhance their learning. It was heart-warming to witness the enthusiasm and patience of the teacher in handling these children.

Every child was related to in a manner that valued his/her presence and being.

MHG teachers were qualified early childhood educators in accordance to the standard of MHG. However, they did not specialise in learning disorders, early intervention or special needs. Mr. Kato shared that research had been conducted to ascertain the success of the programme. The professor who led in the research found that it was the heart of the people in the school that made the programme a success. Mr. Kato pointed to his heart to emphasise this. He stressed that the 'heart to heart education' had been embraced relentlessly by all involved over the years. MHG also continued untiringly to transform curricula, activities and programme. This was to ensure that their students acquire knowledge, competencies and skills to achieve independence and generosity which were the core of their education.

The meticulous planning of the students' acquisition of knowledge was evident in the documentation of the children's learning and artefacts. Noteworthy was that even the seats of the school bus were modified to child's size. An impromptu incident demonstrated the inside-out intention of the programme. A 4-year old boy politely and with assurance interrupted Mr. Kato, not only once but twice whilst he was making his presentation to us. Guessing from his gesture, Mr Kato explained that the boy had not been able to find his peers and was seeking his help. It was evident that Mr. Kato was well-received by the children in both the 1st and 2nd kindergartens. The children were seen to be comfortable and

at ease with him. This could only happen if Mr. Kato had spent a considerable time interacting with them. In the brief encounter, the intent and the success of the MHG programme was evident.

The physical environment was simple and this perhaps could have added to the peacefulness of this community and, in a

way, highlight that, at the heart, was indeed honouring the personhood of each one who, together with the adults in their lives, make up the community.

Can such a programme be made available in Singapore? More significantly, does each child have a place in our hearts? It is certainly food for thought.



Photo: (Seated L-R) Principal Mr Kato together with the Singapore team, comprising Dr Christine Chen, Ms Shirley Tan, Ms Therese Tan and Swami Satyalokananda (standing)

Regulation and Re-imagination in Curriculum Design Reflections on the AECES Japan Study Trip

Oh Chui Hwa

Principal, Far Eastern Kindergarten

Reflections

The Second International Conference of Child Research Network Asia, hosted by Child Research Net (CRN), Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute and Ochanomizu University Institute for Education and Human Development was held in Tokyo on 17 and 18 March 2018. The theme was "Nurturing Social and Emotional Skills - Media, Play, and Children with Special Needs". Researchers and educators in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and paediatricians from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, the United States and Japan gathered to discuss various related issues. The AECES contingent comprised twenty professionals from different sectors of the ECEC community in Singapore went with much anticipation to understand the Asian context of ECEC.

CRN's Second International Conference had an interesting array of presenters –

- Dr Yuichiro Anzai, from Japan, spoke on the need to adapt our way of learning to the rapid social changes due to globalisation. He identified five abilities that children will need to learn to live with in the near future - autonomy, diversity, cooperatively, gratitude and pride.

He talked about a correlation between development of social emotional (SE) skills and that of cognitive skills.

- Professor Fasli Jalal, Indonesia – he presented on the implementation of Holistic Integrated ECEC in Indonesia. He shared that children who received ECEC displayed remarkable growth in SE skills. They attained significant development in cognitive skills after entering elementary school and this confirmed the close relation between SE and cognitive skills.
- Prof Masumi Sugawara's (Ochanomizu University) topic was about cooperativeness being a virtue that has a strong influence on experience and environment. He gave examples about how it is rapidly acquired after the age of four and a half, underscoring the importance of the development of SE skills during the preschool period.

In the first of 3 panel discussions, Dr Yeh Hsueh, Associate Professor from the University of Memphis, USA, was the moderator for 'Children in the new age of digital media'. All the presenters agreed that ECEC facilities and society should continue to utilise effectively the strengths of digital media and to

develop it further. A question was posed: "If robots with no emotions become teachers, will it be possible for them to offer emotional teaching?". Prof Kazuo Hiraki, University of Tokyo, believed that the 'emotional' robot is no longer a myth because of advancing technology.

'Viewing 'play' from a scientific standpoint', moderated by Dr. Nobuko Kamigaichi, Jumonji University, Japan, was interesting. Emerging research from neuroscience affirms that play promotes thinking skills and different types of play with evolving environment (location, conditions, things and people) will influence the value of play. Miwako Hoshi, Professor Emerita of Jumonji University wondered about the impact of spontaneous play on the development of children's SE skills as well as the role of adults during play.

Dr. Christine Chen, President, AECES, Singapore, was the moderator for 'Supporting Children with Special Needs'. Research about lifelong neuroplasticity and sensitive periods in early brain development have shown that a single caring and trained carer can make a difference. This window of opportunity where experiences have a greater impact on certain areas of a child's brain development is especially critical to children with special needs. There is no such thing as an underachieving child, only a teacher who has not found his potential. If young children can be taught self-assertive skills and self-protective knowledge then children with special

needs ought to also learn about self-regulation, self-advocacy, self-assertion and standing up for one's self. They will then have a better chance to succeed in school and life. Therefore inclusive practices can happen in any preschool.

The Japanese Preschool System

In Japan, there are mainly two kinds of institutions involved in ECEC: kindergartens (*youchien*) and nurseries (*hoikuen*).

Kindergartens provide education for 3 to 5 year olds, for at least four hours a day; nurseries provide childcare for infants and children up to 5 years old. In order to qualify for nurseries, both parents must be working, however, we learnt that there is a severe shortage of childcare spaces. Historically, kindergartens and nurseries existed under separate systems of the education sector and welfare sector respectively. Similar to many countries around the world, both sectors are beginning to collaborate under a unified system - the centres for ECEC (*nintei kodomoen*).

The Japanese preschool teacher is trained to manage large class sizes of 35 children. This is deemed useful for collaboration and transition into elementary schools. It was remarkable to observe that teachers appeared calm despite the high adult-child ratio.

One important facet of social development is emotional development, which includes understanding and showing one's own emotions as well as understanding and

responding to the emotions of others. Compassion and empathy are regarded as foundational values in Japanese culture. Therefore, Japanese children are taught to express their opinions, and in turn, to listen to their peers' opinions in the classroom. Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1989) proposed that Japanese preschools' large class-size and high student/teacher ratios offered children opportunities to experience the pleasures and responsibilities of life in a group. Teachers managed large classes by delegating authority to *toban* (monitors) and by interacting with the class as a whole rather than with children individually, thereby minimising competition among children for the teacher's energy, time and attention. They managed most disputes not by stopping fights, but by inviting other children to help resolve disputes.

Centre Visits

We visited 4 preschools and they were all very different and fantastic.

1. Yahata Youchien Religious Kindergarten (Photo 1 below)



Photo 1

It has an enrolment of 300 children, aged 3 to 6 years old. The school functions from 8.30 in the morning to 2pm and After School care is available. The fan-shaped 2-storey building is situated in the precinct of the Yawata Shrine in Yamato Town in Nakano Ward and operated by the school corporation Yawata Gakuen. It is surrounded by gardens and a park. Seven teachers with parent helpers would meet groups of about 15 mixed aged children at seven different parks to take a 20-minute walk to school. Children have prayers at the shrine. Their curriculum approach is project and play-based with a key emphasis on empathy. This kindergarten focuses on nature and emotional learning.



Photo 2: Outdoor play occurs every day with children changing in and out of outdoor and indoor outfits

2. We then visited an award-winning private preschool in Tokyo, Fuji Kindergarten (Photo 4a). It has a large enrolment of 600 children, aged 2 to 6 years. Its curriculum approach is Montessori and play-based.

It is reputed to be the most beautiful kindergarten in Japan and its philosophy is “don’t coddle and don't protect.” The building’s design is meant to expose children to small doses of danger. Architect Takaharu Tezuka constructed this unique architecture for children to live their childhood with unfettered play and learning. Principal Sekiichi Kato desires children to pick up basic manners and skills organically without gadgets. He calls it a doughnut in the air because of the well-ventilated premises when both window and doors made of huge glass panels are opened to let air, leaves and even birds through.



Photo 3: Traditional faucets provide a natural fine motor learning platform with a sensorial awareness as water hits the bare earth



Photo 4b: A 40-year-old Zelkova tree left untouched and now it shoots through the rooftop for children to touch and climb



Photo 4a: The doughnut shaped building

3. The Shinagawaku Daiichi Hino Sukoyakaen Integrated Nursery and Kindergarten is sited in an elementary school. The school has 200 children, aged 0-6 years. It functions from 9am to 2pm. Before/After kindergarten care and Extended Care are available. Their curriculum is play-based and experiential with an emphasis on communication and socialisation skills. Their vision is to nurture children to have a tough body and mind, a rich heart and to think and act for themselves.



Photo 5

The programme is designed around the seasons and festivals (e.g. rice-cake making, bean scattering ceremony) as well as traditions and families.

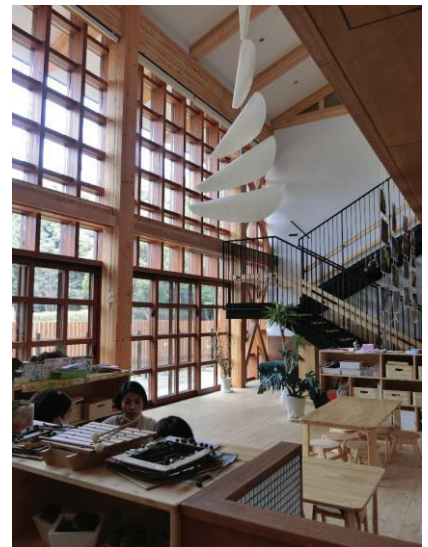
4. The Machino Hoikuen Yoyogikouen Child Care Centre was established on 1st October 2017. Currently it has 128 children (0 – 5 years). It functions from 7.30am to 8.30pm, Mondays to Saturdays. Their curriculum approach is Reggio Inspired. It is sited in the middle of Yoyogi Park in Shibuya Ward. In collaboration with the University of

Tokyo, they have a childcare centre and laboratory school known as “Children and Community Learning Centre” where they conduct action research to reimagine the future of Japanese children, child rearing, childcare and early childhood education. The architecture is harmonised with the park environment.

Reflections

Common Traits – Sense of Order, Self Regulation, Spontaneous, Sporting Spirit (Teamwork)

The Japanese preschoolers were generally observed to be caring and polite towards their peers and adults. At the same time, they appeared strong and brave. There was a tremendous sense of camaraderie in all the preschools we visited. The sense of order that permeates across this



culture in everything they do begin at the cradle. Everything has a place and each step is planned with the journey ahead; it is a normal and usual habit is to remove one’s shoes upon entry with them pointing towards the door. However, in all the Japanese preschools we visited, they had shoes pointing outwards, all prepared for

children to slip them on and take off almost immediately! (Photo 6)



Photo 6

Every item has a place – the snack bag, the cap, and even the shoes! (Photo 7)



Photo 7

This sense of order could have perhaps set the tone for regulation. It was certainly evident in the Japanese culture as I rode the Tokyo Metro and chowed down on their pretty bento sets. Even the Post Office where I mailed my postcard had separate coloured trays for collection of money and stationery items!

Curriculum Design Reflections

The inclusion of traditional practices and ceremonies such as the Dolls Festival and the Rice Cake Making Festival were worthwhile experiences as children took pride in their culture

and relished the fun of their parents' childhood games and memories. It allowed children to continue their traditions and sense of belonging that brought much security and confidence to any child. I enjoyed the appreciation of history and culture that the four preschools infused into their curricula.

Traditionally, the teacher closely observes the activities of children and assists their development as well as developing their cognitive and non-cognitive skills through play. The characteristics of Social and Emotional Development (SED) according to the OECD (2015) are as follows:

1. Capacity to achieve goals (e.g. perseverance, motivation, self-control, self-efficacy)
2. Capacity to work with others (e.g. social skills, cooperation, empathy, trust)
3. Capacity to manage emotions (e.g. self-esteem, self-confidence, low risk of problematic behaviour).

I have no doubt that all these are attainable targets in the Japanese culture and play based approach. I did wonder if it was the culture or the adopted approach that produced such an even SED in the Japanese ECEC.

As I reminisced about the cheerful collaborative play in the simple earthen space without any fanciful playground equipment, I wondered if some of our Singapore ECEC professionals have lost focus on the child being the starting point, the centre and the end to determine both quality and quantity of learning. I wondered about our current

obsession with purposeful play when I reflected on the conference. Learning is perhaps more developmental than linear or sequential. By insisting that every moment counts with pre-determined standards, are we sacrificing spontaneous play and constraining 'teachable moments' by destroying the essence of early childhood? Perhaps little children ought to enjoy simple organic things in life so they too can fight a little, cry a little and figure out later because that is how they learn as they acquire life skills or SED.

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In Unity there is Strength: Key Insights from the Ghent Study Trip

Alicia Chan, Programme Lead (AECES)
and
Cassandra Alison Teh, Teacher (Shaws CDLC)

In May 2018, thirteen participants from Singapore and Malaysia set off on a study trip to Belgium. Led by AECES President Dr. Christine Chen, we attended a week of activities in Brussels and Ghent where we learnt about the early childhood system.

“Little Children, Big Opportunities”



Figure 1

Our journey started with a seminar at the Vlaams Parlement (Flemish State Parliament, Photo 1) which

made the occasion grand and reinforced the importance of early childhood education.



Photo 1: AECES group at the Vlaams Parlement

This full-day event was part of a project that brought together educators in dealing with poverty, diversity and social equity.

This 2.5 years project, called ‘Kleine Kinderen, Grote Kansen’ (Little Children, Big Opportunities), was initiated by the Flemish Minister of Education.

The seminar’s theme was ‘How to eradicate child poverty together’. It covered three issues – preschool registration and attendance, quality of preschool and integration of the different professions. This reminds me of the Hand in Hand Project that AECES is managing in ensuring that children attend preschool regularly.

In the welcome address, Mr. John De Plecker, Head of Unit at Ministry of Education and Training Flemish community, advocated for the integration of various profession in addressing poverty. He encouraged the early childhood community to scale greater heights in inculcating specific insights for teachers to understand poverty and embrace diversity in preschool.



Photo 2: The seminar

When he said that ‘It takes a village to raise a child’, we realised that we needed an entire community of different expertise to give our children the best. This message resonated with us in Singapore, as we see the need to work towards integration of the different professions like the psychologists, counsellors, social workers and early childhood educators to advocate for the same social cause.

It was admirable of the Flemish Minister of Education to initiate this project, it sends a strong message that all professions can work together to provide the little children with big opportunities.

Mr. De Plecker also emphasized the importance of education as a critical leverage in addressing the problem of poverty. In particular, research has shown that quality early childhood education has long term benefits that carries over to adulthood.

The keynote presenter, Dr. Valerie Sollars from University of Malta, addressed the benefits of early childhood education and how quality preschool education is being defined. She presented longitudinal studies on the benefits of quality preschool education and its highlights are summarized as follows:

- an early start in preschool enhances cognitive, social development and behavioural competences of a child,
- good attendance was associated with educational attainment in the long-term,
- children from disadvantaged backgrounds also benefitted from quality preschool experiences, especially when there was a mix of

children from different social backgrounds.



Photo 3: A break-out session

Defining Quality of Preschool

However, the challenge was in defining quality. Whose voice would one listen to? Would it be the policy makers, international bodies, researchers, educators, parents or the child?

According to the OECD, the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), quality is multi-level and multi-dimensional; thus, communication of the shared vision of quality was important for a common understanding within and across different agencies as well as with operators offering the services.

One study with the parents’ voice reported these two quality indicators.

1. Relationships and communication – parents wanted to be involved in activities like parent-teacher meetings, getting updates through Facebook, and
2. Characteristics of the carers and administrative staff, for example, having warm personalities especially

in how they showed care and love to the children.

We were impressed by this communication and partnership with parents and we saw it as a strength in Ghent's preschools. It was clear that parents and teachers shared a common goal, that of the well-being of the child. This type of relationship was built upon the trust they had for each other – teachers had the expertise while parents had knowledge of their own children. This trust even extended to areas where teachers consulted with parents about what their child should drink or eat in school or whether their child should sleep in daycare.

If parents were unable to pick up their child at the designated time, the school helped to make alternative arrangements. For families in poverty, family involvement and participation were crucial in providing the home learning environment that would complement what was taught in school. The keynote emphasized the belief that what parents did was more important than who parents were.

Visits to schools

We visited a day care centre and four kindergartens and primary schools of Sint-Paulus. The kindergartens were located in the same premises as the primary school; the students were aged 2.5 years to 12 years old. School leaders, teachers, 'guiders' and curriculum specialists spoke to us about the schools and their pedagogy. They covered aspects such as the school's core belief, the environment, the curriculum, teacher's overall planning, children's and staff's routines.

It was a refreshing experience to see how the schools in Ghent were run. The experience also highlighted the importance of having an open mind to a different culture. Too often, we stump ourselves with thoughts like "this would not work back home, we have so many restrictions, and people will complain!" instead of being more open to different learning experiences.

Within the schools, we noted three broad themes that highlighted the strengths of the system.



Photo 4: A classroom in Sint-Paulus

Theme 1: Respect and Empower Each Child

Respect for the child was an overarching theme throughout all the presentations. We heard from our hosts:

"As an adult, it is our responsibility to help the child communicate his feelings and guide the child towards a positive resolution of the problem."

"Allow the child to work according to his own pace."

"Listen, observe, interact, and learn from the child."

"Do not place the child in adult-designed or arbitrary time slots of adult management systems."

"If the child is misbehaving, find out why, find out what the child is trying to communicate, find out how you can help the child."

In many of the schools that we visited, this philosophy and belief system was the norm. For example, children were given a choice to finish their activity worksheets according to their own pace. Each child had a booklet showing tasks that they needed to finish by a given deadline (by the end of the week); however, the child had the freedom to choose how much work he wanted to complete each day according to his capability.

In another example, we learnt that students had autonomy, to choose where they would like to sit in class (see Photo 5), what/where to play how they wished to express themselves and be respectful as well (Photos 6-7).



Photo 5: Choosing their seats

Photo 5 also showed that if a child needed more help with a particular subject, he/she may sit in the centre or in front where the teacher could provide them with more assistance; those who felt more capable sat in the outer circle. The School Director, Mr. Peter De Corte from Sint-Paulus (Smidsestraat), shared that this helped a child with decision making and self-assessment. The child would not be forced to sit in a designated place, the child had the freedom and he would be respected for his choice/s. In their system, children were raised to know and understand which subject/s they were better in and thus could be confident with, it was not about what subject/s they were not good or bad in.



Photo 6: Choosing their activity



Photo 7: Working on their choice

In another class, we noticed one child seated apart from the rest of the class. The teacher did not correct the child nor forced him to sit like his peers, she allowed him to feel comfortable so long as he was engaged. In another school, a boy wandered into the class next door, we asked his teacher about it. She replied “He is free to explore”. These observations were eye openers to us.

In the Sint-Paulus schools, we noted that the children were provided with more opportunities to display their strengths and unique learning styles. Their classroom set-up promoted a sense of responsibility, independence, self-worth, and self-regulation. These enabled them to cultivate the children’s talents.

Theme 2: Communication Leads to a Sense of Community

Effective communication leads to a sense of community that is being understanding, intimate, and respectful of one another. There was a mural on a wall at the outdoor playground of Sint-Paulus (see Photo 8). On the mural were several animals such as a tortoise, owl, eagle, lion, peacock and beaver. These animals represented the students and teachers and



Photo 8: The mural

the roles they play in the school. These characters were used as a form of communication amongst the individuals in the schools, for example, instead of saying, “Our football captain, Adam played very unfairly and was rude to the teacher.” The child would say, “The lion was not very kind today especially towards the owl.” In this way, it allowed children to communicate openly without the need of mentioning anyone in specific.

In another example of communication, Ms. Cindy Van der Snickt from Sint-Paulus Nieuw Gent told us the story about one of her students who was unruly and not responding to any of the approaches used to address his behaviour. However, one day, they had an unexpected visitor – a dog (see Photo 9). Cindy exclaimed, “Suddenly, there was a dramatic change in that child, he showed so much compassion towards



Photo 9: The actual dog in the story of the misbehaving boy

the animal.” This episode was a valuable lesson about the various forms of communication - verbal, non-verbal, and unique ones like using this dog.

At Sint-Paulus Sint-Denijs-Westrem, classrooms were called nests, and these group nests were grouped into families - Nest 1, Nest 2, Nest 3, and the school was divided into 2 broad categories – Mini’s and Maxi’s (See Photo 10).

The Director, Mr. Wim Depoorter explained how they were able to let go of the concept of ‘the classroom’. He emphasized that communication was key. He communicated this change and invited his teachers to work with him in the transformation of “classrooms” to “nests”.

“Do we teach so they follow, or do we guide so they can decide?”



Photo 11: ‘Guider’

The schools instilled a culture where the older children were very much involved in taking care of the younger children. The older children took turns to step in during nap times or meal times to help settle the younger ones. This created a sense of family and community. And is most helpful for the new children who found trust and find comfort.

Reflections

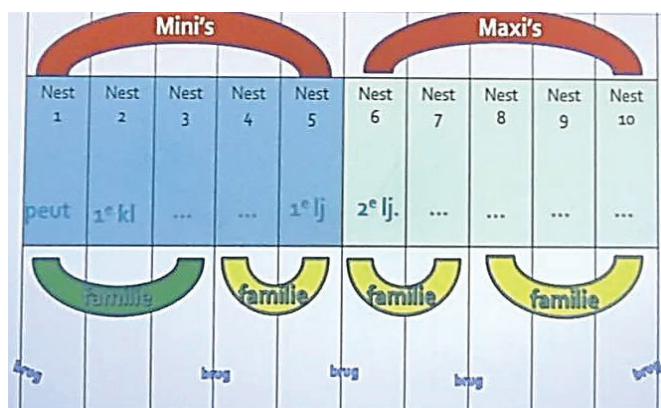


Photo 10: Mini’s and Maxi’s

Theme 3: Education is not a Preparation of Life; Education is Life Itself

The focus on academics or grades was barely emphasised by the school leaders. The word ‘home’ was their constant focus because they wanted the children to consider school as their home. Teachers in the *Kinderdagverblijf Elfenbankje* (the daycare we visited) became ‘guiders’. We recalled a conversation with one of the teachers who posed this question to us,

Reflections

These educators firmly believed that their children were capable. They believed that their role was to help their children fulfil their potential and they viewed themselves as facilitators of learning. In one of the classrooms, we saw the children pretending to shave their friends’ faces using popsicle sticks and shaving cream (see Photo 12).

As we watched this activity, we wondered as educators, (1) could we transform our teachers’ practices from teaching children to designing and creating learning environments that would engage children in active and meaningful



Photo 12: Shaving activity

experiences? (2) could we transform the role of the teacher to become a facilitator and an enhancer of learning? How do we help people change their belief systems, which ultimately affect their practices? What were the relationships between practices, values and beliefs? Ultimately, if we continue to teach today as we taught yesterday, would we rob our children of tomorrow?

“We are all working together, that is the secret”

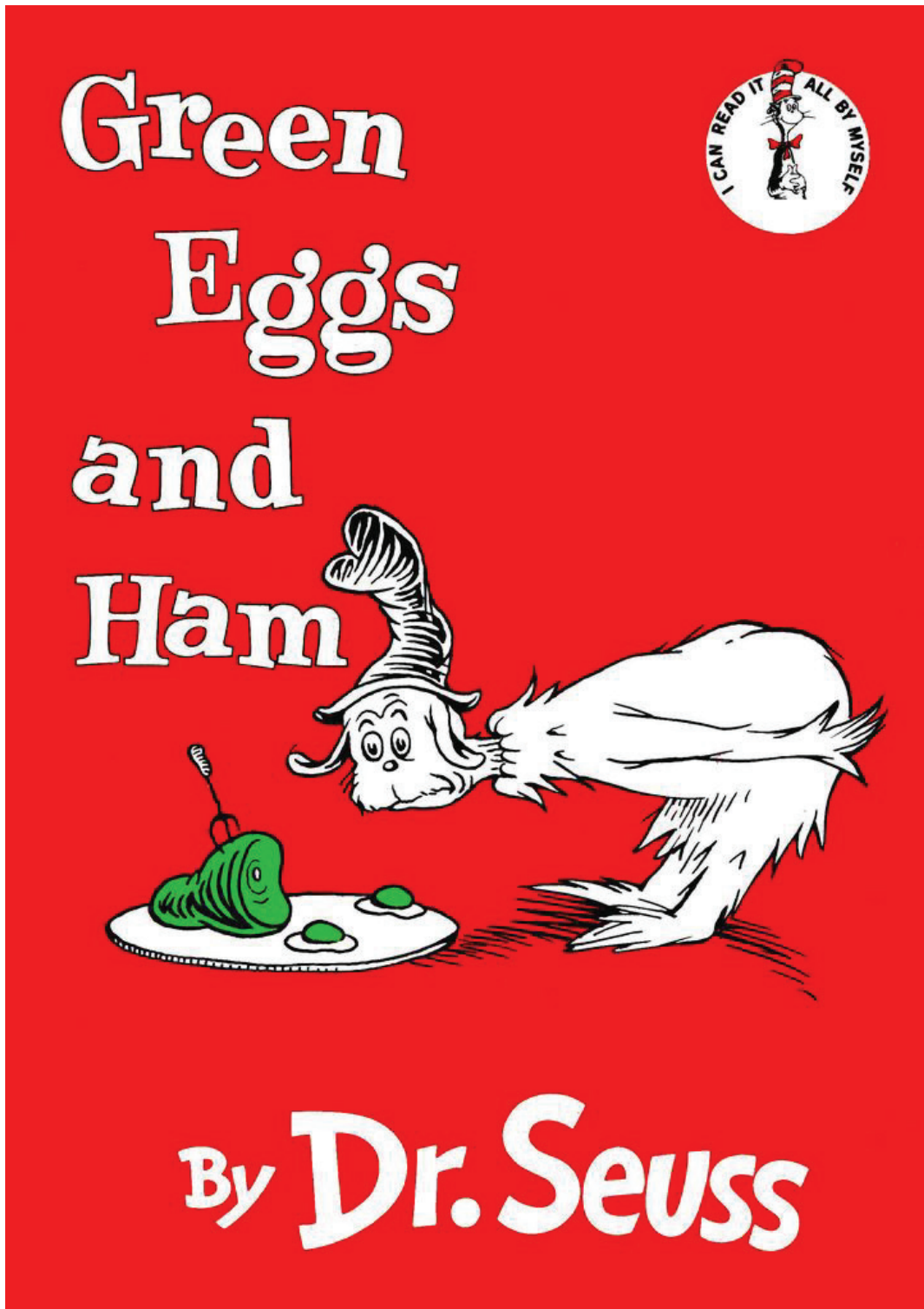


Photo 13: AECES group with Belgian coordinators and the principal of the daycare (in blue)

Book Review

Brenda Pereira, Pro-FLAiR

Book Review



Introduction

This is an excellent story to use in the classroom. It describes the extent the main character, Sam, would go to get his friend to eat something that looks different and unappetising even if it means chasing him on foot, by car, by rail or by boat.

Activities

Green Eggs and Ham is well known for its clever use of only 50 words - the result of a bet between Dr Seuss and his publisher. This served as a means for me to subtly introduce these words to the children – not all at once, a few words at a time, and in the form of games such as Classroom Word Hunt, Swat the Word and my very own version of Monopoly. The children have been receptive to these games and some have been able to remember most of the words while others needed a little more time and encouragement.

The story was also a good opportunity to reinforce the colour 'green' and to open it up for a discussion about judging food by its colour.

"Never ever!" – Kyle

"It's disgusting! It's rotten!" – Sera

"It will make me cough. I will vomit!"

– Wai Yeung

"I will get a stomachache!" – Nehal

"I don't like." – Sherie

That was the reaction from the children when I asked if they would eat green eggs

and ham. Their responses were understandably negative. But I thought they were reasonable answers as I had posed the same question to a few adults and their responses were equally negative.

By then, their curiosity was piqued and they urged me to start reading the story to them. Their eyes were peeled to the book, declaring every now and then that there was

"no way the dog will eat the green eggs and ham."

In the end, when the dog did eat it all up,
"Wah! He ate it. It was wet and he still ate it."

The next day, we cooked our very own green scrambled eggs in school. Some of the children were excited, while a few remained sceptical. We had to use a rice cooker as the centre did not have an induction cooker.



"Yums and delicious! I want to eat it again!" – Nehal

"Good and nice!" – Sherie

"I don't like green eggs!" – Kyle

"It tastes so good!" – Jazlene

"I don't like!" – Wai Yeung

"It tastes a bit nice." - Jaslana



We like **green** scrambled eggs!
(Or rather most of us do!)

